



Tag team simulation: An innovative approach for promoting active engagement of participants and observers during group simulations



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ABSTRACT

Active participation in immersive simulation experiences can result in technical and non-technical skill enhancement. However, when simulations are conducted in large groups, maintaining the interest of observers so that they do not disengage from the learning experience can be challenging.

We implemented Tag Team Simulation with the aim of ensuring that both participants and observers had active and integral roles in the simulation. In this paper we outline the features of this innovative approach and provide an example of its application to a pain simulation.

Evaluation was conducted using the Satisfaction with Simulation Experience Scale. A total of 444 year nursing students participated from a population of 536 (response rate 83%). Cronbach's alpha for the Scale was .94 indicating high internal consistency. The mean satisfaction score for participants was 4.63 compared to 4.56 for observers. An independent sample *t* test revealed no significant difference between these scores ($t(300) = -1.414, p = 0.16$).

Tag team simulation is an effective approach for ensuring observers' and participants' active involvement during group-based simulations and one that is highly regarded by students. It has the potential for broad applicability across a range of leaning domains both within and beyond nursing.

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All the worlds a stage and all the men and women merely
players ... one man in his time plays many parts ~ As you like it,
2/7.

Introduction

The popularity and appeal of simulation is now so widespread within university and clinical training facilities that it has become a ubiquitous teaching method. A body of research attests to the capacity of simulation to improve learners' technical and non-technical skills through direct and active participation in immersive experiences. However, in nursing programs, where there may be hundreds of students, resource limitations often lead to simulations being conducted as group activities. Evidence suggests that when this happens, learners who take on an observer role instead of being an actual participant in the simulation, can lose interest and disengage from the learning experience (Kettlewell, 2012; Harder et al., 2013). To address this issue we developed and

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implemented an innovative simulation approach called Tag Team⁸ Simulation (TTS). TTS is designed for groups of approximately 20 learners, with each participant and observer having a specific, active and integral role in the simulation. TTS is informed by the tenets of forum theatre and applied drama, approaches that facilitate interactivity between cast and audience members, as well as critiquing, questioning, challenging and reflecting (Gervais, 2006).

In this paper we outline the key pedagogical features of TTS, provide an example of its application to a clinical reasoning simulation focused on acute pain management, and provide the results from our evaluation of this innovative approach.

Background

Challenges in simulation

Active participation is understood as a central principle for maintaining engagement of adult learners (Biggs, 1989; Knowles, 1970). Perceptions of active participation equating to hands-on experiences have led to recommendations that simulation is best suited to small groups of learners (Dekkers and Donath, 1981). However, in nursing programs, simulations are often conducted in large groups, with few students playing an active role and most observing.

To date, there is a limited amount of and variable outcomes from research exploring the learning experiences of observers (Kaplan et al., 2012; Hober, 2012). While some studies have identified little difference in knowledge gains between students assigned observer roles and those who are active participants (Jeffries and Rizzolo, 2006), others have found that observers learn less than participants and are less satisfied with the experience (Littlefield et al., 1999). Additionally, some researchers report that learners assigned the observer role are less likely to become immersed in the simulation and often consider them to be unrealistic (Nikendei et al., 2007) and boring (Harder et al., 2013). McAllister et al. (2011) and Hober (2012) found that while students can still learn whilst playing an observer role in a simulation, their relative passivity may lead to lack of sufficient eustress (stress that stimulates attention and learning) to maintain motivation.

All of these issues can lead to disengagement and disenchantment with the simulation experience (Kettlewell, 2012). These concerns, along-side the pragmatic constraints inherent in the provision of simulations for large groups of nursing students, necessitate the consideration of alternative approaches. To encourage deep, meaningful learning, contemporary simulation design requires creative strategies that foster engagement, promote active inclusion of all learners, and create a feeling of contribution to and ownership of knowledge creation.

Performative learning

Theatre, with its power to inform, stimulate, subvert and inspire, has been an important part of human culture for over 2000 years (Brown, 1997). Theatre can include the telling of a story, a re-enactment of an event, or a catalyst for social change. Theatre can exhilarate and excite; when well executed, this sort of creative work can move, teach, entertain, and challenge people.

Theatre is one of the earliest forms of mass communication, providing a forum for debate about social issues and using story as both an art form and political device (Carlson, 1993). In many

communities live theatre remains an inherent part of the culture. The pleasurable experience obtained from being part of a theatre audience is multi-faceted and complex. One can be safely distanced from the action, while at the same time closely immersed in the emotions, dilemmas, disruptions, insights, puzzles and achievements being played out on stage (Mulvey, 1989).

Performance theatre, like learning through novels, film and art, involves aesthetic learning (Brien and McAllister, 2013). It can evoke emotions, awaken creative imaginations and inform people about issues of importance in non-literal ways; this tends to make the learning more memorable and potentially transformative (Denzin, 2009).

Integral to the structure of theatre are the classical Greek philosopher Aristotle's (c.335BC) conventions of tragedy informed by mythos (the plot), ethos (characters), logos (reasoned discourse), and pathos (an appeal to the audience's emotions), which continue to inform many contemporary theatrical practices. TTS is informed by these traditional elements but also grounded in the more non-traditional approaches of applied drama and forum theatre.

Applied drama is generally undertaken with participants who are not skilled actors, performing in spaces not traditionally used for theatrical productions, to audiences with a keen interest in the key issues portrayed (Prendergast and Saxton, 2009). Key features of applied drama include the use of interactive processes which engage participants in a 'what if' exploration of a fictional (but often life-like) situation. The creation of the dramatic frame provides a safe distance for exploring issues that might be too difficult to explore in reality. Applied drama uses conventions such as: dramatic tension or comedic relief, plot lines, characters, props and emotional involvement to capture the audience's attention. Well known in the education fields through the work of Heathcote (1995), it has more recently been used in health professional education (Ekebergh et al., 2004; Lepp, 2000, 2002; Reid-Searl et al., Article, 2014).

Forum theatre, developed by Augusto Boal in the 1960s, is a process that allows members of the audience to pause and discuss the performance and suggest different actions for the actors to take (Boal, 2002). The actors then move in this new direction, improvising and carrying out the suggested changes. In this way forum theatre facilitates the co-construction of the play and through this participative approach the audience, as well as the actors, are empowered to imagine changes, direct the changes, and reflect collectively on the changes made, so as to become agents of social change (Boal, 2002). Such concepts and approaches are readily applicable, and offer productive solutions to, the challenges inherent in large group simulations.

Tag team simulation

Our aim in designing TTS (see Fig. 1) was to create an innovative group simulation experience that brought together the tenets of forum theatre and applied drama to enhance student engagement and facilitate interactivity. TTS immerses learners (actors and audience) in an unfolding drama in a way that allows them to take joint responsibility for the actions and outcomes. In drama the dress rehearsal is the final practice session for a play; costumes, props and scenery are authentic; critique is provided and improvements to the performance and production made as needed. Similarly, TTS is a type of 'dress rehearsal' prior to students' actual clinical performance in a real context. TTS also facilitates cognitive rehearsal of the clinical reasoning process as a way of mentally practising effective responses to unfolding clinical situations (Griffin, 2004).

Central to TTS are the narrator/director, the cast (including the protagonist and other actors), and the audience (who take the role of theatre critics):

⁸ The term 'tag team' refers to two or more participants taking turns as team members and working towards the same goal; one person 'tags' or touches hands with the next participant to signal a handing over of responsibility.

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