

The Gamification of Jurisprudence: Innovation in Registered Nurse Regulation

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The principles of online games—known as *gamification*—were used to develop a means both to educate registered nurses in jurisprudence and to assess their competence in this knowledge. As a requirement for registration with the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA), the method also needed to be psychometrically defensible. An innovative module that educates applicants in nursing jurisprudence and assesses competence for registration in an engaging way is described. Although gamification has been used in many educational applications to improve outcomes and increase engagement, the researchers could find no examples of it being used in a psychometrically defensible assessment. Initial results from pilot testing indicate that the module delivers a valid assessment of jurisprudence knowledge and participant engagement with the content. An implication of this project for nursing regulation is a philosophical repositioning of self-regulation to a more relational perspective.

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Making a game out of a registration requirement would likely be considered an unusual approach by most registered nurse (RN) regulators. Yet, this approach is what the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) set out to adopt. More precisely, CARNA used *gamification*—or the application of gaming elements to traditionally nongaming contexts (Deterding, Dixon, Khaled, & Nacke, 2011)—as a means to create a module that would confirm competence and also engage nurses and nurse applicants in the content of the requirement (nursing jurisprudence) and with professional self-regulation in general.

The potential benefits of applying gaming principles to nontraditional gaming content has drawn the attention of researchers and evaluators as well as game players themselves. Much of the discourse emphasizes the importance of maintaining a distinction between gamification and *gaming*, although the two are closely related. This distinction may best be recognized as a fluid one (Prince, 2013); the perception of a product as one or the other is primarily influenced by context. Gamification is intended to harness the engagement and focus of game playing for other purposes, such as educating students, advertising products and services, motivating employee productivity, and more. It does not necessarily involve a voluntary endeavor, in contrast to playing games, which are generally not prescriptive (McGonigal, 2011).

Considering that gamification is clearly recognized as an important emerging technology (Johnson, Becker, Estrada, & Freeman, 2014), a lack of consensus about its merits exists, as

well as some controversy about its use and benefits. The debate has been characterized as having two poles. On one side is nearly unbridled enthusiasm for gamification as a solution for virtually every problem in the world; the other describes gamification as an overlay of the superficial elements of games, without any understanding of the complexities that make gameplay motivating (Deterding et al., 2011; Hughes & Lacy, 2016). As with many polarized debates, the understanding likely lies somewhere in between. One caution offered by both advocates (e.g., Burke, 2014) and critics is that gamification must be thoughtfully and well designed to be effective. For example, game designer Margaret Robertson worries that gamification “tricks people into believing there is a simple way to imbue their [initiative] with the psychological, emotional and social power of a great game” (2010). She advocates for a thoughtful application of quality game design to everyday things, what she calls “real gamification.”

Beyond the debate, the actual effects of gamification have not yet been well established (Filomena & Ricciardi, 2015). In their literature review, Hamari, Koivisto, and Sarsa (2014) confirm that gamification produces positive effects; however, these effects seem to be heavily context- and user-dependent. That is, it matters how and where gamification is used, as well as on who is using the gamified application. Much of the published discourse anticipates (rather than demonstrates) the potential applications of games for learning and discusses game design; more research is required to better understand use of some of the proposed mechanisms of games and their effectiveness (Connolly,

Boyle, MacArthur, Hainey, & Boyle, 2012; Dominguez et al., 2013; Morris, Croker, Zimmerman, Gill, & Romig, 2013).

Engagement is the most frequently cited advantage of gamification (Arnold, 2014; Dominguez et al., 2013; Kumar & Addagada, 2013; Zhijiang Dong, Untch, & Chasteen, 2013). Marcus Leaning, a media and film scholar who researches education and literacy, explains that gamification changes the nature of the experience for the participant by adding a layer of meaning to the activity. The meaning, in turn, provides a better experience for the learner and encourages participation in the transformed activity (2015). Beyond motivation or engagement, gamified activities can be thought of as having a psychological outcome (changes in feelings) and a behavioral outcome (changes in behavior following the activity) (Hamari et al., 2014). “At its core, gamification is about engaging people on an emotional level and motivating them to achieve their goals” (Burke, 2014, p. 16).

Although less researched than the engagement outcome, psychological and behavioral outcomes have shown promising results in recent empirical research. Sixth grade elementary students were taught about spreadsheets for 6 weeks in an information technologies and software course. Those taught using gamification demonstrated higher achievement scores, and most expressed positive feelings about the method compared with those in the control group taught with no gamification (Turan, Avinc, Kara, & Goktas, 2016). Similarly, final grades of undergraduate students taught using gamification techniques were higher than those of a control group of students who were not “gamified” (Fotaris, Mastoras, Leinfellner, & Rosunally, 2016). The consensus is that attention to the quality of the game design and the integration of the game into the learning experience are crucial to success (Burke, 2014; Connolly et al., 2012; Dominguez et al., 2013; McCallum, 2012).

CARNA and Gamification

In 2010, CARNA's governing provincial council determined that nursing candidates must demonstrate competence in jurisprudence as a requirement of registration. Nursing jurisprudence is “the application of the principles of law as they relate to the practice of nursing, to the obligations of nurses to their patients, and the relations of nurses with each other and with other health care professionals” (Venes, 2005, p. 1162). The emphasis on jurisprudence was seen as a key to facilitating interjurisdictional mobility within Canada. Because each province and territory in Canada is governed by its own health legislation, nurses transferring between jurisdictions must acquire knowledge of jurisprudence in their new province or territory. As well, a gap in knowledge about regulation governing laws had been identified in CARNA members during the transition from a paper-based registration renewal system to a mandatory online system. CARNA staff members were surprised at the number of questions on the content of the

continuing competence program itself, which had been required for several years.

The conventional approach used by other regulators to determine jurisprudence competency was a written examination, as determined by website review and consultation with other regulators. The organization was also facing a finding of its most recent member survey that showed that just under half of survey respondents were not interested in or felt neutral about engaging with CARNA on key issues in nursing (NRG Research Group, 2012). The decision to use gamification was made in the context of an organizational commitment to *relational* regulation (Penney, Bayne, & Johansen, 2014)—a commitment that prioritizes the relationship between regulator and member. This approach is radical in its way, changing from an authoritarian, even adversarial, relationship to a collegial and collaborative approach to regulating the profession. A relational approach is a sincere attempt to respond to recent scholarship regarding the important connection between engagement and professional competence. This scholarship provides insight on how the competence of professionals has evolved in the modern health care milieu. For example, Zubin Austin, a Canadian pharmacist scholar, has observed through his research that practitioners who are considered competent tend to be well connected, create strong networks with other professionals, and feel satisfied with both their professional and their personal lives. He proposes that it may be time to start thinking about competence as “engagement” and to see engaged practitioners as those who are interested in their profession, their practice, and their patients (2014). The importance of supporting the engagement of professionals is recognized by an observation of the Professional Standards Authority in the United Kingdom. In its role to oversee and evaluate health profession regulation, the Professional Standards Authority challenges regulators to realize that, “the regulator is usually furthest removed from the harms it is trying to prevent” (2015, p. 5). This acknowledgement reinforces why a relational approach is important for regulators: the way to best protect the patient is to ensure that competent, engaged, and knowledgeable professionals are providing quality care. In CARNA's estimation, the conclusions from relevant scholarship combined with local observations and experience demand a genuine undertaking of engagement with CARNA members and applicants.

Developing the Module

To fulfill CARNA's directive to assess competence and its strategy to engage RNs in the education process, the researchers identified and adhered to the following principles throughout the project:

- The method of learning will be both engaging and valid, with each concept holding equal importance.
- The method will both provide education and assess knowledge.
- The process of development, implementation, and outcomes will be thoroughly evaluated.

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