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Featured Article

Psychological Safety, Self-Efficacy, and Speaking Up in Interprofessional Health Care Simulation

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KEYWORDS

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speaking up

Abstract

Background: Health care work and training are increasingly team based and interprofessional. This research examines how occupational self-efficacy and psychological safety (PS) perceptions influence active and honest participation in simulation-based learning.

Method: Surveys captured self-assessments and reactions to learning experiences over a two-year period at a European simulation center.

Results: Participants with greater occupational self-efficacy levels spoke up more to clarify faculty explanations. Participants who perceived greater PS spoke up more to discuss colleagues' mistakes and clarify faculty explanations.

Conclusions: Internal and external factors influence the quality of engagement in simulation-based learning. Improving PS and engaging learners with lower self-efficacy levels improves the quality of learning experiences.

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Like health care work itself, the work of learning through simulation has become increasingly team based, relational, and cooperative (Lyons et al., 2015; Rudolph, Raemer, & Simon, 2014; Severson, Maxson, Wroblewski, & Dozois, 2014; Smith & Cole, 2009). Researchers agree that effective team-based learning relies on full authentic engagement by

participants, leading simulation educators to prioritize creating psychologically safe learning environments and to use advanced debriefing approaches that encourage engagement, reflection, and meaningful participation (Eppich & Cheng, 2015; Rudolph et al., 2014). Still, individual learners often vary in their responses to particular teaching styles (Katsioloudis & Fantz, 2012).

Learning behaviors have most often been viewed and studied as a function of external factors affecting the learner,

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such as available resources, teaching approach, or learning environment (McLaughlin et al., 2014). More recently, researchers have begun to view and study learning behaviors as a function of the attitudes and perceptions of the learner, under the theory that particular attitudes and perceptions

promote more positive learning behaviors (Butler, Anderson, Supiano, & Weir, 2017). This research examines how both internal (e.g., self-perceptions concerning ability) and external (e.g., perceptions of psychological safety [PS] in the learning environment) evaluations made by learners are associated with the expectations that learners have concerning outcomes and therefore influence the degree to which learners participate actively and honestly in simulation-based learning (Figure).

Key Points

- The degree and quality of learner participation in interprofessional simulation courses is influenced by self-efficacy as well as perceptions of the psychological safety of the learning environment.
- Educators should strive to create psychologically safe learning environments by protecting learners from negative implications associated with honesty and risk-taking during learning.
- Educators can adapt approaches to better understand self-efficacy dynamics and adjust curriculum to optimize learning behaviors and outcomes.

Internal Evaluations—Will I Succeed With Participation?

Beyond assessing the environment when entering into a moment of team-based learning and performance, individuals assess their own abilities in relation to

the tasks, roles, and challenges presented to themselves and their team. Self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1977, 1997) are self-evaluations concerning the likelihood of successfully accomplishing a task. First explored as a general self-concept by Bandura, self-efficacy research now includes many team- and work-focused studies (Jaina & Tyson, 2004; Katz-Navon & Erez, 2005; McNatt & Judge, 2008)

that closely connect specific self-efficacy beliefs with related behavioral outcomes (Betz, 2000).

Several studies have shown that simulation-based learning experiences have a positive impact on improving perceived self-efficacy in clinical situations both for nurses and doctors (Watters et al., 2015). Some studies have also found a significant increase in perceived efficacy levels combined with improved clinical outcomes, such as reduction of severe postpartum hemorrhage after training (Egenberg et al., 2016). We are not aware of studies linking self-efficacy with behaviors within simulation-based learning experiences.

In this research, we explored the influence of occupational self-efficacy beliefs (Hirschi & Jaensch, 2015; Schyns & Von Collani, 2002) on the display of meaningful learning behaviors during postsimulation debriefing conversations. Because those with greater occupational self-efficacy expect more positive outcomes from their own work-related efforts, we expect that employees with these beliefs are more likely to contribute knowledge and ideas or to feel confident correcting the behavior of others to benefit themselves and the larger group.

External Evaluations—How Safe is the Environment for Participation?

PS is a perceived aspect of team climate (Edmondson, 1999; Roussin, MacLean, & Rudolph, 2016; Rudolph et al., 2014). When entering into any moment of teamwork, individuals automatically assess the PS of the work environment to determine the potential for negative implications associated with risk-taking behaviors (Edmondson & Roloff, 2009; Roussin et al., 2016). When learning in teams, if trainees perceive a learning environment as psychologically safe, they feel able to engage in open reflective learning behaviors—for example, by openly discussing novel solutions or divergent ideas—without the fear of negative implications. On the contrary, learners who feel psychologically unsafe (e.g., intimidated or with fear of negative outcomes) are more likely to choose defensive behaviors, silence, or other disengaged behaviors that do not contribute to personal or group-level learning and development. Edmondson creates important distinctions between feelings of PS and other constructs such as group cohesion or niceness, each of which are associated with dysfunctions such as groupthink and avoidance of difficult conversations (Edmondson & Roloff, 2009). Learners who feel safe are far more willing to practice at the edge of their expertise to experiment, solve difficult problems, and to reflect on their performance (Rudolph et al., 2014). In this research, we explored the influence of PS perceptions (separately directed toward faculty and other participants) on meaningful learning behaviors during postsimulation debriefing.



Figure Theoretical framework.

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