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Adapting a Governmental Training Platform to Simulate Peace Operations in the Classroom

Ludwig Gelot[a,b]

[a]Linnaeus University; [b]Swedish Armed Forces Command and Control Regiment

ABSTRACT

Scholars have developed original pedagogical approaches to impart the knowledge and skills required for professional life in the area of peace and development. Experience-based learning, simulations, games, and role-plays have been used with positive results. Yet most efforts tend to overly simplify and narrow down the learning experience in contrast to the complexity of contemporary post-conflict societies. At the same time, governments and international organizations have developed complex multidimensional and multifunctional training platforms to prepare individuals and organizations to work more effectively in contemporary peace operations. Drawing on elements of the Viking training platform developed by the Swedish government to organize the world's largest peace operations exercises, this article outlines an original type of classroom simulation designed to address the educational and training needs of future peacekeepers and peacebuilders. Contrary to short simulations and rule-bound games that tend to focus on strategic decision making, it describes a simulation played at the operational and tactical levels and sufficiently long and complex to mimic reality and enable learning across the peace operations spectrum of staff categories and activities.

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Introduction

The complexity of contemporary conflicts and of current peace operations requires special training to provide peacekeepers and peacebuilders with the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs). Academia has an important role to play to prepare students for possible deployment in peace operations or more generally for work within the large range of organizations involved in peacebuilding. Unfortunately, university curricula tend to be ill designed to impart the required KSAs. At the same time, governments and international organizations have developed comprehensive training platforms to better prepare personnel prior to deployment. In particular, the Viking (VK) training platform developed by the government of Sweden with the support of the United States enables the organization of the world's largest United Nations (UN)–led peace operation exercises. It is thus important to consider how academia could learn from the VK training platform to better build the KSAs of students.

CONTACT Ludwig Gelot lgelot@hotmail.com Faculty of Social Sciences, Peace and Development Studies, Linnaeus University, 351 95 Växjö, Sweden.

In this article, I first outline current needs and challenges when it comes to the KSAs of UN personnel, and I identify some limits of academic programs to address the said training gap. Then I briefly review the use of simulations for peacebuilding within academia and I point to a set of limits in current practice. Subsequently, I introduce the VK training platform together with its pedagogical underpinnings. I describe how elements of the VK platform can be adapted to a university setting to enrich existing curriculum. I describe a simulation game inspired by problem-based learning (PBL) in which students have to solve interlocking, interdisciplinary, and complementary *problems* and where coordination and a holistic perspective are necessary to implement workable solutions. The case of the Carana simulation organized at Linnaeus University, Sweden, is used to illustrate this classroom adaptation of the VK platform and to discuss its comparative advantages and actual challenges.

The gap

Contemporary civil wars are characterized by the intervention of a large number of actors including international and regional organizations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foreign governments, and other parties. Rather than simply securing an end to the violence, these organizations tend to provide assistance toward the reconstruction of political and economic institutions with the long-term goal of facilitating sustainable development. The challenges of post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction have been discussed extensively, and for decades intervening actors have been known to do harm, to work at cross-purposes, and to fail to coordinate their actions. Trends toward the regionalization, securitization, and militarization of responses have fueled intense debates within academic, policy, and practitioners' circles to adapt and improve peace operations.

The lack of KSAs of peace operation personnel deployed under the banner of the United Nations has been identified as being an obstacle to peace. It affects military, civilian, and police personnel (Allen, Rosén, and Tarp 2016; Caparini 2017). In its latest Training Needs Assessment, the UN identified large gaps in KSAs and stated that addressing them is "critical to effective mandate implementation" (United Nations 2013, 39). Key areas where training is needed for civilian personnel include knowledge of the UN; peacekeeping; mission mandates; general rules and regulations; teamwork; leadership; analytical skills and problem solving; political awareness; conflict management; communication skills, both oral and written; report drafting skills; knowledge/skill transfer; mentoring and advising; and performance management (United Nations 2013, 18–19). When available, training is usually provided by the Troop Contributing Countries, by the mission's Integrated Training Center, or by other UN agencies. However, as institutions responsible for higher education and for the preparation of students for professional life, universities have an important role to play to complement the training offer.

The United States Institute of Peace (USIP) has identified a mismatch between the expectations of employers in the field of peace and conflict resolution and the content of university postgraduate academic curriculum delivered in the same field (Carstarphen et al. 2010). Focusing on providing students with a strong theoretical understanding,

academic institutions tend to spend little time imparting the KSAs valued by employers such as project management; writing and reporting skills; "political savvy"; networking and collaboration skills; and knowledge of the professional jargon and terminology (Carstarphen et al. 2010, 7). Academic institutions have an important role to play to educate future peacekeepers and peacebuilders, and yet their curriculum is generally inadequate to fully meet the needs of employers, including the UN.

Some solutions

Over the years, many course conveners have adopted alternative methodologies based on experiential learning to complement standard lectures with games, role-plays, simulations, and so on.[1] These have become common in fields such as International Relations, Political Sciences, and Strategic Studies. Contrary to the *teaching-and-learning* model that focuses on the transfer of knowledge from teachers to students, they focus on the social and collaborative nature of learning across "cognitive, affective, and behavioural domains" (Ruben 1999, 500). These alternative methodologies seem to facilitate long-term knowledge retention, to increase student and teacher satisfaction, and to foster soft skills such as communication, problem solving, and teamwork (Strobel and van Barneveld 2009).

Among the best-known computer-assisted simulations are Statecraft and International Communication and Negotiation Simulations. They are scenario-driven exercises designed to support the learning of concepts related to international relations or national politics. All-person simulations have existed for much longer and dozens have been developed with varying levels of complexity (Wheeler 2006; Brynen and Milante 2012). Some may help students to grasp concepts through short and simple games like the prisoner's dilemma, the security dilemma, or collective-action problems (Thomas 2002). Others may help students to learn about the complexities of using military force—fog and friction—like the Dalig and Vadan Exercise (Asal, Griffith, and Schulzke 2014). Chasek (2005) has developed a simulation around the UN Security Council's response to terrorism. Ambrosio (2004) focuses the simulation on the challenges of multi-ethnic politics. Some use a handful of simulations to improve students' understanding of a specific geographical region or a given conflict; e.g., Middle East, Balkans, Syria, Northern Ireland, Sudan, and Afghanistan (Dougherty 2003; Ebner, Efron, and Munin 2014; Kumar 2009; Landwehr et al. 2013; Mason and Patterson 2013). Shellman (2001) and Switky (2004) have focused their respective simulations on the complexities of proportional representative systems of elections. The Program on Negotiation at the Harvard Law School has developed a very large range of role-plays and simulations to teach various types of negotiations. Closer to UN peace operations, a couple of activities have been successfully developed, including Belloni's (2008) game involving governments, the UN, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to discuss violence and resettlement. A humanitarian crisis game called Aftershock has also been designed to explore the challenges of interagency cooperation. The Brynania peacebuilding simulation confronts the students to the difficulties of war-to-peace transitions (Brynen 2010, 2014). Finally, Goon (2011) has developed a peacekeeping game with a longer-term perspective for peace and economic as well as political reconstruction. This brief

review covers some of the best-known simulations related to peace and peace operations, but it is far from exhaustive.

Such simulations and games have an added value and a comparative advantage to support student learning. They may form an essential part of the curriculum. However, they may not be sufficient to address the training gaps identified by the UN or USIP for the following reasons:

- They tend to be relatively short and thus limited in their ability to "unfreeze people from past practice" or to achieve deep learning of skills such as teamwork and cooperation (Susskind and Corburn 2000, p. 77).
- They tend to concentrate on single concepts and specific theories and may not address the complexity of multi-dimensional peace operations (interagency coordination, local ownership, etc.).
- They are usually played at the strategic decision-making level (governments, UN Security Council, etc.) at the expense of operational and tactical implications that are relevant in terms of preparation for professional life (mandate interpretation, logical frameworks, outreach and communication, etc.).
- They focus on short-term crisis management and emergencies at the expenses of long-term reconstruction and development (Goon 2011).
- They greatly simplify reality to reach manageable proportions, sometimes using board game–like rules or scoring cards. As a result, they risk oversimplifying the complex realities of everyday mission life (Dorn 1989; Susskind and Corburn 2000, 78).

In order to mitigate these limits, we may imagine a simulation game that would be relatively long, played at the operational and tactical levels, and sufficiently complex to mimic reality and enable learning across a large part of the peace operations spectrum of activities.[2]

The VK training platform

Since 1999, Sweden has organized the world's largest UN peace operation exercises on a regular basis as part of its VK training platform. This was initiated by Sweden and the US at NATO's 50th Anniversary Summit and implemented in line with NATO's Partnership for Peace. The latest edition, Viking 18 (VK18), saw close to 3,000 persons from 62 different nationalities train simultaneously in six different countries (Sweden, Finland, Brazil, Serbia, Ireland, and Bulgaria). Around 80 different organizations took part, including the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), the Red Cross, the German Center for International Peace Operations ZIF, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and Save the Children. VK provides a unique opportunity for military, civilian, and police actors to exercise cooperation at the staff level using a comprehensive approach. It is multifunctional and designed to prepare individuals as well as organizations to meet the range of operational and tactical challenges characterizing peace operations and crisis response

operations. VK18 exercised three staff levels, including 20 HQs from the UN, NATO, and EU.

Such large-scale exercises supported by governments and international organizations have diplomatic and strategic purposes. They are used to facilitate multilateralism and network building by deepening cooperation with allies and building closer relations with other countries. Besides its political purpose, the basic objective of the VK platform is to train people and participating nations use VK to assess the readiness of personnel to be deployed abroad. VK18 thus aims to make an important contribution to meeting the training needs for UN-led peace operations.

VK18 takes place in the fictitious country of Bogaland, located in the North Friendly Sea region. The beginning of the exercise is scripted with an agreed storyline but then a gradual transition toward "dynamic" or "adaptive" gaming takes place as the training audience starts to put in place solutions to bring peace and security to Bogaland. The Joint Exercise Control (JEC) directs and oversees the game during the exercise. It has a planning section (JEC Plans) that finalizes the scripting and planning of the game and provides overall coordination with a 24 to 48 hours perspective, i.e., the game for the following two days. It also has a current section (JEC Current) responsible for the implementation of the training as planned by JEC Plans. JEC Current helps to maintain situational awareness and progress in the game. The JEC includes a number of response cells staffed with subject-matter experts (SMEs) who inject information to the trainees through phone calls, e-mails, meetings, etc. They include police experts who will act as the national police of Bogaland, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) experts who may impersonate members of the National Commission for DDR, and humanitarian experts who may play the role of the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), among others. To support the game and increase situational awareness, a media gaming cell publishes a daily newspaper, a TV broadcast, and a social media feed. The JEC relies on a group of observers, trackers, trainers, and mentors (OTTMs), experts in specific fields who follow and observe the training audience and provide advice and guidance to facilitate the learning process. They are aware of the prescripted game and of the tasks that are required of the training audience. Some OTTMs work within functional areas (i.e., human rights), while others focus on processes (i.e., staff coordination).

The scenario for the exercise describes the situation up until the first day of the exercise and then a storyline summarizes the scripted game. It is composed of a large number of incidents designed to trigger learning processes and actions/reactions by the training audience. Each incident is composed of *injects* that are the medium used to provide sufficient information to trigger a reaction from the training audience and to kick start a process to solve a problem or complete a task. They may include a phone call from a mayor who reports the discovery of a mass grave, a news report on hate speech and ethnic tensions, or a message from UN headquarters to which the trainees are expected to react. The entire exercise is supported by a set of core IT systems including an exercise portal, an exercise management system listing all incidents and injects, and real-time simulation systems to display the movement of units and a common operational/tactical picture system.

Pedagogical underpinnings

The VK training platform is designed to support a type of outcomes-based education guided by constructive alignment so that scenario, tasking, activities, and assessment are aligned with the intended outcome (Biggs 2003). This model focuses on the learning process rather than content and aims to achieve deep learning relevant to professional life. The training objectives become the main guide to this alignment and overall coherence of the learning activity. They are then used to develop problematic situations that require action from the training audience. Biggs (2003) suggests to use PBL since it focuses on functioning knowledge rather than the underlying and secondary procedural and declarative types of knowledge. John Savery (2006, 12) defines PBL as

> an instructional (and curricular) learner-centered approach that empowers learners to conduct research, integrate theory and practice, and apply knowledge and skills to develop a viable solution to a defined problem. Critical to the success of the approach is the selection of ill-structured problems (often interdisciplinary) and a tutor who guides the learning process and conducts a thorough debriefing at the conclusion of the learning experience.

PBL enables a deep form of experiential learning that facilitates knowledge retention and the learning of new skills and abilities (Ramsden 2003, 47; Rideout et al. 2002; Wells, Warelow, and Jackson 2009; Wood 2003). Overall, PBL increases learners' performance and helps address the training gap identified by the UN and USIP (Newman 2003, 15; Savery 2006).

In VK exercises, the ill-structured problems are given by the Bogaland scenario and further developed in the prescripted storyline and its incidents/injects (illegal checkpoints, NATO plane shot down, attack on an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp, prison escape, etc.). The tutoring that is essential for PBL is done by the OTTMs who guide the trainees on the job as well as during regular debriefings. VK is unique in that it involves a much higher number of organizations from different countries and with disparate professional cultures, capabilities, and pedagogical awareness. Each organization has different political interests, training needs, and willingness/ability to engage. Some nations may want to train their personnel to respond to hybrid warfare threats, while some organizations may want to train border management or handover/takeover between NATO and the UN. Exercise coherence and *constructive alignment* may be very hard to ensure as a result and the main common denominator takes the form of the general training objectives shared by the military, police, and civilian components.

Compared to other pedagogies that may use board game–type rules, scoring cards, or simple scenarios to keep the training manageable, VK adopts a different approach. Much like the virtual reality depicted in *The Truman Show, The Matrix* or, more recently, *Westworld*, VK is organized in such a way that the game is managed by controlling the environment in which trainees evolve. The Exercise Pocket Guide illustrates the chains of command of all organizations in which trainees are working during the exercise (Figure 1). They include NATO, the UN, NGOs, and the EU. The upper levels of the chains of command are manned by experts located in JEC in what is known as HICON or Higher Control. They will role play the UN Secretariat located in New York, for example. The lower levels of each organization (LOCON) is also role-played by

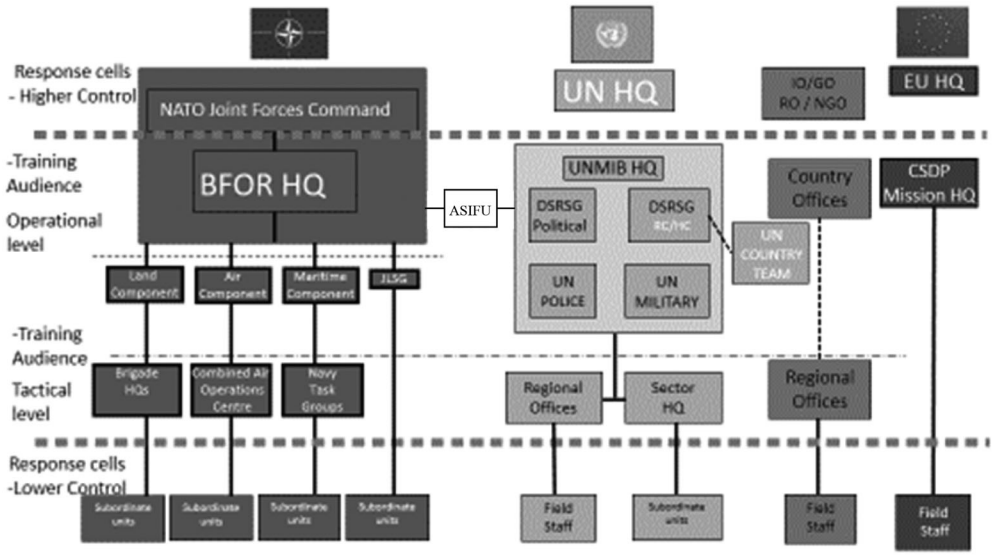

Figure 1. Training audience and response cells. *Source:* Viking 18 Exercise Pocket Guide. Reproduced with permission from the Swedish Armed Forces.

response cells in the form of military companies or field offices. They will feed pre-prepared reports up the chain of command.

Based on this setup, JEC can give directives and orders from above and they can paint a coherent and appropriate picture of the ground reality from below. When needed, the media outlets will be used to reinforce a given operational/tactical picture. As a result, the boundaries of the exercise are controlled by the JEC and provide some sort of frame of contention sufficiently large and flexible to facilitate the trainees' learning process. The objective for the JEC is to foster learning in the training audience with the minimum input from above or from below. Instead, two types of processes are generated: (1) processes internal to a single organization (UN, NATO, EU) are promoted to facilitate internal coordination, leadership and management, medium or long-term planning, or the application of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs); and (2) horizontal processes involving interagency coordination and communication are promoted to facilitate information sharing, joint assessment and coordination, Civil-Military Co-Operation (CIMIC), etc. Normally, sufficient information is available in the scenario documents to enable trainees to conduct those tasks in a realistic manner.

Within this frame, smaller ill-structured problems are created to support specific learning processes for specific staff. The UN Mission in Bogaland (UNMIB) is a multi-dimensional peace operation with military, police, and civilian components as well as a country team. The civilian component includes officers for civil affairs, political affairs, human rights, DDR, Security Sector Reform (SSR), Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Recovery (RRR), etc. Incidents and injects have thus been planned in advance for each function. An example of an ill-structured problem concerns the implementation of the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy (HRDDP), which is mandatory for all UN entities providing support to non-UN forces. The Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) may task human rights officers to conduct an awareness raising session

for all UNMIB personnel as well as the Transitional Government of Bogaland. In turn, this may lead to the establishment of an HRDDP task force, the conduct of risk assessments, monitoring, and the establishment of mitigation measures. As a result, human rights officers will have learned about the policy itself, but they will also have communicated and coordinated with stakeholders and engaged in some medium- and long-term planning, etc. Peer instruction will come in to support the learning process since the human rights officers will have to communicate and train their colleagues.

The exercise ends up creating a set of interlocking, interdisciplinary, and complementary ill-structured problems that call for individual action and agency-wide solutions using a comprehensive approach. Pieces of this large puzzle are distributed among the trainees and key elements of PBL including the conduct of research, the integration of theory and practice, and the application of KSAs are required to solve it (Savery 2006, 12). An atomistic approach to the problems will necessarily lead to partial and uncoordinated solutions as well as frustration and sanctions from the excluded parties. In turn, a mechanism naturally emerges to promote holistic solutions (Ramsden 2003, 43). OTTMs are present in the office to provide guidance, mentoring, and just-in-time learning. Debriefings with both JEC SMEs and OTTMs take place at least once a day in line with the requirements of the methodology (Fanning and Gaba 2007; Petranek, Corey, and Black 1992). Overall, VK is a simulation game played at the operational and tactical levels that is sufficiently long and complex to mimic reality and to enable trainees to develop the KSAs critical to UN mandate implementation.[3]

Bringing VK to the classroom

With some adjustment, it is possible to draw upon the VK training platform and use the same pedagogical underpinnings to run a simulation game in a university setting. Even though VK is a multimillion Euro exercise with thousands of participants, its structure can be adapted to fit a small class. This has been done successfully since 2016 by the Peace and Development Studies Program of Linnaeus University, Sweden, where a two-week simulation in the fictitious country of Carana is used to train future peace operation personnel. The simulation has adapted the VK working methods and scaled them down so that EXCON is manned by one lecturer with minimal support from colleagues or former students to play extra roles as LOCON or HICON.

Setting up a fictitious environment for the simulation has been the most resource-intensive part of the process. Fortunately, scenario packages are easily available online. Besides Bogaland, Carana is an excellent scenario where a broad range of documents has been developed including economic and demographic reports, a constitution, maps, UN Security Council resolutions, Secretary-General Planning Directives, etc. At first, the scenario documents were updated and tailored to the purpose of this particular simulation game and its specific ill-structured problem (ongoing civil war with the signature of a cease-fire agreement on Day 2 of the simulation). With time we created a majority of "timeless documents" (they do not contain specific dates and if they do they are mostly "old" events that took place more than 3 to 5 years ago. They may refer to indeterminate times like "on 7 July last year"), thereby cutting down dramatically the

amount of time spent on updating the scenario documents from one simulation to the other.

Once a scenario was in place, the roles to be played during the simulation were decided. While VK can accommodate thousands of persons, a smaller simulation has been done for as few as 15 students. This was organized by diminishing the number of organizations in the game. Based on the expertise of the teachers, the pedagogical objectives, and the size of the classroom, it was easy to drop NATO and the EU. At Linnaeus University, the program focuses on post-conflict peacebuilding and development and as such the simulation focused on the UN Country Team alongside the government, political parties, and NGOs for a simulation of 15 to 40 students. The planning for the deployment of a peacekeeping mission was considered by the participants during the simulation. If the academic program had been geared toward humanitarian action, the roles of the clusters and working groups could have be developed to include the World Food Programme (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and Save the Children, for example. Alternatively, a course on electoral assistance could focus on an electoral commission, observers, judges, and relevant judiciary and constitutional bodies as well as security forces.

It was then possible to draft the storyline and plan the tasks to be completed by each student in the form of individual problems. Ministers were asked to develop strategic reports, UNDP was to lead on governance reform, UNICEF was to address the needs of children in the country, and political leaders had to draft a peace agreement. All simulations conducted at Linnaeus University were different due to the differing number of students and the implementation of lessons learned from one semester to the other. Generally speaking, students began by developing a strategy in their given area of responsibility during the first two or three days and, once the strategy had been coordinated with all stakeholders and approved, they had to start operationalizing it in the form of projects. For example, UNICEF had to conduct an analysis of the situation or a needs assessment and, once this had been coordinated with relevant stakeholders, they drafted a strategy containing a list of prioritized activities, i.e., severe acute malnutrition and access to primary education. Once the strategy was drafted, UNICEF developed specific projects to solve the problem, for example, through the delivery of Plumpy'Nut for the nutritional rehabilitation of children in a specific region of the country.

In order to keep the coherence of the game and overall control, teachers played the role of HICON and LOCON by acting as president, UN resident coordinator, World Bank, etc. This made it possible to monitor and support the learning process very closely and to provide direction to the role players as well as support while they worked in their office. To diminish the demands from students on LOCON response cells, the scenario explained that some regional and field offices had not yet been established or that they had been evacuated for security reasons. The entire process was guided by the teacher to ensure a productive learning process. For example, as students were nearing the completion of their strategic work, they received an e-mail and press releases regarding the availability of funds from donors. They also received guidelines and templates to submit funding proposals. Real-life documents used by the UN, the World Bank, or donor governments were provided to students to ensure realism. They had to

fill in logical frameworks, come up with a budget, and find partners for the implementation of the project. They ended the simulation with a presentation of their respective project during a donor conference.

The classroom simulation was supported by a dedicated Gmail e-mail system developed by the university's IT services as well as a free WordPress blog website where scenario documents were available together with a contact list, daily newspaper, press releases, individual pages for each actor, and a toolkit. In this toolkit, students had access to real guidelines to help them solve their ill-structured problem. It contained UN guidelines to draft a UN Development Assistance Framework or a Peace Agreement as well as examples of those documents used in real countries. As students moved from strategic decision making to operationalization, they start to use policy and practitioners' resources. They quickly realized that academic textbook and research articles were insufficient to guide practice and instead they turned to DPKO's Peacekeeping Resource hub, the UN Department of Political Affairs's (DPA) UN Peacemaker support tool, or guidelines and reports developed by NGOs, international organizations, and governmental agencies such as SIDA, USAID, and DFID.

In the classroom, incidents and injects took the form of e-mails received by participants, orders given by the president or the resident coordinator, and articles published in the newspaper. These were usually created ahead of time and they were aligned with the purpose of the game. New injects were developed to stir the game in the right direction, increase the pressure and workload, and train additional topics. Depending on student response, follow-up injects were used. For example, Sexual Abuse and Exploitation and Sex and Gender-Based Violence are high on the UN agenda. The simulation relied on students role-playing UNWomen, the Minister of Women's Affairs, and a local NGO Carana WoMen to mainstream the topics in the strategies and projects developed by other role players. Articles were also published in the newspaper and e-mails sent to UN staff regarding the UN Standard of Conduct. When they failed to respond properly to the information within the mission (e.g., training, awareness-raising, investigation), the situation escalated through negative press reports or adverse events until students adopted an acceptable course of action. Injects were designed to foster coordination and cooperation and, as such, some donors only funded projects that involved the civil society.

Overall, the learning process is supported by a guidance-intensive approach (Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark 2006). In a classroom setting, the OTTMs and response cells of VK were replaced by a restricted number of teaching staff who provided support in their respective area of expertise. They stirred the game through morning briefings and they led evening debriefings. They provided feedback on the work of students and mentored them. Many of the tasks required of students were new to them and throughout the simulation short lectures and workshops were organized to support their learning "just-in-time." This included workshops on official communication and letter writing provided by the university library, workshops on media relations and press releases provided by the communication unit of the university, and a team-building workshop and logical framework workshops provided by the teachers. One-on-one coaching was also provided to help students take the next step in their learning or to reveal a potential that was yet untapped due to fear or confusion. For a class of 30

students, a single teacher was sufficient depending on preparedness, gaming experience, breadth of professional expertise, and complexity of the scenario.

The importance of debriefing in simulations and games is widely recognized (Crookall 2010) and debriefings were organized daily. In our case, teachers were intermittently embedded within the training audience to provide coaching and mentoring throughout the day. Evening debriefings were not so much about the transfer of knowledge and skills or the assessment of performance as about creating a space free from tensions and stress to reflect on group dynamics and obstacles and to think outside the box. They enabled students to summarize the day's events and to reflect on possible ways forward. At the end of the simulation game, a final debriefing was organized to identify individual and group lessons regarding role-player performance, links between theory and practice, and the organization of the simulation itself. Of importance, this last debriefing contained a closed-eye visualization "to help participants leaving their role and leaving the simulation game in a sound way, that is, cooling down, and, if necessary, desensitizing" (Peters and Vissers 2004, 74). It was common during debriefings to ask students to relate their experience to reality in order to facilitate "a transfer of the experience and knowledge to participants' own lives" (Kriz 2010, 670).

Assessing the benefits

The adaptation of the VK platform conducted at Linnaeus University has resulted since 2016 in the organization of five simulations with a total of 134 participants from the undergraduate Peace and Development Studies Program. The simulations lasted two weeks with three to five days of preparation and five to seven days of role-playing.[4] Results from anonymous student self-evaluations demonstrate the overwhelming success of the concept, with 91% of respondents being satisfied with the simulation, 96% saying that they would recommend it to other students, and 97% thinking that it should be part of the study program (Figure 2).[5]

Ninety percent of participants found the simulation effective to develop professional skills. During the final wrap-up session, students explain that the skills they developed the most include time management, teamwork, conflict management, verbal and written

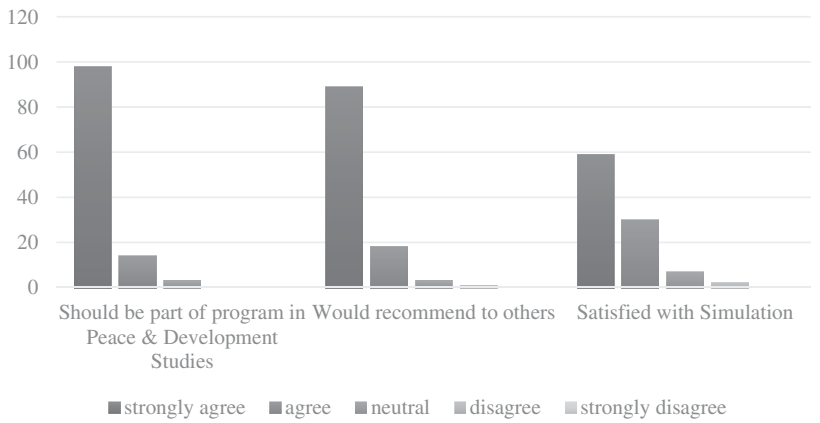

Figure 2. General evaluation of the simulation (number of students).

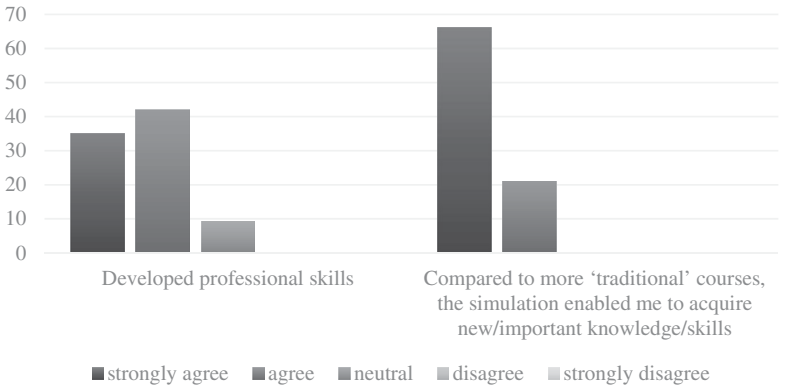

Figure 3. Comparative advantage of the simulation (number of students).

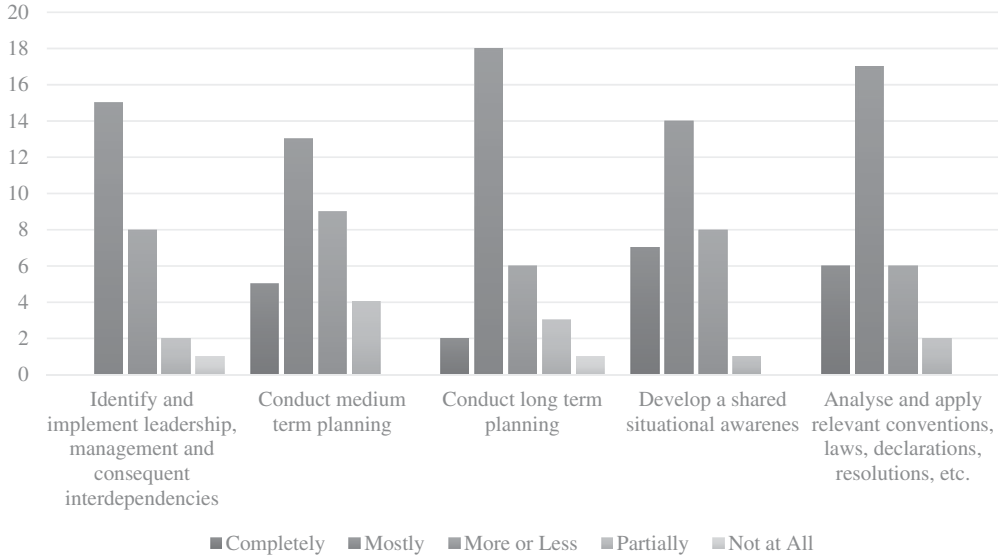

Figure 4. Meeting Viking objectives in the classroom (number of students).

communication, and stress management. They always reflect on the comparative advantage of the pedagogy and on the need to spread its use at the university. Over the years, the evaluation results have been very similar and students have engaged with the challenges in similar ways and with similar results. Experiences have mostly differed due to the presence of particular students (strong leadership, revolutionary tendencies, military background, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, etc.) who have gone as far as organizing a coup d'état on one occasion (Figure 3).

The simulation organized at Linnaeus University is an adaptation of the VK platform and it should thus enable students to meet equivalent training objectives. As such, following VK18, students at Linnaeus University were asked to evaluate the extent to which they met those VK18 training objectives that were applicable to their simulation. The results are positive and support the effectiveness of the methodology to teach KSAs for peace operations (Figure 4).

A comparison with VK18 survey results would be informative, but no self-evaluation was conducted after the exercise. Instead, evaluation focused on the running of the exercise itself and on OTTM observations.

Conclusion

Academic institutions have an important role to play to deliver curriculum that meets the needs of employers in the field of peace and conflict resolution. They may use complementary pedagogical approaches to foster experiential learning and to impart necessary KSAs. Finding inspiration in the VK training platform developed by the Swedish government to organize peace operations exercises, this article described a particular type of classroom simulation game played at the operational and tactical levels and sufficiently long and complex to mimic the reality of peace operations.

Through the use of interlocking, interdisciplinary, and complementary problems, a complex learning environment is created where coordination and a holistic perspective are necessary to bring the different pieces of this large puzzle together into workable solutions. Once role players have developed comprehensive strategies for peace, they are required to take the necessary steps for the implementation of their respective vision. Original projects emerge and ideas are turned into project proposals and logical frameworks. As a result, students learn about project management and at the same time they have to develop their teamwork, communication, and coordination skills. The simulation creates an environment conducive to the development of professional skills highlighted by USIP and the UN.

Notes on contributor

Dr Ludwig Gelot was voted 'Teacher of the Year 2019' by the students at Linnaeus University, an award delivered by the student Union Linnéstudenterna.

Notes

1. These terms that refer to alternative approaches to education and learning are often used interchangeably and definitions abound. In this article, the definitions of Dean Dorn (1989, pp. 2–3) are used: "A game is any contest or play among adversaries or players operating under constraints or rules for an objective or goal … A simulation is an operating representation of central features of reality… Consequently, simulation games are activities undertaken by players whose actions are constrained by a set of explicit rules particular to that game and by a predetermined end point. The elements of the game constitute a more or less accurate representation or model of some external reality with which players interact by playing roles in much the same way as they would interact with reality itself."
2. In this article, I refer to the suggested adaptation of the Viking training platform to a classroom setting as a simulation game. However, its emphasis on realism, the low number of rules and the absence of designated end point make the approach much closer to a 'simulation.' The rules are not so much board game rules as realistic SOPs, Codes of Conducts, laws, mandates that are realistic but that end up restraining the realm of the possible.

3. No evaluation was conducted during VK18 to assess the development of specific KSAs among trainees working for the fictitious United Nations Mission in Bogaland. However, the end of exercise survey shows that participants consistently rank the usefulness of VK for professional development as 'very good' or 'excellent'.
4. In 2016, students had 5 days to prepare for a 5-day simulation. Based on their feedback and available resources, the simulation has progressively changed to include 4 days of preparation ending with student briefings (ministers brief ministers, UN staff brief UN staff, etc.) followed by one day of simulation on the Friday. Students then have the weekend to rest, reflect or further prepare before the simulation re-starts for 5 days.
5. Only 116 out of the 134 students filled in the evaluation questionnaire. The others were absent during the evaluation (illness, late night drafting of the peace agreement, etc.)

ORCID

Ludwig Gelot http://orcid.org/0000-0003-0393-8216

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