

# USING VOICETHREAD TO PROMOTE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN ON-LINE CLINICAL NURSE LEADER COURSES

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The movement to advance the clinical nurse leader (CNL) as an innovative new role for meeting higher health care quality standards continues with CNL programs offered on-line at colleges and universities nationwide. Collaborative learning activities offer the opportunity for CNL students to gain experience in working together in small groups to negotiate and solve care process problems. The challenge for nurse educators is to provide collaborative learning activities in an asynchronous learning environment that can be considered isolating by default. This article reports on the experiences of 17 CNL students who used VoiceThread, a cloud-based tool that allowed them to communicate asynchronously with one another through voice comments for collaboration and sharing knowledge. Participants identified benefits and drawbacks to using VoiceThread for collaboration as compared to text-based discussion boards. Students reported that the ability to hear the voice of their peers and the instructor helped them feel like they were in a classroom communicating with “real” instructor and peers. Students indicated a preference for on-line classes that used VoiceThread discussions to on-line classes that used only text-based discussion boards. (Index words: Clinical nurse leader; CNL; VoiceThread; Collaborative learning; Asynchronous on-line communication) *J Prof Nurs* 0:1–7, 2016. © 2016 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

**T**HE MOVEMENT TO advance the clinical nurse leader (CNL) as an innovative new role for meeting higher health care quality standards continues with CNL programs offered on-line at colleges and universities nationwide. Quality on-line learning environments include opportunities for students to engage in collaborative activities with their peers (Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009). Collaborative learning activities offer the opportunity for CNL students to gain experience in working together in small groups to negotiate and solve care process problems. Knowledge is cocreated and shared among learners as they work toward a common learning goal or solution for a problem (Brindley et al., 2009).

The challenge for nurse educators is to provide collaborative learning activities for learners in an asynchronous learning environment that can be isolating by default.

On-line learners separated by time and distance sometimes feel disconnected from peers (van Tyron &

Bishop, 2009). This disconnection can hinder students from fully engaging with the instructor and their peers in the learning process. Then there is the reality of low participation based on the perception of collaborative learning as a reduction in the flexibility and convenience to choose study hours that fit around the demands of work and family. No matter the reason, lack of full participation with peers in the on-line classroom can be counterproductive to emulation of expected CNL competency in facilitating collaborative, intra-, and interprofessional approaches to solving care process problems.

## VoiceThread and Collaborative Learning

Many practitioners of on-line communication advocate the use of VoiceThread to extend and foster collaborative learning activities in the on-line environment (Ching & Hsu, 2013; Pacansky-Brock, 2013; Pacansky-Brock, 2014). VoiceThread is a cloud-based communication application that allows instructor and students to upload a presentation in the form of PowerPoint slides, images, video, or all three, add voice comments, and securely share the presentation with others enrolled in a class. Most importantly, others can stop the presentation at any

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point and use a microphone on his or her computer, a Webcam, or even a telephone to add their own voice or video comments. This creates a thread of audio or video asynchronous communication much like the back-and-forth conversation that occurs in a face-to-face classroom.

Pacansky-Brock (2013), an innovator in the use of VoiceThread in education, validated many of the ideas about social presence and its humanizing effect in the asynchronous on-line environment. Benefits Pacansky-Brock identified include the following:

- Improved sense of social presence. The ability to see and hear their peers and instructor reminds students that they are interacting with a real person, rather than a computer.
- Improved sense of community. The humanizing aspects of VoiceThread foster a sense of community. Students are more motivated to participate when they feel they are part of a group and community of learners.
- Improved understanding of complex ideas in different ways. Students reported increased understanding with VoiceThread.

In addition, Pacansky-Brock (2014) analyzed the student responses to open-ended questions about how voice comments affected his or her on-line experience. The five themes that emerged were a perceived sense of community, improved learning, more like a “real” class, improved communication, and improved nuance/emotion.

Ching and Hsu (2013) explored the experiences of 20 graduate students using VoiceThread for a collaborative activity in an on-line graduate course. The results of the study revealed that the students had very positive experiences toward using VoiceThread for collaborative learning. Fifty percent of students reported that they felt more connected to peers; however, feeling more connected did not result in a level of participation beyond the course requirement. Fifty percent of students did not feel more connected to peers. The most frequently mentioned benefit of using VoiceThread as compared to text-based discussion was the ability to communicate emotion and other nonverbal cues conducive to understanding and interpretation of meaning. Forty-five percent of students preferred VoiceThread to text-based discussions for collaborative learning activities. Twenty-five percent of students preferred text-based discussions to VoiceThread, and 30% preferred a mix of VoiceThread and text-based discussions depending on the nature of the task.

In Ching and Hsu's (2013) study, only three students identified areas they disliked about using VoiceThread for the collaborative activity. One stated that “he was shy and did not like to speak in public.” Another said that “the control for making the VoiceThread public needed to be more obvious,” and another commented that “the voice response made receiving feedback and making revisions more cumbersome than did the text response.”

## Theoretical Framework for VoiceThread Enhanced Collaborative Learning

Ching and Hsu (2011) developed a framework to guide the design of VoiceThread enabled collaborative learning activities. The major components of the framework are shared goals, knowledge construction through social interaction, distributed cognition to process and produce artifacts, and situated cognition for learning in an authentic and meaningful context. A shared goal establishes a purpose for participation, communication, and collaboration among the members of a learning group. Distributed cognition suggests that knowledge is distributed across collaborators. When individuals construct knowledge through social interaction, they create learning experiences for each other as they discuss and negotiate how to achieve the shared goal. Both the process and products of collaborative knowledge construction align with the shared goal. Learning is situated and occurs in an authentic context that requires participation, communication, and collaboration.

Based on Ching and Hsu's (2011) framework, VoiceThread (a) supports social and interpersonal interactions through its commenting function, (b) can record the artifacts created from the distributed cognition of collaborative individuals separated by time and distance, and (c) provides an environment to build authentic learning contexts in which learners collaborate in knowledge construction through situated participation. Collaboration is a necessary competency for all practicing nurses and can be strengthened through engagement of on-line students in meaningful collaborative learning activities.

This article reports on the experiences of 17 CNL students who used VoiceThread, a cloud-based tool that allowed them to communicate asynchronously with one another through voice comments for collaboration and sharing knowledge. Based on the research associated with the use of VoiceThread in the on-line environment, the following question was the focus of this inquiry: What are students' perceptions of using VoiceThread for collaborative communication and knowledge sharing in an asynchronous on-line environment?

## Methods

### Setting

The setting was a small private college located in the southeastern United States. The master of science in nursing (MSN) program for CNL is delivered in an asynchronous on-line format. All enrolled students are required to complete an on-line tutorial and pass a quiz on using the on-line learning management system. Each semester is divided into two 8-week terms, Term I and Term II. The two 8-week terms make it possible for students to take one course each term, complete two courses each semester, and graduate in five to six semesters.

The didactic course content is divided into eight units with learning activities and discussions to be completed

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