



# LET'S GO RETRO IN COMMUNICATION SKILLS STUDIES! REINTRODUCING ROLE-PLAYS IN A NEW AND PLAYFUL WAY

Role-plays were reintroduced in communication skills studies in Helsinki in 2010. A combination of role-plays and simulations and a step-wise process towards patient interviews proved to be a successful learning experience for students.

## Introduction

Comprehensive communication skills studies (CCS) were started in Helsinki in 1994. Simulated patients were introduced in 1997 alongside role-plays. Students preferred simulations, and role-plays were given up in 2002. Student feedback of CCS from years 2007-2009 was analysed. Students expressed both enthusiasm and anxiety towards simulations and some suggested that communication could also be rehearsed with peers. Thus, role-plays were reintroduced in a patient interview course in a modern way in 2010. This research analyses how students value different learning methods used in communication skills studies.

## Summary of work

The patient interview course for 2<sup>nd</sup> year medical students was redesigned in year 2010. The course consisted of an introductory lecture, practices of nonverbal communication, role-plays with peers, simulations with actors and constructive feedback discussions (Table 1). At the end of the course the students assessed their communication skills in a web-based self-assessment form including open-ended questions of learning methods. The students' writing about different learning methods were analysed using thematic content analysis.

## Summary of results

110 out of 114 students filled in the self-assessment questionnaire. The students' learning experiences grew more positive step-by-step when the course advanced, being at its highest when they described constructive feedback discussions after simulations (Table 2). Students esteemed highly the supportive atmosphere and the many-sided viewpoints of these discussions. Simulations were described as powerful learning experiences. Students described that they learned both from their own and their peers' patient interviews. Role-plays with peers were described as a safe and relaxed way of learning patient interviews. Role-plays helped the students to learn the basics of patient interview and also reduced anxiety before simulations with actors. In practices of non-verbal communication the students learned about their own gestures and expressions, and also about interpreting each other's gestures and emotions. Relatively few negative learning experiences were described in relations to any methods used. However, some students criticized that the practices were either too easy or too challenging.

## Conclusion

A combination of role-play and simulations and a step-wise learning process proved to be a successful way of learning patient interviews. Role-plays reduced students' anxiety towards simulations. Benefits of both role-plays and simulations were profited from in this course. Constructive feedback discussions deepened the learning experience of communication skills and fostered reflection.

## Literature

Kurtz, S., Silverman, J. & Draper, J. 2005, Teaching and Learning Communication Skills in Medicine. 2nd edition. Abingdon: Radcliffe; 2005.

Lane, C. & Rollnick, S. 2007, The use of simulated patients and role-play in communication skills training: A review of the literature to August 2005. Patient Educ.Couns. JUL;67(1-2):13-20.

Lane, C., Hood, K. & Rollnick, S. 2008, Teaching motivational interviewing: using role play is as effective as using simulated patients. Med.Educ. JUN;42(6):637-644.

Table 1. Course of patient interviews with simulated patients.

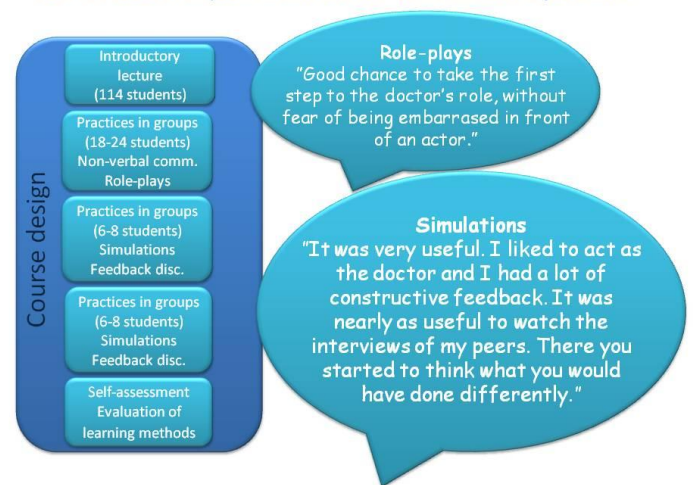


Table 2. Students' descriptions of learning experiences concerning different learning methods.

	Learning process					Total
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	No experiences	No reply	
Practices of nonverbal communication	32.7 %	50.9 %	11.8 %	0 %	4.5 %	99.9%
Role-plays	41.8 %	29.1 %	8.2 %	19.1%*	1.8 %	100 %
Simulations	53.6 %	39.1 %	5.5 %	0 %	1.8 %	100 %
Feedback discussions	64.5 %	24.5 %	7.3 %	0 %	3.6 %	99.9%

\*Swedish-speaking groups did not have role-plays.

## Take-home message:

A combination of role-plays and simulations is an efficient way of learning communication skills.