

Using Wikis to enhance the PBL experience at The University Of Salford



Introduction

Salford University has introduced wikis to the undergraduate occupational therapy programme in order to complement Problem Based Learning. Wikis are increasingly being used to aid group communication and projects, and are emerging as a potentially effective tool in education (Lamb 2004).

What is problem based learning?

Problem based learning has been defined as an attempt to create a learning environment in which students

- Learn in the context of meaningful problems
- Can actively construct mental models to aid their understanding of the problem
- Learn through sharing thoughts about these problems with peers
- Develop self directed learning skills (ENOTHE 2004)

The success of PBL can therefore be said to lie in a group's ability to effectively share thoughts, ideas and information and translate these into new knowledge (Price 2003), however this process can be logistically difficult.

What is a wiki?

Recent advances in the use of Web 2.0 internet technologies have led to the development of wikis. The aim of a wiki is to provide an online environment in which a body of knowledge can be built and edited by anyone at anytime and from any location (Lamb 2004). In essence, a wiki is a collection of web pages aimed at facilitating group collaboration.

Methodology

Each of 6 PBL groups were provided with a wiki space situated within a Virtual Learning Environment (Blackboard). The wiki was accessible to group members and module tutors who had advised that they would review wiki periodically and provide feedback on content.

A module evaluation was conducted with a cohort of 60 full time second level students using a nominal group technique.

Findings

	Top 5 Negative aspects of using wikis (tutor perspective)	weighting
1	Content is too overwhelming to review if poorly structured	12
2	Need to remember to monitor frequently	11
3	Can feel more accountable for final product	9
4	Is it supervision or monitoring?	8
5	Can be difficult to judge when to intervene	6

	Top 5 Positive aspects of using wikis (tutor perspective)	weighting
1	Being able to comment on work with the aim of facilitating learning	17
2	Can easily view students contributions	9
3	Can answer questions and give feedback	6
4	Convenient receptacle for information	5
5	Easy to set up and use	5

	Top 5 Negative aspects of using wikis (student perspective)	weighting
1	Feeling tutor may have an unclear view of work done	74
2	Feeling under pressure to evidence input to PBL process	72
3	Experiencing information overload	52
4	Feeling tutor may have an unclear view of who has contributed what	49
5	Experiencing difficulty cutting, pasting and uploading to the wiki	48

	Top 5 Positive aspects of using wikis (student perspective)	weighting
1	All work is filed, accessible and safe	57
2	Easy to use	56
3	Easy method of file sharing	41
4	Can keep relevant all documents in one place	40
5	Quick way to communicate	39

Conclusion

Wikis are useful tools for facilitating group communication in PBL. Staff and students must be taught how to use them effectively, and technological support should be available on an ongoing basis in order to maximise their effectiveness.

Students have been shown to have mixed feelings regarding their work being viewed by tutors with some finding tutor comments supportive and others feeling this as an unnecessary pressure. Tutors also had ambivalent feelings about this and therefore consideration should be given to the appropriateness of this in relation to module learning outcomes and assessment strategies.



Sarah Bodell · Angela Hook · Senior Lecturers · University Of Salford UK
 s.j.bodell@salford.ac.uk A.Hook@salford.ac.uk

Ref: 001 Using Wikis - May 2008

