Reviewer's report

Title: "Evaluating progressive levels of simulation in the development of technical skills, integrated performance and woman centred clinical assessment in midwifery students"

Version: 1 Date: 18 February 2013

Reviewer: Julie Scholes

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This is a well written protocol - although I do raise a few questions - notably relating to sufficiency of the design to enable replication.

I think it is strange that the researchers plan to publish their study design. The proposal clearly identifies the text as 'a work in progress'.

I find reading this protocol causes me to ask more questions that the protocol alone can answer.

1) I feel photographs would be useful to enable the reader to envisage what is being proposed and to clearly illustrate the different types of 'fidelity' that are being set up for comparison in this protocol.

2) It is unclear how women centred practice is to be assessed - e.g. the 'translation to practice behaviours' would be useful to help the reader make sense of what is being proposed.

These two points make me concerned that we have sufficient information for a replication study to be undertaken. Further points that raised my interest included:

3) It is unclear what is to be gained by midwifery RAs reviewing the video (and the epistemic position taken by the researchers when suggesting this), what are the risks associated with this? Does this imply there is only a single way of performing a skill? If so, how does this correspond with women centred care?

4) Will the tools that are being proposed to assess validity and reliability illuminate understanding about the most effective learning outcomes? How the different elements of data are to be linked requires further clarification. For example, how can the researchers be sure that it is not the debriefing that is the more valuable component to engage the learner and impact on their skill acquisition?

5) The statistical analysis seems appropriate to the tools that are being used.

Having said this I can see no 'scientific reason' why this protocol should not be published - but my epistemic position would challenge the value of setting up a trial to answer the question of fidelity (especially when this is linked to learning
outcome). Fidelity is more complex and has more elements to it than those isolated for this trial. Having said that, one would hope that subsequent publications provide richer discussion / exploration of these issues.