

Chapter 7

Developing a Pedagogical Framework for Simulated Practice Learning: How to Improve Simulated Training of Social Workers who Interact with Vulnerable People

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ABSTRACT

While simulated learning becomes an attractive learning method for learners and educators, it is the pedagogical framework behind the technology design that makes the learning efficient. Thus the context and the subject domain, along with learning theories largely influence its impact. Working with vulnerable people becomes part of many jobs specifics. Therefore, the main goal of the chapter is to present the pedagogical framework for simulated practice learning for social workers who interact with vulnerable people. It takes into consideration both the theories of learning and the features of games-based learning. It also outlines the relations between the broader social context, the particular educational setting and the learner, the trainer and the vulnerable person. The focus of the presented simulated learning is on teacher training for child-care professionals who work with 3- 7 years old children. The Pedagogical Framework is developed under the Simulated Practice for Skills Development in Social Services and Healthcare - Digital Bridges (2014-1-UK01-KA200-001805).

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INTRODUCTION

Healthcare and social services have gained significant attention over the recent years and will become even more important in view of the aging of society and the increasing problems with economic downturns, unemployment, migration and social exclusion. Thus the healthcare and social systems in all EU Member States face similar objective requirements to adjust to demographic problems such as ageing, societal and economic changes, migration and social pressure. Moreover, nowadays the latter frequently demand that professionals fast adapt to and expertly handle various real-life situations involving interaction with vulnerable people. Accordingly, many social workers need to enhance their competences to work with such vulnerable groups through attending specially designed appropriate programs and on-the-job-trainings. Therefore, investigating computer-based learning, simulated learning and game-based learning models in the context of working with vulnerable people can bring many benefits such as improving access to learning, learning adaptability and problem-oriented learning.

Social and pedagogical work viewed in a professional context is a complex phenomenon which combines a number of activities, functions and professional roles which are generally aimed at supporting people in their coping with difficult life situations and strive for successful functioning in society. Its main aim is to satisfy the socially guaranteed as well as the personal interests and needs of people from different social strata. In this sense it can be discussed as an integrative activity targeting society as a whole. On the other hand, it can be seen as an activity which targets a smaller social group or an individual in a difficult situation (Pavlenko, 2010). Often, people who are subject to social and pedagogical work are referred to as “vulnerable population”. The vulnerability notion is researched in depth and explained in detail from a healthcare point of view in relation to susceptibility to different health conditions, access to health care, or as “vulnerability by virtue of status” (See de Chesnay & Anderson, 2016). In an EU context, special emphasis is placed on sustainable and adequate reforms of social protection systems, active inclusion strategies, well-designed universal and targeted benefits and most often migrants, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, homeless, etc. are seen as vulnerable (European Commission, 2011). Dealing effectively with such social groups as well as improving life circumstances and equal access to services and protection is viewed as a major factor in achieving social cohesion, hence the need to provide up-to-date initial and in-service training for social work and pedagogy professionals.

Simulation learning has gained in popularity and is being used more frequently in a number of health disciplines including social care (Wiseman, Haynes, and Hodge, 2013). According to Cosman et al., (2002) simulations display a number of important advantages such as being available regardless of the time factor and being usable in the development from novice to expert. They also lend themselves to being rehearsed before being assessed and allow for risk-free training. Furthermore, when computers are used, an effective record of previous performances of the procedure can be compared to future attempts and thus the trainee can obtain effective feedback. In addition, games-based learning has also grown in popularity and has become recognized as a potentially engaging (motivating and rewarding) and novel (innovative and more interactive) form of learning. It has been applied in a number of different areas such as: physics (Anderson & Barnett, 2013), health and well-being (Farrel et al., 2011), multiculturalism, tolerance, and solidarity (Furió et al., 2013), promotion of social skills and bullying prevention (Rubin-Vaughan et al., 2011), nutrition (Baños et al., 2013; Yien et al., 2011), music (Çoban & Tuncer, 2008) mathematics (Bakker et al., 2012), science (Wang, 2008) and language learning (Yang, Chen, & Jeng, 2010; Connolly et al., 2010). Some specific game examples also include successful results for

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