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Simulation as Pedagogy: An Experiential Teaching Strategy for Social Work Education

C. Jean Roberson
University of St. Thomas, Minnesota

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by

C. Jean Roberson

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Abstract

This banded dissertation is an examination of simulation as a pedagogy for social work education. While the Council of Social Work Education recognizes simulation as an accepted pedagogy, there remains little research on its use in social work education. To effectively utilize and structure simulation within the curriculum, more needs to be understood about its influences on social work student development and its fit within the social work educational context.

The first product of this dissertation, a conceptual paper, presents a framework for the use of simulation in social work education. The framework consists of three elements: holistic competency as the aim of social work education, a model of curriculum as engagement for the vehicle through which programmatic culture is established, and experiential learning theory as a foundational learning theory. The author demonstrates alignment between the pedagogy of simulation with the aims, culture, and theory which inform social work education.

The second product is a research study, examining the influence of participation in repeated simulations on social work student development in clinical skills. Addressing a gap in the literature, this study utilized a nine-month qualitative design to explore student experiences with three simulations over the course of two semesters. Based on the findings, the author proposes a conceptual model for student growth in metacognition and self-regulation, utilizing multiple simulation experiences.

The third product is an interactive eposter presentation given at the Council on Social Work Education 2018 Annual Program Meeting. This eposter summarizes research findings from the second banded dissertation product and incorporates practice experience in simulations for interprofessional education. Conclusions address the need for alignment between simulation learning objectives and simulation frequency.

Simulation is a strong pedagogy for social work education, allowing for holistic engagement in learning. A better understanding of its influence on social work students allows educators to leverage the benefits of the pedagogy to align with identified learning objectives. Further research can build on the proposed conceptual model in Product Two as well as explore the use of simulation in an online environment.

Keywords: simulation, social work education, experiential learning theory, thematic analysis, holistic competency

Dedications

This banded dissertation is dedicated to my family. To my mother, who taught me that learning is a lifelong process. I will wear your regalia, knowing that a love for learning is something that will always bind us together. I miss you. To my father and Pat, who never tired of asking me when I would pursue my doctoral education. You two are my truest examples of perseverance and commitment. To Darin, who sacrificed and extended so I could accomplish my dream. While you literally fought for your life and health, you never once let me consider stepping away or quitting. Look how far we have come! To Drayton and Kassidi, for your love and encouragement. You two remain the best investments I have ever made with my life.

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Simulation as Pedagogy: An Experiential Teaching Strategy for Social Work Education

In 2015, the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) released the 2015 Educational

Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) which newly recognized simulation as a means for

social work students to complete field education hours (CSWE, 2015). This addition of

simulation legitimized the pedagogy, indicating its parity with field education in creating

opportunities for students to learn and practice the application of course content in real

situations. However, within social work there is a dearth of research published on how educators

utilize the strategy (Jones & Phillips, 2016; Logie, Bogo, Regehr & Regehr, 2013). Additionally,

simulation demands time and resources. Thus, the relevant questions for the social work

profession are not only what simulation is and how it can be utilized in social work education,

but also what best practices for social work student development are.

Simulation is a teaching strategy in which faculty create practice scenarios using realistic

practice settings and standardized clients, allowing students to interact uninterrupted and to apply

intellectual knowledge and skills spontaneously (Gaba, 2007). Standardized clients are

nonprofessionals trained to imitate a situation or diagnosis and who are unfamiliar to the student

(Badger & MacNeil, 2002). Similar to role-plays, simulations incorporate realistic settings,

standardized clients, and faculty expectations for students to engage as professional social

workers, adding to the validity and intensity of simulation, and can be more efficacious in

teaching professional skills (Badger & MacNeil, 2002, Carter et al., 2018, Tufford, Asakura, &

Bogo, 2018). They are observed either in-person, remotely, or through video-recording, thus

providing an opportunity for immediate feedback from standardized clients, observers, and

educators, as well as opportunities for student self-reflection (Bandali, Craig, & Ziv, 2012; Mooradian, 2008).

Simulation is a core pedagogy for many disciplines, such as the healthcare professions, aviation, law, and military and has been used for over 20 years (Gaba, 2007). Research in other disciplines has demonstrated that simulations raise student self-awareness, which can be used in refining professional skills (Bolesta & Chmil, 2008; Potter & Allen, 2013). The low-stakes nature of simulation provides developing professionals an opportunity to refine professional skills with little to no risk for clients (Gaba, 2007). The fact that these professions continue to rely on simulation as a core pedagogy validates its effectiveness (Bandali et al., 2012; Hayden, Smiley, Alexander, Kardong-Edgren, & Jeffries, 2014). Simulation is increasingly visible due to its use as a teaching strategy for interprofessional education. Findings from studies of its use in interprofessional education consistently supported the receptiveness of students to the medium and its effectiveness in facilitating skill development (Campbell, Themessl-Huber, & Mole, 2007; Murphy & Nimmagadda, 2015; Thompson et al., 2016).

Most recent simulation studies involving social work focused on interprofessional education and the healthcare context (Nimmagadda & Murphy, 2014; Olsen, Lewis, & Hartley, 2015; Thompson et al., 2016). In looking at studies focused specifically on social work skill development and scopes of practice, research was generally cross-sectional (Bogo et al., 2013; Carter et al., 2018; Forgey, Badger, Gilbert, & Hansen, 2013; Logie et al., 2013; Mooradian, 2008; Rogers & Welch, 2009). The resulting gap in literature presents a need for research that explores social work student development through the repeated use of simulation over time, utilizing social work contexts and scopes of practice.

To embrace simulation as a pedagogy in social work education, it must not only be effective, but it must also fit within the context, scope, and competencies of social work education. Thus, the purpose of this banded dissertation is to examine simulation as a pedagogy in the context of social work education. Product One is a conceptual framework, demonstrating how simulation as a pedagogy aligns with the multi-dimensional scope of social work education and its signature pedagogy, field education. Product Two explores the influence of repeated simulations on social work student development over time, using a qualitative approach. In this work, the author proposes a conceptual framework for the structuring of simulation frequency to align with the complexity of specific learning objectives. Product Three is the dissemination of the findings in Product Two, applying the findings to field education, the social work classroom, and interprofessional education.

Conceptual Framework

In the exploration of simulation within social work education, the author approached the work from a conceptual framework informed by constructivism and experiential learning theory. Constructivism served as the paradigm for the inquiry while experiential learning theory informed the understanding of pedagogy and, more specifically, simulation as a pedagogy. The two are complimentary as experiential learning theory developed from the early work of Piaget and Dewey, also drawing from a constructivist framework (Kolb, 2015).

Constructivism emphasizes the primary role the student plays in the learning process and, thus, the subjective nature of learning (Krahenbuhl, 2016). Setting the student in the center of learning, a constructivist paradigm recognizes that learning is a process which requires the student to engage in the creation of meaning from experiences (Davis & Sumara, 2002). It is an internal process and, therefore, necessitates more the engagement of the student than that of the

instructor. Furthermore, learning is subjective. In this perspective, each student brings past

learning to the present. This past learning exerts influence on how students perceive and

understand the present. Learning occurs when past knowledge and new experiences interact,

creating new meaning and understanding (Kolb & Kolb, 2005). The synthesis of the new

learning with past experiences serves to either modify or reinforce understanding (Garrison,

2013).

Experiential learning theory draws from a constructivist paradigm as it seeks to explain

the process by which individuals transform experiences into learning (Kolb, 2015). According to

this theory, learning occurs through two means: grasping and transforming. Grasping is how a

person perceives the experience, creating a continuum between the actual physical sensations of

an experience and the internal cognitions and conceptualizations about the experience. Kolb

(2015) refers to these as experiencing and thinking. The other process, transforming, refers to

how a person understands the experience, creating a continuum between interacting with the

experience and reflecting on it. Kolb (2015) refers to these as acting and reflecting. Experiential

learning theory argues that these four stages comprise the learning cycle and that for deep and

lasting learning to occur, a person must transition through all four stages: experiencing, acting,

thinking, and reflecting.

Highlighting the role of constructivist assumptions within the theory, the centrality of the

learner to the learning cycle becomes evident. The learning cycle is centered within the internal

processes and perceptions of the student. While the instructor may create the experience, it is the

learner who engages in the cycle and, thus, plays the primary role in the learning process.

Additionally, the learning cycle illustrates the points of intersection between old and new

learning. As the student experiences something novel, old knowledge serves as the filter through

which the student understands the experience both through cognitions and reflections. Acting on the old understanding, the new experience either conflicts with or refines the old understanding, presenting new responses and new learning.

Experiential learning theory is a foundational theory for social work education, informing the development of field education (Hendricks, Rinch, & Franks, 2013). Simulation, too, is a form of experiential learning. An understanding of experiential learning theory assists in recognizing how simulation can be effective in the learning process, moving students through the entire learning cycle and leading to deeper, lasting learning.

Summary of Banded Dissertation Products

This banded dissertation contains three distinct products. Product One is a conceptual paper, presenting a framework for understanding simulation as a useful pedagogy in social work education. Product Two is a nine-month qualitative study, resulting in a proposed conceptual framework for the use of repeated simulations with social work students. The third product is an interactive poster, presented at the Council of Social Work 2018 Annual Program Meeting, which summarizes the research of Product Two, expanding to address simulation in interprofessional education.

The 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) recognize simulation as one means by which students can complete field education hours, suggesting that simulation provides similar learning opportunities as field experiences, yet little has been published about simulation in social work education (CSWE, 2015). Product One explored the fit between simulation as a pedagogy and social work education, creating a conceptual framework within social work education using the concept of holistic competence, a model of curriculum as engagement, and experiential learning theory. Also, within the 2015 EPAS, the Council on

Social Work Education charges social work education with a broadened scope, *holistic competence*, which builds on the previous definition of competency as the integration of knowledge, skills, and values and adds the internal cognitive and affective processes of students. A model of curriculum as engagement, as articulated by Barnett and Coate (2005), provides a context for achieving this broadened scope, addressing both external and internal learning aspects of students. Experiential learning theory provides a theoretical foundation for the classroom by guiding faculty in structuring classroom experiences for holistic engagement. Simulation is a form of experiential learning, and the author argued that simulation is a useful pedagogy for social work education given the alignment between simulation and holistic competence.

To date, much of the research on simulation in social work education has been cross-sectional, examining single uses of simulation. Building on past research, Product Two is an exploratory study on the influence of repeated simulations on twelve first-year MSW students in practice classes over the course of nine months. Students participated in three simulations: an individual assessment, a group therapy session, and a family counseling assessment. Students then completed semi-structured reflections after reviewing the video recordings of the simulations. Using the students' reflections, the researcher conducted a thematic analysis to identify relationships between themes over time. These included an awareness of key learning elements, skill-based performance to the inclusion of theoretical concepts, and self-awareness to goal-orientation. The author proposes a conceptual model for the development of student metacognition from the use of multiple simulations.

Product Three is an interactive eposter presented at the Council on Social Work 2018 Annual Program Meeting at Orlando, Florida in November 2018. The topic is the use of

simulation to accomplish both social work education and interprofessional education

competencies. The eposter provides an overview of the research conducted for Product Two,

highlighting the research design and findings. Professional experiences with simulation for

interprofessional education were included. The implications from research findings are applied to

the use of simulation both in social work education and in interprofessional education, including

the importance of aligning the frequency of simulation experiences with the complexity of

identified learning objectives.

Discussion

Social work education utilizes a number of effective pedagogies, from in-class role plays,

to critical dialogue, to field education. The move by the Council on Social Work Education to

name simulation as an acceptable pedagogy positions social work education well by adding

another intriguing and effective teaching strategy (CSWE, 2015). As a pedagogy, simulation

engages both the internal and external aspects of student learning. The application of knowledge

and the use of social work skills are external and explicit, readily observable in simulation. In

addition, reviewing the recording and reflecting on the experiences allows students to recognize

internal processes and thus, make those internal processes more explicit. Once those are made

explicit, both the students and instructor can shape the internal processes: values, cognitive and

affective processes, and metacognitive learning. It is a holistic experience that results in holistic

engagement.

It is precisely this holistic engagement that recommends simulation as an effective

pedagogy for social work education. The aim of social work education is holistic competency

(CSWE, 2015). This broadened scope asserts that social work education must not only engage

with the knowledge, values, and skills of students but also the internal cognitive and affective

processes. Therefore, social work education programs must consider pedagogical choices that allow for such holistic engagement. The holistic engagement offered through simulation aligns with the aim and scope of holistic competency, creating continuity between program intent and classroom experience.

Simulation, as a form of experiential learning, can best be understood by deconstructing the experience within experiential learning theory. Drawing on the learning cycle articulated in experiential learning theory, simulation leads the student through all four processes of the learning cycle: experience, thinking, acting, and reflecting (Kolb, 2015). It is both physically and psychologically immersive, thus increasing the intensity of the experience and adding to the realism (Carter et al., 2018; Gaba, 2007). By creating this immersive, holistically engaging experience, educators can use simulations as a creative way to integrate the knowledge, values, skills, and cognitive and affective processes of the student, thereby creating opportunity for the student to synthesize learning from the curriculum (Dodds, Heslop, & Meredith, 2018). The student applies and practices new learning while interacting with the standardized client.

While simulation is an effective pedagogy, it may be presumptuous to assume the same kind of learning occurs each time simulation is used. Research supports the use of simulation for skill development (Carter et al., 2018; Hayden et al., 2014; Singer, 2018). The question is how the strengths of simulation as a pedagogy can be leveraged to focus on deeper, metacognitive learning. Product Two explores the use of multiple simulations in social work students. The author proposes a conceptual framework for precisely this, suggesting that as students engage in multiple simulations, the learning expands from skill-based learning to self-regulated, metacognitive learning. The implications for this are that the strengths of simulation can best be leveraged by aligning the frequency of simulation with the complexity of the learning objectives.

This may guide social work programs and educators as they structure courses, make choices on pedagogy in relation to course objectives, and determine resource allocation.

Implications for Social Work Education

The 2015 EPAS recognize simulation in conjunction with field education, but the uses for simulation within social work education extend beyond the field education program. Some have used simulation as an assessment tool for practice skills (Bogo, Rawlings, Katz, & Logie, 2014). Drawing on the proposed conceptual model of this dissertation, classroom instructors can develop simulations that align with the learning objectives of their courses. For example, objectives that focus on the application of skill or on developing self-awareness of professional self can be utilized in a single event. However, learning objectives that focus on the integration of course content or self-regulated practice may need to be offered in succession. This sequencing can be significant, for the course instructor can observe the student in practice and draw alongside the student in professional development. Such opportunities are rare in social work education.

An application of this idea is for interprofessional education. Often, interprofessional education utilizes single simulation experiences. This structure may work well to provide students with an awareness of other disciplines' roles, such as dieticians or nurses. This may also be successful for practicing interprofessional communication. However, to address more complex issues such as teamwork, interprofessional conflict, and values, multiple simulations may be more effective. Therefore, the strengths of simulation can also be leveraged by the number of times it is offered around learning objectives.

As a tool for field education, simulation can be very effective in exposing students to challenging populations or providing opportunities for students to practice specific modalities in

low-risk situations. Students who struggle with bias, countertransference, or concern with

specific issues may find simulations helpful. More specifically, the timing of field education

differs between programs and, often, students are learning skills and concepts without an

opportunity to practice in real settings. Simulation affords these opportunities and can serve as a

bridge between the classroom and field practice (Bandali et al., 2012).

Implications for Future Research

The work of this dissertation was to explore simulation in the social work education

context and examine its use with social work students. While the proposed conceptual model in

Product Two is intriguing, there is further work to be done. Replication of the study with a larger

sample is warranted. The qualitative study of Product Two can serve as the first arm of a mixed

methods study. Additionally, further research can address the limitations of Product Two such as

addressing maturation and the small sample size.

At the same time, applying the conceptual model to metacognitive development may lead

to interesting results. For example, drawing on the use of simulation to make student bias more

explicit, one can look at simulation as an effective pedagogy around issues of intersectionality

and discrimination in social workers. Another application may be the use of simulation to

address the integration of spirituality, both on the part of the social worker and the development

of spiritually integrated treatment. Further research on the use of simulation as a teaching

strategy in these situations can benefit not only social work education but also other disciplines.

As healthcare transitions to online interaction and telehealth, further research is needed to

examine how simulations can prepare students for online interactions. For example, one question

may be whether simulations are as effective in online situations given online simulations are less

immersive. Simulations also may be informative in identifying the challenges of telehealth services and may serve a formative function in curriculum development.

Conclusion

While this banded dissertation explores simulation within social work education, there is still more to discover. No one pedagogy is ideal for all circumstances. However, as the profession continues to examine simulation both in the classroom and in field education, the use of simulation can become increasingly targeted and intentional. The further development and use of simulation will only enrich the tools that social work educators can utilize as they seek to develop holistic competence in social work students.

The goal of holistic competence is challenging and, potentially, overwhelming. Both social work programs and educators must evaluate teaching strategies, ensuring these strategies engage and develop students in a holistic manner. Simulation provides a unique opportunity to do just this, allowing instructors and students to partner together to engage knowledge, skills, and meta-cognitive development as students grow in their professional self. Furthermore, the flexibility to sculpt simulation scenarios targeting specific professional challenges, skill sets, and practice scenarios allows the use of the pedagogy across the social work curriculum.

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Understanding Simulation in Social Work Education: A Conceptual Framework

C. Jean Roberson

St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas

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Author Note

C. Jean Roberson, School of Social Work, St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas.

The author is a doctoral student at St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas. The author is also a full-time instructor and Director of Field Education at Samford University. The author would like to thank all peer reviewers for providing feedback and editorial assistance on the manuscript. This is the author's accepted manuscript of an article being published by Taylor & Francis in the *Journal on Social Work Education*.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to C. Jean Roberson, Department of Social Work, Samford University, 800 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35229. E-mail: croberso@samford.edu

Abstract

With the adoption of the 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards, the Council on

Social Work Education accepted simulation as a means for students to accumulate field practice

hours. However, little research exists addressing the use of simulation for social work student

development. To effectively utilize simulation to develop social work competencies, more must

be known about simulation and its integration into curriculum. This article presents a conceptual

framework for simulation: holistic competence in social work education, curriculum as

engagement, and experiential learning theory. The author integrates the framework with research

on the efficacy of simulation as pedagogy in other disciplines and provides strategies for

simulation within social work curriculum and field education programs.

Keywords: simulation, social work education, curriculum, experiential learning theory

Simulation in Social Work Education: A Qualitative Study of MSW Student Development

C. Jean Roberson

St. Catherine University / University of St. Thomas

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Author Note

C. Jean Roberson, School of Social Work, St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to C. Jean Roberson, Department of Social Work, Samford University, 800 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35229. E-mail: croberso@samford.edu

Abstract

The 2015 Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) recognizes simulation as a means for students to gain skills, technical proficiency, and even field practicum hours. Research on its use in social work education has been largely cross-sectional. The purpose of this nine-month qualitative study was to explore the influence of three simulations on twelve MSW students in practice classes, using students' semi-structured reflections. A thematic analysis identified three key themes: awareness of key learning elements, development from skill-based performance to the inclusion of theoretical concepts, and growth from self-awareness to goal-orientation. A conceptual model for the development of student metacognition from the use of repeated simulations is proposed.

Keywords: simulation, social work education, experiential learning theory, thematic analysis, metacognition

Simulation in field: A strategy for developing social work and interprofessional competencies

C. Jean Roberson

St. Catherine University / University of St. Thomas

Author Note

C. Jean Roberson, School of Social Work, St. Catherine University and University of St. Thomas.

The author is a doctoral student at St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas. The author is also a full-time instructor and Director of Field Education at Samford University. The author would like to thank all peer reviewers for providing feedback and editorial assistance on the manuscript.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to C. Jean Roberson, Department of Social Work, Samford University, 800 Lakeshore Drive, Birmingham, AL 35229. E-mail: croberso@samford.edu

Abstract

Simulation is recognized in the 2015 Education Policy and Accreditation Standards (EPAS) as a means to accumulate field education hours, suggesting that simulation offers similar learning opportunities as field experiences (CSWE, 2015). This eposter presents an overview of exploratory research on the influence of multiple simulations on Master of Social Work (MSW) students in MSW practice classes. Based on the findings, the author proposes a conceptual model for student development from the use of repeated simulations. The author draws implications for the use of simulation as pedagogy both in the development of social work competencies and interprofessional competencies, asserting that learning objectives requiring knowledge integration and self-regulation require the use of multiple simulation experiences.

Keywords: simulation, interprofessional education, metacognition, social work education, qualitative, thematic analysis

Introduction

This eposter was presented at the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) 64th Annual Program Meeting in Orlando, Florida. The conference was held at the Walt Disney World Swan and Dolphin Resort on November 8-11, 2018, and the conference theme was "Expanding Interprofessional Education to Achieve Social Justice." The author presented the eposter on Sunday, November 11, from 7:30-8:30 am.

The eposter provided an overview of qualitative research conducted for the completion of the second banded dissertation product on the influence of repeated simulations on Master of Social Work (MSW) student development. Additionally, the author drew from professional experience with interprofessional simulations in higher education. Implications included the structuring of simulation frequency in both social work education and interprofessional education for alignment with learning outcomes.

Samford University
School of Public Health

SIMULATION IN FIELD EDUCATION
DEVELOPING SOCIAL WORK AND IPE COMPETENCIES

C. Jean Roberson
Samford University
St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas

ST. KATE'S - ST. THOMAS
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Abstract
Introduction
Methods
Results
IPE Simulations
Conclusion

Please use the headings above to navigate through the different sections of the poster

C. Jean Roberson, MSW, LICSW

Background: Simulation can be used as a method to accumulate field practicum hours and is frequently used for interprofessional education (IPE). However, research on simulation in social work is limited.

Question: What is the influence of repeated simulation experiences on social work student development?

Method: A longitudinal qualitative study of 3 simulations over 9 months, using semi-structured reflections

Results: A proposed conceptual model for structuring simulation into social work curriculum, field education, and IPE

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Background

Simulation defined as recorded and observed practice scenarios set in realistic settings, using standardized clients. The expectation of the student is to fully engage in the professional role.

Simulation in Social Work Education
- More effective than role play
- Increased skill development and self-efficacy
- Development of self-awareness
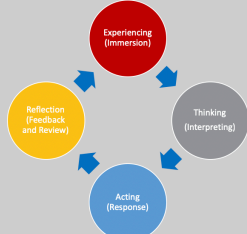- Limited studies: cross-sectional, post-test

Simulation in IPE and Other Disciplines
- Increase in skill development and clinical preparation
- Development of self-awareness of learning needs
- Evidence of self-regulated learning
- Students receptive to experience
- Focus on IPE competencies and interpersonal processes

Simulation as a form of Experiential Learning

Experiencing (Immersion)

Reflection (Feedback and Review)

Thinking (Interpreting)

Acting (Response)

(Kolb, 2015)

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INTERPROFESSIONAL SIMULATIONS

Scenarios – Single simulations up to 4 hours long
- Disaster Simulations (fire, earthquake, active shooter)
- Home health simulations
- End of life simulations
- Acute care simulations

Focus on Interprofessional Competencies
- Roles/Responsibilities
- Values/Ethics
- Interprofessional Communication
- Teamwork

Multiple Disciplines
- Nursing
- Pharmacy
- Social Work
- Physical Therapy
- Communication Sciences
- Emergency Responders

While single IPE simulations are beneficial for raising general awareness, the conceptual model developed in this study suggests simulations targeting awareness and growth in IPE competencies must be delivered repeatedly over time, utilizing recording and reflection to support student growth.

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Conclusions

Participation in multiple simulations allows students to develop and activate metacognition.

The more sophisticated the learning objective, the more simulations need to be offered.

A single simulation experience raises student awareness of self and practice.

Simulations focused on knowledge application need to occur in succession.

Multiple simulations allow students to own their internal processes and self-correct their behavior.

A printed reference sheet is available.

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