Description

As a Graduate Assistant in the College of Education at The University of Akron, I created a tutorial to help Dr. Susan Kushner Benson learn how to use Blackboard Collaborate, a webconferencing tool. This recording was made using Blackboard Collaborate on March 5, 2013. Earlier in spring semester, I contacted the Design and Development Services department on campus to have a Collaborate Demo Site created, so that I could coach Dr. Kushner Benson about how to use Blackboard Collaborate. She expressed an interest in learning how to use Blackboard Collaborate to conduct class meetings for her online courses or virtual office hours with students, and I was somewhat familiar with using Collaborate from using Elluminate Live, a similar webconferencing tool, in two of my graduate classes the previous semester. Having the demo site gave me the opportunity to create recordings to coach Dr. Kushner Benson about how to use Blackboard Collaborate for these purposes. There were moderator links set up for both Dr. Kushner Benson and myself, a participant link, and link to the recordings page. I used the moderator link that was assigned to me to access Collaborate and make this recording. This tutorial was about 25 minutes long and was uploaded to the recording page, so Dr. Kushner Benson could watch it at a convenient time.

In this tutorial, I explained to Dr. Kushner Benson how to set up her microphone and webcam before recording a session, upload a PowerPoint presentation into Collaborate and present it to students, how to share her desktop, and how to share websites with students during a session. I also described the three modes of presentation that instructors can have during a Collaborate session - Whiteboard, Application Sharing, and Web Tour - and demonstrated what each of these modes would look like to the students. Using the Whiteboard mode, I modeled how to add text to the whiteboard and change its color and size. Using the Application Sharing mode, I modeled how to share programs that were open on my desktop. Using the Web Tour mode, I modeled how to share websites with students or other participants. In addition, I also described how students could use the Raise Hand tool to ask questions and use emoticons to give praise to the presenter or indicate that they were confused about something being taught. This was not a “professional” tutorial, but rather an informal coaching experience that was designed to help a professor learn how to use a new technology tool.

Impact

One of the technological limitations that I encountered while making this recording was that I was using the Moderator view in Blackboard Collaborate, while Dr. Kushner Benson could only view the recording from the student view. As a result, she could not see all of the links or icons that I was clicking on to perform different tasks during the recording. To compensate for this, I always made sure that I identified the exact name of the link or icon that I was clicking on to perform different tasks and where the link or icon was located on the screen. I also tried to be very descriptive when I was describing to Dr. Kushner Benson how to perform different tasks, so it would help her visualize what she could do when she was using Blackboard Collaborate. After Dr. Kushner Benson had a chance to watch the recording, we met face-to-face to review what she learned from the
Blackboard Collaborate Tutorial Reflection

Even though I gave detailed directions in the recording because Dr. Kushner Benson could not see exactly what I was doing, I feel that providing detailed, step-by-step instructions is an important aspect of doing any tutorial related to technology. I feel that this rule applies if the tutorial is done using audio and video (like the recording I made about Collaborate), a document with screenshots, or in-person training. Technology coaches should always be aware of the current technology skill level of their audience, whether that audience is a large group or just one person, and attempt to tailor their coaching to meet the specific needs of their audience. In the case of this Collaborate tutorial, I knew that Dr. Kushner Benson learns best when a complex task related to technology is broken down into a step-by-step process. In my experiences working with her, she appreciates learning simple things that have immediate, practical benefits more than learning complex things where the benefits might take time to develop. Therefore, in my tutorial about using Collaborate, I tried to focus on the basic tasks that Dr. Kushner Benson wanted to learn about and tasks that I felt would benefit her students, instead of teaching her about all of the features that Collaborate offers. For example, since Dr. Kushner Benson was particularly interested in learning about how to import PowerPoint presentations into Collaborate, I demonstrated this task early in the recording. Also, I only briefly mentioned at the end about creating breakout rooms to have small group discussions using Collaborate. This is an advanced feature of Blackboard Collaborate. Since I was aware that Dr. Kushner Benson only wanted to use Blackboard Collaborate for online class meetings or virtual office hours, describing how to create breakout rooms would not have been the best use of time during this tutorial.

Reflecting on Collaborate as a multimedia tool, I feel that is an excellent tool to improve teaching and learning. Instructors can use Collaborate to present lectures to students, poll students to get feedback, and share documents and websites. Students can give speeches or presentations to the entire class by using a microphone, webcam, or built-in camera. Students can send instructors PowerPoints to upload into Collaborate. If some students are unable to attend a live Collaborate session, then students can watch recordings at a more convenient time. Thus, Collaborate can be used for both live synchronous communication or asynchronous communication among students and instructors. I feel that making the Collaborate tutorial was relatively easy to do. The interface was not difficult to figure out, and the buttons seemed to be placed in logical places. One complaint about Collaborate is that it runs using Java. Collaborate users have to make sure that their Java is updated to participate in live sessions and watch recordings. I have had classmates in my graduate courses experience unexpected audio issues or issues with being logged out of Collaborate during a live session. If instructors wanted to record class lectures, then I would recommend Panopto.

This was my first experience creating a Blackboard Collaborate recording on my own. Even though I had a short script in front of me with a list of topics that I wanted to cover, I could have taken more time rehearsing exactly what I wanted to say. I feel that any instructor should have a plan or script outlining what they want to teach or go over with students before conducting a live Collaborate
session. While listening to the recording afterwards, I noticed that I said the word “um” many times. As I develop more experience using Blackboard Collaborate as a moderator and a participant, then I will feel more confident in my ability to describe this webconferencing tool.

**Intent**

This fall I will be teaching a graduate-level course called Multimedia/Hypermedia for seven weeks while Dr. I-Chun Tsai, one of my professors in the Instructional Technology program, is taking leave to have a baby. This will be a fully-online course using Springboard, the learning management system at The University of Akron. When I took the course in Spring 2013, Dr. Tsai used Elluminate Live, which is a similar webconferencing tool, to facilitate bi-weekly online class meetings to give us instructions for completing class projects and answer students’ questions. It is my expectation that I will take her place and facilitate these class meetings in her absence. Since I took the course, Dr. Tsai began using Blackboard Collaborate to facilitate these meetings. Therefore, as a result of making a tutorial demonstrating how to use Blackboard Collaborate, I will be familiar with the features of this tool and feel confident that I will be able to help students if they have difficulties using the tool. I will be able to share my desktop to share instructional materials that are posted in Springboard just like Dr. Tsai does. If needed, I will also be able to upload PowerPoint presentations to share with the class based on my experience creating this tutorial. One of the other ways that Dr. Tsai uses Blackboard Collaborate is to have students present their final projects to the entire class at the end of the semester. For this course, students have to present a final website project. Since I am familiar with the Web Tour feature in Collaborate, I will be able to help the students share the links to their projects directly within Collaborate using this feature. If the Web Tour feature does not work, then I can help students troubleshoot this issue by typing the link in the chat window, so that students can open it on their own computers. If I have any questions about using Blackboard Collaborate that I am unable to answer, then I know that I can always contact Design and Development Services for assistance. Since I would already be familiar with Blackboard Collaborate as a result of making this tutorial, there will hopefully be a seamless transition when I teach Dr. Tsai’s online course this fall. Dr. Tsai will not have to give me a lot of instruction about using Blackboard Collaborate.