

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**Distance Simulation-Based Learning from the Perspective of the Group
Coordinator**

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Abstract

In recent years, the simulative tool has been widely used in the training and professional development of teachers in Israel (Yablon, Iluz and Eisenhower, in print; Iluz and Yablon, in print; Ran and Yosefsberg Ben-Yehoshua, 2021) and worldwide (Dotger, 2015; Kaufman & Ireland, 2016; Kaufman & Ireland, 2019; Levin & Flavian, 2020).

The simulative tool is human imaging that is a simple but accurate, valid and dynamic model of reality (Kaufman & Ireland, 2016). Visualization has many benefits for learning and practice including the ability to repeat scenarios with specific learning objectives, longer practice time frames than is possible in real life, use trial and error, experience rare or dangerous situations and measure results clearly with verified measurement systems. In order to develop skills, the practice of simulation, combined with reflective learning processes, provides an important opportunity for improved performance improvement and the development of significant insights on effective solutions to complex situations (Kaufman & Ireland, 2016).

Simulation in teaching is a way to improve socio-emotional skills among teachers by dealing with situations of uncertainty (Dotger, 2015; Freedman, Woodfield & Dotger, 2020). Teachers are required to deal with complex situations in many different conflict events, adapting their teaching to a huge variety of emotions and needs arising from diverse cultural backgrounds. The main conflicts faced by teachers are lack of time, complex relationships with parents, disciplinary problems or unacceptable behaviors of students.

In addition, a negative social climate in the school and lack of social support from the school administration and staff, lack of autonomy and lack of school support may lead to feelings of stress and frustration (Skaalvik & Skaalvik 2010; 2016).

To succeed in these situations, teachers are required to use their interpersonal skills embedded within them (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017; Goroshit & Hen, 2016; Brackett & Katulak, 2006).

Following the understanding that teachers tend to excel in the emotional social dimensions of their work, researchers have concluded that in addition to the importance of pedagogical expertise and control over areas of mind, there is great importance in developing social and emotional skills among teachers. (Brackett & Katulak, 2006; Chatterjee Singh & Duraiappah, 2020; Ferreira, Martinsone & Talić, 2020; Oliveira et al., 2021).

Simulation in front of actors is a practice for teaching and learning based on experiential, active learning (Kolb, 2014) and is intended for learning and strengthening skills of various types in diverse fields. While simulation-based learning is very common in the fields of aviation and medicine (Aebersold, 2016), simulation in education is relatively new (Eisenhower, in print) and research on the subject is still in its infancy. While various aspects of the simulative experience such as the contributions of the simulation to self-direction, focus control and more, (Yablon, Iluz and Eisenhower, in print) have received research attention, the view point of group leaders has not been investigated so far. In the present study, we will focus on the perspective of group leaders who choose to include online simulation workshops in the training and professional development program for which they are responsible.

The present study aims to examine what is the unique response that online simulation experience gives to group leaders of teachers and students, with respect to training and professional development processes, while examining the differences between different groups of participants at different stages of their professional development. In addition, we sought to understand the needs and expectations of group leaders, from the online simulation workshops, to test what skills and competencies they would like to promote through group participation in the simulation workshops.

The simulation workshops include several components.

In each workshop, participants experience different authentic conflict scenarios. Members of each group experience their true professional roles. The experience in the workshop is done in front of professional actors who play the role of the other partner in the event. After the experience phase of the workshop, the player and team members who watched the simulation give feedback on the conduct of the experimenter. The workshop is accompanied by the guidance of a simulation expert. She is photographed in a technology studio and by a professional photographer. In the case of online simulation workshops, the workshop takes place in the 'ZOOM' software. At the end of the workshop, the participants watch the video of each of the simulations for the purpose of researching and learning an applied model. At the end, the experimenters receive the personal simulation video in which they participated, for the purpose of continued learning.

Fifteen interviews were conducted with group leaders who had participated in remote simulation experiences at the Center for Simulation in Education at Bar-Ilan University .

The purpose of the research is exploratory and therefore the research method is qualitative (Tracy, 2019).

The research tool is a semi-structured interview. This type of interview was chosen because the researcher has the option of deepening the conversation with the interviewee on issues he or she wants to deal with, asking pre-planned questions, but allowing the interviewee and the researcher to add questions and answers freely.

Interview analysis is done using the CQR analysis method: Consensual qualitative research (Hill, 2013).

The analysis of the interviews revealed a number of key themes that reflect the goals and expectations of group leaders who choose to bring their groups to the simulation workshops and the unique contribution of the workshops for those participating in them.

The results of the study reflect the importance and uniqueness that group leaders attach to the simulative experience and how it promotes effective training and professional development processes of teachers. However, differences were found between the interviewees, expressing different perspectives related to the developmental stage.

The analysis of the interviews revealed seven main themes from which one can learn about the contributions of the simulation workshop to its participants.

The first theme dealt with the **authenticity** that characterizes the simulation workshops. It was possible to understand from the interviewees the meaning of the simulation workshops in front of actors as actually representing the complex reality in the school and the feeling is that the workshops, as a pedagogical tool, is the tool that most closely reflects what is happening in the field.

The second theme examined the processing done among the participants through **feedback and reflection** that takes place in the workshops. In their interviews, group leaders mentioned various components in this process, through which the participants can perform internal processing following the simulation workshop.

The third theme examined the issue of strengthening **social, emotional, and media skills** following participation in workshops. The interviewees noted that watching the simulation allows participants to find the skills required to cope in the different situations, to examine which skills need reinforcement and which skills help the trainee to cope with the situation.

The fourth theme examined the construction of the **professional identity** that takes place among the participants in the workshops. The group leaders noted a number of important

points that arise from participating in the workshop, which contribute to building the professional identity of those participating in it.

The fifth theme dealt with the **active experience** made possible in the workshops. The simulation workshop allows for an active experience that gives participants a place to practice and prepare for the teaching work in the field.

The sixth theme examined the **adaptability of the process of online simulation workshops to the changes occurring** in our time. The corona virus, which has brought with it many changes in our lifestyles, has caused us to change the way we conduct ourselves on a daily basis and adapt to a new reality. The simulation workshop was conducted online in order to allow the simulations to continue in the new reality as well. This change brought with it a number of advantages which were noted by the heads of the various groups.

The seventh theme proposed to **thicken the experiences** and assimilate them more significantly in the learning processes as a suggestion of optimization for the simulation workshops in order to create an effective learning process. Group leaders noted that participants would derive even more from the simulations in multiple workshops and as part of a long learning process, than from a one-time simulation experience.

From the results of the study it can be learned that group leaders who participate in simulation workshops, see them as a fertile ground for new learning, personal examination and as a tool for strengthening existing skills and competencies that can benefit participants for present and future teaching.

The transition to online teaching and distance workshops bothered the heads of the groups. From the beginning it was possible to believe that in fact online learning may impair the learning experience. In retrospect, therefore, it emerges from their remarks that online simulation inevitably entails benefits that produce added value for workshop participants.

In conclusion, this study has a theoretical and pedagogical contribution. At the theoretical level, it can be learned from the research that experiential learning is significant for students, interns and experienced teachers in the process of building their professional identity and coping with the teaching work in the field. It may add a unique element to the training and professional development processes because these processes are mainly built from theoretical and passive learning while experiential learning is established as more effective and advanced learning among teaching staff. At the pedagogical level, it can be learned from this study that the simulation workshops are significant to the process of training and professional development of students and teachers. The simulation workshops are added to the workshops and courses that exist in professional development today and give added value to the practice and application of theoretical learning. They enable practice and learning of key and important skills in the teaching work, which is not common in existing courses.

The simulation workshops are researched and established as an effective and promoting tool in the training process of teaching staff, and enters the professional development of the learning and training processes that exists today.