

# Application of Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) to Simulation in Nursing Education

Penny Briese, MS, RN

Faculty – Dr. Darlene Hanson, PhD, RN

School of Graduate Studies, College of Nursing and Professional Disciplines, University of North Dakota

## Problem

- Nursing is one of the largest and fastest growing occupations worldwide (AACN, 2017).
- Nearly 3 million nurses currently working in the US (AACN, 2017; Grant, 2016).
- Growing concern that this will remain an inadequate workforce to provide patient care in the very near future (AACN, 2017; Juraschek, Zhang, Ranganathan, & Lin, 2012).
- 700,000 nurses are expected to retire by 2024, leaving 1 to 1.2 million vacant positions (AACN, 2017; Grant, 2016; Juraschek et al., 2012; Richardson, 2011).
- Schools of nursing challenged to increase numbers of students; turning to simulation to fulfill clinical requirements (Hayden, Smiley, Alexander, Kardong-Edgren, & Jeffries, 2014).
- Simulation standards and best practices exist (Jeffries, Rodgers, & Adamson, 2015, September/October; INACSL Standards Committee, 2016), yet there is a gap in the literature regarding how students learn through simulation.
- TLT, when juxtaposed with a simulation-based learning experience (SBLE), provides insight as to how nursing students may be learning through simulation.

## Purpose

- The purpose of this presentation is to explain how the 10 phases of TLT apply to SBLE; prebriefing, simulation, debriefing, and repeat simulation.

## Assumptions of TLT

- Educational shift from classical "stimulus-response theory" towards a "more progressive constructivist/transformational" approach (Keating, 2006, p. 50).
- TLT is a constructivist theory.
- Adult learners utilize past life experiences as a reference when constructing new meaning (Mezirow, 1991).
- New experiences open the door to learning and greater self-understanding and, in the process, transform student's personal paradigm (Mezirow, 1991).
- Transformation is a change in the way a person views a problem (Kitchenham, 2008) and/or how a person thinks, feels, and behaves (Christie, Carey, Robertson, & Granger, 2015; Nohl, 2015).
- TLT assumes learners are adults (Mezirow, 1997).
  - Adults gain a greater sense of accomplishment and knowledge by performing hands-on tasks and seek practical application of new knowledge in their everyday lives (Keese, 2010).
- Assumes learners are capable of rational thought and discourse (Merriam, 2004; Mezirow, 1997).

## Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory (TLT)

Application of TLT to the simulation-based learning experience (SBLE); prebriefing, simulation, debriefing, and repeat simulation.

Phase	Defining Characteristics	SBLE
1	A disorienting dilemma	Prebriefing/Simulation
2	A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame	Simulation/Debriefing
3	A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions	Simulation/Debriefing
4	Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change	Simulation/Debriefing
5	Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions	Debriefing
6	Planning of a course of action	Debriefing
7	Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans	Simulation/Debriefing
8	Provisional trying of new roles	Repeat Simulation
9	Building of competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships	Repeat Simulation
10	A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's perspective	Repeat Simulation

Figure 1. Mezirow's Ten Phases of Transformative Learning (Kitchenham, 2008).

## Support of TLT from the Literature

- Humans have a natural tendency to reinforce their existing points of view;
- Points of view will only change when challenged;
- Humans seek out new experiences in order to challenge their points of view;
- Repetition of experience, self-reflection, and discourse with others transforms points of view and habits of mind, resulting in a paradigm shift for the learner (Brock, 2010; Grabove, 1997; Mezirow, 1997; Nohl, 2015).

## Definitions

- Frames of Reference** - "structures of assumptions through which we understand our experiences. They selectively shape and delimit expectations, perceptions, cognition, and feelings" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5).
- Habits of Mind** - "broad, abstract, orienting, habitual ways of thinking, feeling, and acting influenced by assumptions that constitute a set of codes. These codes may be cultural, social, educational, economic, political, or psychological" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5-6).
- Points of View** - "the constellation of belief, value judgment, attitude, and feeling that shapes a particular interpretation" (Mezirow, 1997, p. 6).

## Limitations of TLT

- Assumption that all learners are capable of rational discourse during the debriefing stage of simulation cannot be met for every SBLE, due to individual student ability.
- Simulated learning environment is not exactly the same for every learner, based on the students actions and the facilitator's response; this may influence learning outcomes.
- Phases 8-10 may not occur; repeat simulation is not always possible, given facilitator and curricular time constraints.

## Recommendations for Future Research

- Explore how repeated simulation experiences effect transformation in nursing students' habits of mind and points of view.
- Utilize TLT as a framework to investigate how and where learning occurs within nursing SBLEs.
- Incorporate TLT in designing educational nursing research to further determine its applicability to a wide variety of nursing topics.



## References

- References available upon request.