Utilizing VoiceThread Technology to Foster Community Learning in the Virtual Classroom

With the expansion of online nursing education, nurse educators face challenges that arise from distance learning. One notable challenge is increased difficulty in promoting a meaningful learning community. Ultimately, a sense of belonging can influence student satisfaction and the ability to endure through strenuous coursework (Delmas, 2017). One tool found to promote engagement and community learning, particularly in online education, is VoiceThread (Kirby & Hulan, 2016). VoiceThread is a platform that allows the ability to upload, share and discuss different types of media including documents, presentations, and images. VoiceThread is compatible with most online learning platforms and can be purchased for use by a single instructor or for an entire university. Students do not purchase their own individual accounts. Use of this technology applies principles of social constructivist learning theories by allowing students to build on their knowledge in a social learning environment (Thomas, Menon, Boruff, Rodriguez, & Ahmed, 2014).

VoiceThread was utilized in an online accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing program to promote team learning in a pharmacology course. The goals of the activity were to (a) actively engage students in the course content and (b) create a social learning environment.

The course instructor created a PowerPoint® presentation with directions on each slide. The content on each slide correlated with the module activities, including assigned reading, and videos or websites to be explored. For example, slides related to the assigned reading included instructions to define terminology, respond to a chapter objective, or describe a case study located in the text. The presentation was then uploaded into VoiceThread and placed within the learning module. Each student was assigned a slide and was responsible for posting a comment responding to the task assigned. Although VoiceThread offers several commenting options including audio and text, video commenting was chosen to optimize engagement based on recommendations from current literature (Kirby & Hulan, 2016). Kirby and Hulan (2016) reported both seeing and hearing their classmates allowed them to get to know each other and better understand communication, compared with more traditional written methods of discussion often used online.

Faculty utilized a simple rubric designed to assess students’ ability to completely and substantially respond to the task assigned. If any student video comment provided inaccurate information, faculty communicated within VoiceThread to provide guidance for the student and group as a whole. This interaction is important, as one study found students in an online program felt more connected to their instructor in courses that utilized VoiceThread (Delmas, 2017). Students were encouraged to use the VoiceThread complete with comments from their peers as a study guide, further promoting the social aspect of the learning environment. Listening to other students explain concepts served to build on their knowledge by offering different perspectives and insight into the content in the course. This practice is of benefit to students who are audio and visual learners.

After completing the assignment, faculty requested confidential feedback from all students enrolled in the course. Of 122 students, 32 (26%) responded to a survey. When asked if they enjoyed the assignment, one student stated, “I love the VoiceThreads! They’re helpful and creative ways to learn the material.” Additionally, when asked if they planned on viewing the VoiceThread once it was complete with video comments from their peers, 24 of 32 (75%) respondents answered yes. One student commented that the assignment “really does provide a comprehensive study guide for the students made by the students.” These student comments signify that the goals were successfully met. Additionally, anecdotal reports from faculty in subsequent courses revealed increased retention of the knowledge gained through these assignments. Although there were few reports of difficulty uploading comments communicated to faculty, issues were quickly solved and often attributed to poor internet connection.

VoiceThread is an innovative platform gaining popularity in online education. Use of the video comment feature has the ability to foster inclusiveness and engagement for students in online nursing programs. This technology can also serve to enrich the distance learning experience for students with varying learning styles.

References

