Multimedia Club Wiki Reflection

Description

From October 2013 to May 2014, I volunteered as an instructor for an after-school Multimedia Club at the National Inventors Hall of Fame STEM Middle School in Akron, Ohio. I eventually took a lead role in planning and implementing lessons and activities for the club. One of my accomplishments in this role was creating and adding instructional content to the Multimedia Club wiki, which was made using the online tool Wikispaces. While the club wiki was originally created by two other graduate students for a class project about instructional design, I was given permission by its creators to add a separate section to the wiki for the weekly activities of the Multimedia Club. The students in the club were already familiar with the wiki, since the two graduate students who created the wiki came to present it to the club in November 2013. I did not want to have the students learn a new URL for the wiki. I also did not edit any of the content that the two graduate students worked hard to create.

From November 2013 to December 2013, I used the wiki to post instructional materials and resources to help students complete a digital photo project. I posted a description of what I expected students to do for the project, instructions for using Windows Movie Maker, and an example of a digital photo story that I created using personal vacation photos to give students an idea of what they could make for their projects. Later, I also posted three examples of quality video projects that students made.

Beginning in January 2014, I started using the wiki to post weekly activities and learning materials for the club. I created a Multimedia Club home page within the wiki and put a link to this page on the navigation menu, so students could easily find it. Each week, I created a separate page with the date at the top. Each page contained an introduction to the topic of the day and an agenda for students to complete. The agendas contained links to websites that I wanted students to visit, videos that I wanted students to watch, Google Drive documents and presentations that were embedded into the page, and other helpful instructions for students. Students were asked to go to the Multimedia Club home page on the wiki at the start of every club meeting to find out what they would be learning about that day. As students started doing more projects, I eventually added a Picture Gallery and a Student Showcase to the Multimedia Club home page to post pictures of students using the wiki to complete activities and examples of student projects made for the club. I also used the Discussions tool in the K-12 classroom version of Wikispaces to post discussion questions for students in the wiki.

Impact

The need for this wiki to deliver instruction for students in the Multimedia Club arose from the fact that I did not always have a laptop to connect to the projector in the room where the club met. Also, I wanted students to be able to access instructional materials directly on their laptops and did not want to print out materials for every student. Since most of the students in Multimedia Club were fifth-graders, Wikispaces met the need for a website that would be easy for younger students to use and a website that did not require students to create a username and password to
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access. Once I added Discussion questions to the wiki, however, I did create individual usernames and passwords for all of the students in the club to post responses to the questions. I posted a Google spreadsheet with all of the usernames and passwords to the wiki. Even though I had asked the students not to change their usernames and passwords, some of them did so anyway. In these cases, the students had to respond to questions as “guests” and add their name somewhere in their responses. Then I contacted Wikispaces by e-mail to have their passwords reset. I recognize that any time students have usernames and passwords to access a website, there is always a chance that a student will change their username and/or password without permission or forget their username or password altogether. Therefore, I highly recommend that teachers keep a list of usernames and passwords in a safe place and strongly encourage students to not change their log-in credentials. In this case, I was very grateful that those students who changed their passwords were still able to access the club wiki.

In addition to students forgetting passwords, I also had some students to changed their usernames. When I created the usernames for the students, I deliberately made the usernames the students’ first name followed by their last name. This would allow me and the students to easily figure out who posted responses to the Discussion questions. After I noticed that three of the students in the club had changed their usernames and had posted Discussion responses, I did not know which students posted the responses. I had to ask the students. While two students changed their usernames to characters from Japanese anime, one student changed his username to something inappropriate. I actually deleted him from the wiki and told me my rationale for doing so. The student proceeded to create a new username and password using a different username - “Hatred” - and posted responses to a Discussion question. I was not happy with this, but I did know which student had posted the response. Based on this experience, I would strongly recommend that all teachers have discussions with students about appropriate usernames to use when accessing websites or posting comments online. This is an important part of responsible digital citizenship because students need to realize that their usernames and comments will always remain online. If a student has an unprofessional username or makes an inappropriate comment, then others could have a negative perception of the student.

In regards to the design and development of the Multimedia Club wiki, I tried to make the wiki as simple to use as possible, yet still effectively deliver instruction. Each page of weekly club activities had a similar format: an introduction to the topic with connections to previous topics or student’s prior knowledge, a related image to interest students, and a weekly agenda with instructions about what students were going to learn about and needed to do. The weekly agendas were presented as numbered lists, instead of paragraph form, to make it easier for younger students to follow. When I wanted to add documents or presentations, I made the decision to create instructional materials using Google Drive and then either embed the files into the wiki page or add links to the files. I felt that doing this would allow students to work directly from the wiki and not have to download files from the wiki. If the students had to download files, then it is very likely that they would have three windows or tabs opened up on their laptops: the wiki, a website or program that students would be using, and the file itself. I felt that it would be easier for fifth grade students to manage having two windows open on their laptops - the wiki and another website or program -
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rather than three. As I wrote out the agenda each week, I tried to make the instructions as clear as possible. I made sure that any important information or instructions was in bold or in a different color. The only thing about the navigation of the wiki that I wish I could have changed was that students had to always click on the green Multimedia Club link along the right hand side if they wanted to visit a previous week’s page in the wiki. To do this, I would have needed to add links to all of the other Multimedia Club pages from every other page related to the club. While this would have improved the overall navigation, it would have been too time-consuming. Without these links, the students only had to click one other link to access additional links, so the extra time to add more links was not justified.

In regards to the sequence of instruction as presented to students on the wiki, I felt that the lessons were logically connected and helped students improve their skills over time. The first lessons that I taught were about creativity and the elements of game design. I chose these initial lessons because all of the students in the club had a high interest in video and computer games. In these lessons, students completed a survey about creativity, made Vokis, identified elements of game design that were in their favorite video and computer games, and started creating their own games using the website Gamestar Mechanic. The next series of lessons focused on helping students learn about computer programming, since this is how video and computer games are made. In these lessons, students completed the Hour of Code by solving puzzles about computer code and made simple games using Scratch, a the kid-friendly programming language. In order to keep applying what students had learned about elements of game design, I had some students in the club complete a Google chart identifying the different elements found in the coding games from the Hour of Code. For the final lesson, I had students “put together” all of the skills they learned to create a final video project. While I gave the students the option of creating a game using Scratch or even creating a web page using HTML code, all of the students chose to create videos using Movie Maker.

Overall, I feel that the Multimedia Club wiki was an effective tool at delivering instruction for the students in the club. Since most of the students were fifth-graders and students only met once a week, the wiki was a great tool to use to meet the needs of students in the club. The wiki was not difficult for the students to use, and I could make the wiki colorful to engage and interest students. Since I only had to add one page to the wiki each week and wikis are easy to edit, the wiki was a great tool for me as the instructor. Before each club meeting, I would send a link to the actual wiki page for that week to Dr. Tsai and any graduate students who would also be coming to help out. One technical issue that arose was that students could not access the wiki using Firefox. The wiki was blocked. In order to troubleshoot this issue, I asked students to use Internet Explorer to access the wiki and helped students get past the security warnings that came up. Once the students were using the right browser, they had no trouble accessing the wiki.

Intent

At the present time, I intend to continue volunteering for the Multimedia club again during the upcoming 2014-15 school year. This could change depending on my availability and employment
situation in the fall. If I continue volunteering for the club and having a primary role in planning activities for the club, then it is possible that I could continue using the same wiki by just adding more pages to the existing Multimedia Club home page. I could also change the name of the home page to reflect that it was from the 2013-14 school year and add a new section to the wiki for the 2014-15 school year. One of the advantages to using the existing wiki is that the instructional content made by the original creators, as well as the learning materials that I created, would not need to be copied into another website. One of the disadvantages to using the existing wiki, as I recently discovered, is that the free version of Wikispaces does not allow users to upload files that are than 20MB. As a result, I was unable to upload one of the student’s final video projects to the Student Showcase section of the wiki. If students wanted to make videos that were larger than 20MB in the upcoming year, then I would have to find a different way to post them online to share with others. If I decided to use Wikispaces again with the club, then I would e-mail Wikispaces to find out if there is an option where students are unable to change their usernames or passwords. I would also want to explore opportunities for students to collaborate on projects using the wiki, since that is what a wiki is truly designed to do.

One alternative to using Wikispaces that could possible work well for Multimedia Club next year is Weebly, which is the tool that I used to create this e-Portfolio! Similar to Wikispaces, Weebly allows teachers (and anyone else!) to create websites by using ready-to-use, customizable templates. I like the templates on Weebly because they look more professional than Wikispaces. Just like Wikispaces, I could easily embed Google Drive files and videos into Weebly. From a design perspective, there are more design options in Weebly, too. The one drawback to Weebly is that the free version does not allow users to upload video files, such as mp4 files. Users can only embed videos posted to YouTube. If I wanted students in the club to produce videos next year, then I would perhaps have to explore alternatives for websites for the club, such as Google Sites or Wix. I would have to find out if there is a maximum video file size for these online tools.