Description

As a Graduate Assistant at The University of Akron, I worked for Dr. Susan Kushner Benson, a professor who teaches graduate and doctoral courses in educational research and assessment. I worked for Dr. Kushner Benson from August 2012 to May 2014. One of the graduate courses that she teaches is called Implementing Assessment in the Classroom. This course is part of the Assessment and Evaluation graduate degree program for K-12 professionals. Effective Fall Semester 2013, the entire Assessment and Evaluation program would be offered in a fully-online format using the university’s learning management system called Springboard.

In September 2013, Dr. Kushner Benson was looking for a solution to an instructional problem that arose when transitioning Implementing Assessment in the Classroom from a face-to-face to online format. She wanted her students to be able to work together to complete two matrices related to evaluating assessment instruments used in education—the test validity evidence matrix and the test reliability evidence matrix. In a face-to-face setting, she would have students fill out these matrices either individually or in small groups. She would also give students feedback about their contributions to the matrices and answer any student questions. However, she was not sure about how students could complete these two matrices in a fully-online course and how to provide quality feedback that supported student learning.

On September 24, 2013, Dr. Kushner Benson and I met in her office to develop a quality solution to this instructional problem. Prior to our meeting, I had suggested that I could help her learn how to create a collaborative wiki using the online tool Wikispaces. Dr. Kushner Benson was somewhat familiar with Wikispaces already because I had helped create a wiki using Wikispaces for a group project for a course called Instructional Design during the fall of 2012. This wiki was designed to be used in the same Implementing Assessment in the Classroom course to give students a collaborative space to share end-of-the-semester survey projects. Even though we could have added to the same wiki that was created before, Dr. Kushner Benson and I decided that it would be better if we made a new wiki for students to collaborate on these two matrices.

During our meeting, I coached Dr. Kushner Benson through the process of creating a Wikispaces account, making a new wiki, adding pages, and inviting students to the wiki. After the wiki was created, I changed the settings so that Dr. Kushner Benson and I could work together to collaborate in the design and development of the class wiki. The wiki had a basic structure: a home page, one page for the test validity evidence matrix, and another page for the test reliability evidence matrix. The two pages for the matrices included the matrix at the top of the page and space for students to ask questions and Dr. Kushner Benson to provide feedback and answer questions at the bottom. I demonstrated to Dr. Kushner Benson how easy it was to edit pages in the wiki by just clicking Edit.

In addition to coaching Dr. Kushner Benson about how to create a wiki using Wikispaces, I also recognized that some, if not all, of her students might not know how to set up a Wikispaces account or how to use a wiki. Therefore, I created a guide with instructions to help students create...
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accounts and screenshots of each step in the process. Since I had access to the online course as a graduate assistant, I uploaded this file to the online Implementing Assessment in the Classroom course. I also added a direct link to the wiki from the course. In addition, when Dr. Kushner Benson e-mailed me to tell me that one of her students was having trouble creating an account and could not participate with the rest of the class in the wiki, I contacted Wikispaces about the issue and replied back to the student once I received a response. Using the response from Wikispaces, the student was finally able to create an account and contribute to the wiki. Dr. Kushner Benson appreciated my assistance. Students in Dr. Kushner Benson’s class used the wiki from late October to November 2013.

Impact

This field experience was a good example of how wikis can promote collaborative learning among both students and instructors. The students in Dr. Kushner Benson’s were successfully able to make individual contributions to the two matrices in the wiki using content learned from the course, thus collaborating to create an original learning product representing the knowledge of everyone in the class. By using the wiki, students were able to view and read their peers’ contributions to the two matrices. From a pedagogical perspective, this can help students clarify their own understanding and help instructors recognize areas where additional instruction or feedback is needed in order to help students achieve mastery of course content. In this instructional context, students could make contributions to the wiki (and Dr. Kushner Benson could answer questions and give comments) at times that were convenient to them. This illustrates the asynchronous communication that wikis offer to students and instructors, which is particularly important in a fully-online course where the students and instructors could be accessing the course at different times.

During the two-week module where students in Dr. Kushner Benson’s class were using the wiki, I would regularly check to see if students and Dr. Kushner Benson were making contributions to the wiki. While there were only a few contributions during the first week, the level of contributions increased significantly during the second week. This observation could be attributed to students reading course materials and related assessment instruments during the first week to learn how to complete the two matrices. When making contributions to the wiki, the students did well adding their first names in parentheses after their comments and typing their comments in different colors, further distinguishing their comments from those of other students. During our meeting, I made a suggestion to Dr. Kushner Benson that students should add their names when adding comments to the wiki, so that everyone knew who wrote it. I was very pleased that Dr. Kushner Benson and the students took this suggestion, but I don’t remember suggesting that students type comments using different colors. This was a pleasant surprise! This actually made the two matrices much easier to read as students added more information during the course of the module.

While I was reading students contributions to the wiki and Dr. Kushner Benson’s feedback, I was pleased with the interactions between the students and the instructor. For example, one student posted under “Questions for Dr. KB” that “How current should the validity measures be?” Dr. KB
responded by clarifying that the phrase “validity measures” should be “validity evidence” and that the student should focus more on the currency of the assessment instrument being evaluated in the matrix. In another example, a second student posted under “Questions for Dr. KB” that she was not sure why the terms internal consistency and test-retest coefficients were referred to as “estimates.” Dr. KB complimented the student for recognizing this “subtle meaning” and stated that this was because we would not be able to calculate what the actual values of these two terms for someone would be. Dr. Kushner Benson also initiated interactions with her students, instead of just waiting for her students to post questions or comments. For example, for the test validity evidence matrix, she noticed that students were only providing evidence of content validity. Dr. KB later posted a comment under “Questions from Dr. KB” asking students to think about other types of evidence to include in the matrix. Also, inside a couple of boxes on the same matrix, Dr. KB indicated that the box “does not apply” to the situation and would not need to be filled in by the students. These examples illustrate how wikis can be used to create a supportive online learning community.

This wiki was also an excellent example of how an external learning tool can be integrated into a learning management system to benefit student learning and facilitate quality interactions among students and instructors. I believe that all instructors who teach fully-online courses should have a “personal toolkit” of Web 2.0 tools that could be used to enhance the quality of an online course beyond the features of the LMS being used to deliver the course. Both the students and Dr. KB were still able to access the wiki, interact with the course content by sharing ideas, and communicate with each other even though the wiki “existed outside” of the LMS. Since students were asked to collaborate to complete these matrices as a class, I feel that this learning activity would not have been as successful if it had been done in a threaded discussion forum within the LMS. It would have been more difficult for students to visualize what the matrices would look like with new ideas being added by classmates. The students could have still discussed the matrices and Dr. KB could have provided feedback, but the students’ ability to make meaningful connections between the different types of evidence that would be used to complete the matrices would have been more difficult. I hope that Dr. Kushner Benson will be able to add Wikispaces to her ‘personal toolkit” after this experience. This field experience helped reinforce my belief that wikis can be an effective teaching and learning tool that promotes communication, collaboration, and assessment.

Intent

Dr. Kushner Benson will be teaching Implementing Assessment in the Classroom next during Fall Semester 2014. Therefore, it is very possible that she will want to use the wiki again. In this case, I would be more than willing to coach Dr. KB get the wiki ready for this course, even though I am no longer her Graduate Assistant. The most important example of how I could coach Dr. KB would be to help her add two new pages to the wiki, so that she could create two blank matrices for students. Unfortunately, it is not possible to copy existing wiki pages using Wikispaces, so Dr. KB could have to create new pages and then design the new pages so that they matched the current ones. Perhaps we would add the name of the semester to the pages to distinguish between semesters. For example, we could change the name of the existing “Test Validity Evidence Matrix”
page to “Test Validity Evidence Matrix Fall 2013” and also call one of the new pages “Test Validity Evidence Matrix Fall 2014.” In case Dr. Kushner Benson did not want her Fall 2014 students to see what the contributions that students from Fall 2013 made to the two charts (to prevent copying), I could also coach her about how to hide the Fall 2013 pages from the navigation menu along the left hand side. The students in Fall 2014 would only be able to access the new pages. In addition to adding pages, I could also help Dr. KB insert images into the wiki. In its current form, there are no images on the home page to attract students’ interest or any images on the other two pages. However, before doing this, I would want Dr. KB and I to discuss the images and make sure that any images added to the wiki have a specific learning or motivational purpose. As a technology coach, I have to always remind myself that this is Dr. KB’s wiki, not my wiki. Therefore, I can only make suggestions to help improve the wiki and not force her to accept my advice. Technology coaches and instructors have to work together as teams in order to achieve quality results that have a positive impact on teaching and learning. After this field experience, I intend to continue creating wikis using Wikispaces for a variety of instructional contexts.