Designing an Interprofessional Healthcare Ethics Small Group Meeting in Second Life by using Kolb’s Learning Cycle

Litao Wang, M. Ed and Marcy Halterman-Cox, D.C., MsPH
Texas A&M Health Science Center, College of Medicine

Introduction
Interprofessional healthcare education has become a hot topic in medical education in recent years. However, gathering students from different colleges, who are at different locations, can be a real challenge. For two years, the Texas A&M Health Science Center (TAMHSC) has been offering the “Interprofessional Healthcare Ethics” course to multiple components and associated healthcare professionals, including the College of Medicine, College of Nursing, College of Pharmacy, and Chaplain students at associated hospitals. Starting from the first year, we have been exploring different technologies to facilitate teaching and learning processes. In academic year 2011-2012, TAMHSC chose to conduct the small group discussions by using the following three delivery platforms:

- Traditional Face-to-face Groups
- Video Conferencing Groups
- Second Life

Design Rationale
Second Life is an online virtual environment. Users interacted with each other through avatars within the simulated environment. The use of avatars provides participants with an added sense of immersion and presence in the virtual world (Spooner, Cregan and Khadra, 2011). In order for a Second Life lesson plan to be successful, a complete redesign is necessary. The communication technology to support the learning activity should provide a platform for exchange, organization, and procession of student idea and knowledge (Beaumont & Cheng, 2006). To ensure the effectiveness of the group activity, Kolb’s Learning Cycle was applied to redesign a 50 minute group meeting in Second Life.

Design Rationale (Cont.)
Kolb’s Learning Cycle was developed from David Kolb’s learning styles model and experiential learning theory.

Applying Kolb’s Learning Cycle to a Group Meeting in Second Life
Step 1 Thinking: Students listened to a live online streamed lecture regarding “End of Life”, then logged into the small group meeting place in Second Life. They then wrote down the top three things that came into their mind after listening to the lecture, and submitted them as “Notes” within Second Life.

Step 2 Planning and Testing: Students visited a virtual patient – “Mary.”

Step 3 Doing: Students attended a simulated hospice ethics committee meeting by utilizing an ethics decision making model – “The Four Topics Chart.”

Step 4 Observing and Reflecting: During the last 10 minutes of the class, students worked on a short paragraph on how they would respond to the patient and her family/friend based on what they learned from the lecture and experienced during the simulation. They then submitted their paragraphs as “Notes” to the instructor.

Lesson Plan Provided to the Students
1. After listening to the lecture, write down the first 3 issues that come to your mind related to end of life issues.
   Time Limit: 5 minutes.
2. Visit the patient at the first floor. Patient name: Mary
3. Role play exercise:
   A: Patient encounter (location: 1st floor)
   B: Ethics committee meeting (apply 4 boxes model, location: rooftop)
   Assigned Roles:
   - Medical director
   - The patient’s personal physician/ hospice physician
   - Nurses
   - Other roles: social workers, other counselors and therapists

   After the role play exercise: Write down a short paragraph about how you would respond to Mary and her family and friend. Drop the note to your instructor!

Conclusion and Reflection
The level of realism and interactivity that Second Life simulations brought was promising. However, planning and conducting the lesson was much more complicated than delivering it in a face-to-face setting. For example, even though it only took about 15 minutes to create an avatar in Second Life, a real person still needed to be recruited to bring the avatar to life. Training and support for Second Life can also be very time consuming and resource intensive since there is usually a steep learning curve and various problems related to audio and other features in Second Life.

For future simulated group meetings, adequate personnel and other resources need to be provided.

References


Acknowledgements
We thank the following individuals who offered suggestions to this poster: Dr. Mark Sadowski, Director of Office of Educational Development and Dr. Paul Brandt, Associate Dean of Academic Technology and Curriculum Innovation.