

# Online Role-Play as a Method for Exploring the Issues Surrounding DNP Practice

L. Rounds, PhD, RN, FNP; E. Blight, MSN, RN, NNP-BC; M. Fagbemi, MSN, RN, FNP-C; M. Hemingway, MSN, RN, NNP-BC; A. Jackson, MSN, RN, WHNP-BC; S. Joy, MSN, RN, FNP; B. Manakatt, MSN, RN, FNP-C; C. Simmons, MSN, RN, FNP-BC; M. Wade, MSN, RN, FNP-BC

The University of Texas Medical Branch - Galveston, Texas

## Abstract

### Statement of Problem

Can DNP students gain realistic experiences from a role-play involving key stakeholders in the debate regarding the role of the DNP graduate in the future health care system?

### Synthesis of Evidence

Fink (2003) describes significant learning as an educational process that engages students and produces a high energy level for learning. It also results in a significant and lasting change for the students that retains value after a course or project is completed. Role play is a teaching strategy that can result in significant learning. Role play also reflects the constructivist theory of learning by creating "personal meaning based on the individual's experiences" (Levitt & Adelman, 2010, p. 229). By taking on the role of a character and leaving their personal self, students can increase awareness of the subject and engage emotionally, resulting in deeper learning (Nelson & Blenkin, 2007).

### Description of Innovation

In an online DNP foundations course, one goal was to investigate professional and societal issues surrounding development of the DNP degree. These included such things as the use of the appellation "doctor", restrictions on DNP practice, and the advantages of seeking the degree. Students were already facing some of these issues in their choice to study for a DNP. The intent of the role play was to allow students to respond to questions and challenges in a safe environment while also learning the content needed to support their responses.

### Implementation

In the asynchronous role play, students took on new identities, acting as representatives of professional nursing organizations, professional medical organizations, and accrediting agencies; relevant government and legislative agencies; and consumers. A facilitator guided the discussion toward the goals of the role play. The students remained anonymous in their assumed roles giving them the freedom to act in a manner consistent with the role - whether they personally agreed with the character's stance or not. In order to achieve a scholarly outcome, students were required to reference their statements using professional literature and national standards. Upon completion of the role play, students revealed themselves and shared their insights into the character they played and the discussion as a whole.

### Evaluation

During the debriefing, faculty and students were uniformly positive in the usefulness of this learning strategy. By using asynchronous role play, students had time to search the literature and consider their responses - preparing them for the real challenges of the future in a safe though occasionally contentious environment.

### Significance

Use of role play as a teaching method prepared students for the many and varied challenges to DNP practice they may face in the future. The need to present their role play character realistically required reading and preparation, creating an evidence-based foundation for future support of their education and practice. Additionally, assuming the role of an "other interest" helped students better understand the motivating factors behind divergent views. This prepared them to address conflict issues as they arise and to better assume a leadership role in the negotiation process.

### Recommendations for Future

The use of role play may be helpful in debating other controversial issues. In addition, research comparing online and face-to-face scholarly and learning outcomes would be useful in designing other forms of significant learning.

## Poster Objectives

1. Explain how an online, asynchronous role play can be used to create significant learning for DNP students.
2. Explore the value of online role play compared to a face-to-face experience.
3. Describe the scholarly outcomes of an online role play focused on the issues surrounding the development and implementation of DNP practice.

## The Value of Role Play

- ❖ Constructs a form of active learning (Sellers, 2002)
- ❖ Engages students cognitively and emotionally (Nelson & Blenkin, 2007)
- ❖ Enhances the ability to enter another person's reality
- ❖ Includes psychological, social, & intellectual dimensions (Fink, 2003)
- ❖ Improves retention of concepts (Boehle, 2005)
- ❖ Offers a safe environment for practicing new skills
- ❖ Creates significant learning (Fink, 2003)
- ❖ Requires minimal resources



## Value of Online Role Play

- ❖ Permits reflection before responding
- ❖ Learner centered
- ❖ Active participation of students
- ❖ Increased interest and engagement

## Course Objectives for Role Play

1. Explore perspectives of professional organizations, health policy groups, regulatory agencies, certifying organizations, and other key stakeholders regarding the development and implementation of the DNP.
2. Analyze views of stakeholders involved in the development of the DNP.

## DNP Online Role Play

- Asynchronous
- Anonymous
- Students responses were referenced to the literature or national standards

### The Story or "Kickstart for the Role Play"

A federal agency has requested a meeting of key stakeholders in the evolution of the DNP degree and resulting practice. This meeting is intended to provide expert advice to the federal agency on the DNP prior to any major legislation related to DNP education, practice, or reimbursement. The charge to this group is to:

1. identify the advantages and disadvantages of the DNP;
2. outline any restrictions that should be placed on DNP practice; and
3. determine if the appellation "doctor" is appropriate for use by a nurse.

The agency has provided a facilitator and requests that the work be completed in a timely manner. Stakeholders from major professional organizations, regulatory agencies, accreditation agencies, certification organizations, and consumer groups have been invited. The meeting will take place in a federal office building in suburban Washington, D.C.

### The Role Play Characters

Facilitator

#### Representatives for:

- Advanced Practice Education
- NP Professional Organizations
- Advanced Practice Certification Organizations
- Professional Nursing Organizations
- Nursing Accreditation
- Professional Medical Organizations

#### State Legislator

#### Consumer

## Outcomes

- ❖ Increased understanding of the beliefs and values of all stakeholders
- ❖ Provided preparation for current & future face-to-face questions and debates regarding the DNP
- ❖ Student comments included "enjoyable", "energizing", "memorable"



## Lessons Learned

- ❖ The size of the group matters
- ❖ Students need clear instructions
- ❖ Faculty participation as the facilitator aids in achieving learning goals
- ❖ Non-verbal behavior is absent
- ❖ Role play is a useful method for debating controversial issues
- ❖ Research comparing online and face-to-face learning outcomes would be useful in designing other significant learning activities

"In a powerful learning experience, students will be engaged in their own learning, there will be a high energy level associated with it, and the whole process will have important outcomes or results. Not only will students be learning throughout the course, by the end of the course they will have changed in some important way –"

L. Dee Fink (2003)

## References

- Boehle, S. (2005). Simulations: the next generation of e-learning. In D. Nelson & C. Blenkin, The power of online role-play simulations: Technology in nursing education. *International Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 4(1), 1.
- Fink, L.D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Levitt, C. & Adelman, D. (2010). Role-playing in nursing theory: Engaging online students. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 49(4), 229-232.
- Nelson, D. & Blenkin, C. (2007). The power of online role-play simulations: Technology in nursing education. *International Journal of Nursing Scholarship*, 4(1), 1-12.
- Sellers, S. (2002). Testing theory through theatrics. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 41(11), 498-500.