

2010

## Online Role Play Activities for Developing Oral Presentation Proficiency

Joan M. Culley

*University of South Carolina - Columbia, jculley@sc.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/nurs\\_facpub](https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/nurs_facpub)



Part of the [Nursing Commons](#)

---

### Publication Info

Published in *26th Annual Conference on Distance Teaching & Learning*, 2010.

This Presentation is brought to you by the Nursing, College of at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact [digres@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:digres@mailbox.sc.edu).

## **Online Role Play Activities for Developing Oral Presentation Proficiency**

Joan M. Culley, PhD, MPH, MS, RN, CWOCN  
Assistant Professor  
College of Nursing  
University of South Carolina

Vera Polyakova-Norwood, MEd  
Director of Online Learning  
College of Nursing  
University of South Carolina

A large part of nursing graduate education is delivered today asynchronously through a combination of online technologies to accommodate the needs of adult learners. Working in a technology-mediated environment, students primarily develop skills in asynchronous text-based communication. Asynchronous learning environments often do not provide opportunities for students to acquire effective oral communication skills expected of graduate level nurses in professional practice. Creating opportunities for developing oral presentation proficiency, which is an important component of graduate education, requires introduction of carefully structured synchronous learning events.

This paper describes a combination of synchronous and asynchronous role play learning activities that was used as a teaching strategy for enhancing oral presentation proficiency in a graduate online Applied Technology in Health Care course at the University of South Carolina (USC). The course is part of the post-masters curriculum in the Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) program at the USC College of Nursing. The entire post-masters DNP curriculum is delivered online in a primarily asynchronous mode to accommodate adult learners who are geographically dispersed, work part time or full time, and juggle multiple family responsibilities in addition to meeting academic obligations.

### **Health Care Professionals, Teamwork, and Communication Skills**

Today's health care system is characterized by innovation, creativity and a technologically defined delivery system. (Porter-O-Grady, 2003). The focal unit in the health care system is the interdisciplinary team and the collaboration that takes place within the team strongly affects the outcomes. Graduate prepared nurses need to develop effective collaboration and communication skills to be successful team players and leaders. This skill set includes the ability to present and defend proposals to the team, management or stakeholders in face to face meetings.

To address this limitation of the asynchronous online delivery, the course instructor worked with an instructional designer to develop a course project combining synchronous and asynchronous presentation activities. As the final activity in the course, the project was to enable the students to synthesize major course concepts and apply them in a real life context of presenting and defending a proposal in front of a management team. The project was designed using authentic learning methods: role play and collaborative problem-solving activities.

### **Setting the Stage: Facilitating Community and Collaboration**

At the beginning of the semester students were placed in information system (IS) consulting teams of 5 students each to work on projects that would ultimately reflect their team consulting portfolio. The course designers followed the model of online collaboration described by Palloff and Pratt (2005), which

underscores the critical importance of establishing a sense of community through communication and interaction, sharing of experiences and ideas, receiving and providing constructive feedback, and reflecting on the learning process.

During the first week of class, students were directed to complete a series of community- and team-building activities. They introduced themselves in a personal way to the class and to their IS team members on the discussion board and responded to other students' introductions. Students wrote a team contract to articulate expectations about team members' contributions and responsibilities and set norms for communication and collaboration. To ensure more equitable distribution of leadership opportunities and workload among team members, each student signed up for a three-week leadership term.

By the end of the first week, each IS team determined an appropriate consulting name and built their team wiki, representing the team as a whole and providing a profile of each individual member. Throughout the semester, team wikis served as a collaboration platform and a tool for presenting completed projects to the instructor and classmates. The evolution of the wikis reflected the acquisition of new knowledge and skills and culminated with a complete consulting portfolio for each student IS team. In addition to wikis, each IS team had access to a secure work area equipped with a private discussion board, a file exchange, and an email function. Initial team-building activities gave students opportunities to connect with each other and to test most of the technologies that they would later use for course projects.

### **Role Play: Synchronous and Asynchronous Activities**

The role-play approach was carried out consistently through the semester, as students explored the course content, discussed the transformative impact of technology on patient care and organizational structures. Students were encouraged to think of themselves as information systems consultants. Each of the course projects required them to perform technology related functions expected of advanced practice nurses in health care agencies. Student IS teams evaluated health care web sites and software applications and constructed databases to inform clinical decision-making. The final project required writing a proposal for a software application, presenting it to the management team and entertaining follow-up questions on the spot. Meeting with the management team, i.e. the entire class and the instructor, was to be conducted with web cams in a virtual meeting room through Adobe® Connect™. Adobe® Connect™ provides a synchronous meeting environment, in which participants can see and hear each other through the use of web cams and microphones. A combination of the Blackboard (Bb)® course management system and Adobe® Connect™ fully enabled the learning activities and behaviors critical to the course. Other factors in the technology selection were access and technical support provided to the users by the university.

To facilitate the work on the final project, the course instructor met with representatives from each IS team using the same technology (Adobe® Connect™) as was required for the project presentation and the meeting with the management team. This session imitated a consultation with an expert and offered opportunities to clarify requirements and expectations for the proposal and presentation, brainstorm new ideas, and also to discuss the team processes and possible team re-alignment if necessary. Each IS team was asked to prepare an agenda for the meeting and compile a list of questions for the instructor. The virtual meeting participants were able to achieve resolution on all agendas items, including conflict management and work process re-structuring, more efficiently and effectively than would be possible through asynchronous written communication.

Following virtual consultations, the four IS teams prepared written proposals, and recorded multimedia presentations with narrated PowerPoint slides, using Adobe® Connect™. The goal of developing a multimedia presentation was to convince the management team to implement the proposal. The management team carefully reviewed the proposals and presentations and then met virtually in an Adobe® Connect™ meeting room for follow-up questions and answers. A detailed protocol for the meeting was

developed and posted on the course site in advance. Each IS team fielded questions posted by the management team. The instructor acted as chair of the management team and moved the meeting forward. This role-play activity simulated the real world context of behaviors expected of both management and advanced practice nurses when making decisions on deploying new technologies in health care.

### **Student Perceptions of Learning**

To gauge students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the final project, a short online survey was administered. Eighteen students replied to the survey (86% response rate). When asked the extent to which the final project/exam provided an opportunity to apply course concepts learned throughout the course, 100% indicated that it enhanced the opportunity to apply course concepts. Ninety-four percent of the students also responded that the final project/exam provided an opportunity to develop oral presentation skills.

Students included the following comments: "I thought the final proposal and mock proposal review served their goals well," "the process simulated the intensity of being grilled and having to defend your conclusions in a proposal," "it was the longest 20 minutes I have experienced recently, but I think the experience is a useful one," and "it resembled a lot of professional experiences required professionally of nurses, such as facing a research or mock review committee to defend research articles or proposals and candidate/PhD defense."

Students also shared the following advice for future students in the class: "actively participate," "take the time to complete the readings and reflect on the application to your practice or position in academia," "this is also a great opportunity to work as a member of a team," "be considerate of the timelines for each activity and enjoy the new knowledge."

### **Conclusions and Implications**

Advancing oral presentation proficiency is an important component of graduate education, whether it is delivered in the classroom or online. Attention must be given to fostering an educational approach that uses real-world contexts to facilitate proficiency in oral and written communication needed to navigate an evolving healthcare system. Online educators can combine synchronous and asynchronous role play activities to provide their students with opportunities to develop effective oral communication and presentation skills expected of graduates in professional practice. Lessons learned from implementing this teaching strategy in a graduate nursing online course at the University of South Carolina include: 1) be very specific about the project requirements; 2) provide reliable technical support and multiple opportunities to practice with technology; 3) closely monitor collaborative work process; 4) provide and solicit feedback; 5) model expected behaviors; and 6) faculty engagement throughout the course is critical.

### **References**

- Palloff, R. M., & Pratt, K. (2005). *Collaborating online: Learning together in community*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Porter-O-Grady, T. (2003). Innovation and creativity in a new age for health care. *Journal of the New York State Nurses Association*, 34(2): 4-8.

### About the Presenters

**Joan Culley** is an associate professor at the University of South Carolina's College of Nursing. For the past twenty years she has been involved with distance and online education. Her interests include the use of synchronous role-play activities to create a real world context for enhancing collaboration skills and oral presentation proficiency in graduate online courses and the use of simulation in emergency preparedness training. Her educational background includes a PhD from the University of Arizona with a major in Healthcare Informatics and Nursing Systems and a BS degree in nursing from West Virginia University.

Address: College of Nursing  
University of South Carolina  
1601 Greene Street  
Columbia, SC 29208  
E-mail: [jculley@sc.edu](mailto:jculley@sc.edu)  
URL: [http://www.sc.edu/nursing/personnel/faculty\\_1.html](http://www.sc.edu/nursing/personnel/faculty_1.html)  
Phone: 803-777-1257  
Fax: 803-777-5561

**Vera Polyakova-Norwood** has twenty years of experience in designing, teaching and managing various types of distance education courses and programs. As director of online learning at the University of South Carolina's College of Nursing, she assists faculty with design, development, implementation and evaluation of online courses, modules and activities. She presented at several local, national and international conferences and led numerous workshops on technology-based teaching and learning. She holds an MEd from the Herzen Pedagogical University in St. Petersburg, Russia and a Post-Graduate Certificate in Technology-Based Distributed Teaching and Learning from the University of British Columbia, Canada.

Address: College of Nursing  
University of South Carolina  
1601 Greene Street  
Columbia, SC 29208  
E-mail: [vnorwood@mailbox.sc.edu](mailto:vnorwood@mailbox.sc.edu)  
URL: <http://www.sc.edu/nursing/personnel/staff.html>  
Phone: 803-777-2476  
Fax: 803-777-3771