Description

On May 8, 2014 I met Dr. Susan Kushner Benson, Associate Professor in the College of Education at The University of Akron, to teach her how to use the Rubrics tool in Springboard. Springboard is the learning management system (LMS) used by instructors and students at The University of Akron. I worked for Dr. Kushner Benson for two years as a Graduate Assistant and have coached her about several technology tools that would enhance the online courses that she teaches. For this meeting, she wanted to learn how to create rubrics inside Springboard that she could use to grade writing assignments submitted by students. In particular, she wanted to create rubrics for an online course called Techniques of Research. This foundation course is required for all graduate students in the College of Education.

During this meeting, I showed Dr. Kushner Benson how to find the Rubrics tool from the list of tools that are available for instructors to edit online courses in Springboard. I walked her step-by-step through the process of starting a new rubric, changing the names of the achievement levels across the top of the rubric, changing the names of the categories along the side of the rubric, attaching a rubric to an associated Dropbox assignment, and attaching a Rubric to an associated item in the gradebook. Dr. Kushner Benson brought a rubric from a current rubric that we could use as a guide when making a new rubric. In order to practice creating rubrics, we used one of Dr. Kushner Benson’s courses that was saved in her Springboard account from a previous semester. We were also able to preview the student view of the rubric with the Dropbox assignment and in the gradebook.

Impact

What impacted me the most from this field experience is being able to coach an instructor on a one-on-one basis about how to use a technology tool that could improve the instructor’s teaching practice, yet at the same time, tailor that coaching to meet the instructor’s teaching style and the pedagogical considerations that she wanted to address. Instead of coaching her about all of the features associated with the Rubrics tool, I only chose to coach Dr. Kushner Benson about those specific features which I felt would be helpful to her. Here are some examples of how I tailored this coaching to meet Dr. Kushner Benson’s teaching style, content, and pedagogical needs:

- Dr. Kushner Benson has students complete a series of three assignments called Scenarios. Each of the Scenarios has different questions and requirements. She wanted to be able to assign different point values to different parts of each assignment, since some parts are weighted more heavily than others. Therefore, I coached Dr. Kushner Benson about how to create criteria groups within the rubric and assign point values to each criteria group.
- Rubrics that are created in Springboard automatically calculate a student’s overall score as the instructor grades the assignment and clicks on the radio buttons found inside each box on the rubric. In her teaching, Dr. Kushner Benson has told me that she sometimes adjusts a student’s grade up or down based on their overall effort on the assignment or exceptional writing. Therefore, I coached her about one feature of the Rubrics tool where she would be
able to override the score for one section of the rubric or the student’s overall score on the assignment. I also showed her how she could give feedback to the student directly on the rubric to explain the rationale for giving the student a different grade than what the rubric would indicate.

- In her current teaching, Dr. Kushner Benson downloads student assignments from the Dropbox, adds written feedback to the assignment, and then uploads graded assignments back into Springboard for students to view grades. Dr. Kushner Benson shared that she wanted to continue a similar process of providing feedback, but make the overall grading process more efficient. Therefore, I coached her about how to attach a rubric to a student’s graded assignment directly within Springboard so a student could see both the assignment and the rubric with the instructor’s written feedback and comments in the same place. She would no longer have to download any files and then upload new files after grading.

To prepare for this meeting, I could have easily printed out the instructor resource guides about the Rubrics tool in Springboard and used these guides to coach Dr. Kushner Benson through the process of creating a new rubric. I could have showed Dr. Kushner Benson about all of the different features of the Rubrics tool, so she would know everything that the tool could possibly do. However, I chose not to use this approach. Instead, I chose to listen to Dr. Kushner Benson’s specific needs, figure out which features would help her the most, and coach her about the unique ways that the Rubrics tool would improve teaching and learning in the context of her class. I did not show her how to share rubrics with other instructors or view rubric statistics, since these features did not meet her needs. Rubrics help ensure that assignments are evaluated fairly and consistently and are a helpful tool to provide feedback to students. These were the points that I wanted to emphasize during our meeting and the focus of my coaching, not all of the “cool” things that the Rubrics tool could do.

For me, this field experience greatly emphasized the importance of providing learners with personal attention when it comes to coaching them about technology. Effective technology coaching is not conducted in a large classroom with a large group of learners. I believe that effective coaching is best done in a small group or one-on-one setting. During our meeting, I appreciated that I was able to answer Dr. Kushner Benson’s questions immediately and work through any technical issues that arose. In fact, toward the end of our meeting, I was having trouble figuring out why the practice rubric that we created would not show up correctly when previewing it as a student. Dr. Kushner Benson had added some feedback to the rubric for practice, but the feedback would not show up. After trying some different things to fix this problem, I realized that we forgot to attach the rubric to the corresponding assignment. If I had not been coaching Dr. Kushner Benson one-on-one, I do not feel that I would have been able to figure this out as quickly. If I had been coaching a larger group, then I might have had to wait until I had a chance to answer her question in order to figure it out. Furthermore, by coaching her one-on-one, I could also easily coach her about how to correct this issue if it happened in the future when she decided to create more rubrics.

**Intent**
Springboard Rubrics Reflection

Even though this field experience only lasted for a couple of hours, this was one of the experiences that I enjoyed the most. Dr. Kushner Benson told me that creating rubrics in Springboard will save her a lot of valuable time when it comes to grading assignments, so I am extremely happy that she will be able to use her time more efficiently. I also enjoyed coaching her in an informal setting, a local coffee shop. This proves the fact that technology coaching does not have to take place in a classroom or in a formal training situation. Even though I have not seen any rubrics that she has created using Springboard since our meeting, I am very confident that she will be able to apply the skills that I taught her and align these skills with the rationale for using rubrics to improve teaching and learning.

What I will take away from this field experience is a greater understanding of the role that content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology all play in effective technology coaching. Each one of these components is important. Without knowledge of the content that Dr. Kushner Benson teachers, I would not have been able to understand the rubrics that she was trying to create for her Techniques of Research class. Without knowledge of the pedagogy that was important to her, I would have explained things to Dr. Kushner Benson that would not have matched her teaching style or that might have been too confusing. Without knowledge of the technology (Springboard Rubrics tool), I would not have been able to walk her through the process of what buttons to click and how to edit the rubric once it was created.

In future technology coaching situations, I will use this field experience as a role model for how to design the coaching experience for a teacher or perhaps a student. First, I will make sure that I fully understand that the teacher or student is trying to accomplish through technology. Second, I will make sure that I listen to the teacher’s or student’s concerns and answer all questions respectfully and honestly. Third, I will make sure that the coaching I provide matches the teacher’s or student’s existing technology skills. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, I will make sure that I give the teacher or student ample opportunities to practice using the technology with guidance from me, instead of just demonstrating the technology and having the teacher or student watch me. This is the purpose of an effective technology coach. I feel that having this approach worked very well during my meeting with Dr. Kushner Benson, so I would be eager to apply it again in the future.