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Assessment in E-Learning
Midterm JigSaw
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The number of Web2.0 tools available to an online facilitator for assessment grows every year, if not every month. Keeping up with technology becomes a job in itself. We, Kim Audetat, JoAnn Harrison, and Kevin Schuchmann will strive to acquaint you with three of those tools, WebEx, TeacherEase, and OurStory. These tools are from different assessment categories, peer to peer collaboration, course tracking, and reflective assessment respectively, to provide the reader with a broader range of tool information. We have also offered a group rating for quick future reference. The reader must remember, though, that because these are web tools, reading about them will only provide an overview. One must work with the tools, play if you will, to realize any Web 2.0 tools real potential.



WebEx is a system for holding meetings over the web. With this system, presentations can be done through web conferencing, as a web meeting or as a video conference. WebEx is a pay system with different subscription pricing available. The basic subscription product sold by WebEx is the Meeting Center. With this downloadable software, you can show a presentation, share documents and have up to six webcams running at one time. Attendees can either call in or use Voice-over (VoIP). You are able to have an unlimited number of meetings that can be recorded and played back. This service is \$49.00 per month with a free two-week trial. (Cisco)

For training a group of people in diverse locations, WebEx also offers the Training Center, which allows up to 1000 participants at once. This is based around training, so there are added features such as hands-on labs, registration and reporting and more. Because it is a training session, the instructor is also able to track how the students are doing to ensure the training is working. There are additional options to charge students for the courses. WebEx pricing also varies for this service. (Bleicher, 2009) While the Training Center seems to have numerous applications for education, for our purposes, we are going to be exploring the basic subscription, The Meeting Center, taking advantage of the two-week free trial.

In a distance learning situation, while replacing the classroom with features, institutions also value security, which is supposed to be one of WebEx's strengths. The downside is that WebEx is not a free platform like WiZiQ or Moodle and fees are paid by the classroom or meeting "host". According to Wikipedia, there has been an increase in the use of WebEx as an online learning platform and classroom. WebEx claims to now have a 64% share of those users. (Wikipedia, 2010)

Examples of possible learning objectives that could connect this tool with online instruction, specifically to promote collaboration, include:

- Participate in group discussions for problem resolution
- Organize and lead discussions; participate in meetings; answer questions in formal and informal situations
- Demonstrate interactive listening techniques

Our group knows first-hand that WebEx supports the Jigsaw method as an online instructional tool, as it was what we used in order to collaborate, present, and combine our individual documents for our toolbox. Getting logged into the meeting presented the biggest challenge, but by using WebEx support and directions we were able to overcome that hurdle in a fair amount of time. The meeting area itself was easy to learn and provided us with great way to collaborate on our project. Although, we would be hesitant to implement it with a large group, it is a tool we would definitely consider using again.

 **Group Rating:** 



While current gradebook software allows for uploading of progress reports, an online facilitator will have a need for a web-based gradebook. Facilitators will be looking for a gradebook that can accommodate various forms of grading, communicate with parents and/or students, and more. TeacherEase is designed to meet the needs of both the online facilitator and face-to-face teacher, giving students/parents online access to a student's current assessment status.

TeacherEase appears to be specifically designed for the K-12 environment, boasting its ease of use and accessibility for teacher, student, and parent. The benefits of the software are numerous. The website claims the following benefits: "Teachers save time . . . parents are better informed . . . student performance improves dramatically . . . align assignments to state or district standards . . . enter

standards-based grades and track student performance versus standards . . . everything teachers need to manage the standards-based classroom.” (TeacherEase, 2010)

TeacherEase offers a free year subscription to the first three teachers of a school that sign-up for product access. This provided me with the opportunity to login to the program and determine, for myself, the benefits as compared to my school’s current grade book software.

TeacherEase would eliminates the difficulty of posting grades from a single computer-based software program because the program is not stored on a school server but on the TeacherEase server. A web-based grade book gives teachers, parents, and students, with Internet connection, 24/7 access to the gradebook.

The program was easy to set-up and use. There are many options within each section of the gradebook allowing for some customization of information. The program provides options to block access to information, giving the facilitator areas for private notes and comments. The TeacherEase servers are backed up every night, protecting a school’s information and archiving it for a time.

The website boasts “everything teacher’s need to manage the standards-based classroom”, (TeacherEase, 2010) which is true, but some of those tools are add-ons and they do increase the price. After the free year subscription, the cost of the gradebook **only** is just under \$90 a year. The Lesson Plan/Curriculum Mapping feature is an add-on and priced at just under \$45. The Report Card printing add-on is \$4.50 per student, which is the cost that would turn away districts that still produce the hard copy report card. An interesting built-in feature is the parent donation link. This feature allows parents to make a donation to help offset the teachers’/schools’ cost of the gradebook access.

The one challenge I had with TeacherEase is the depth of clicking required to set-up the gradebook. For a program to be truly user-friendly, the end user shouldn’t have to delve into the program through multiple clicking. Things need to be easy to find and not deeply buried in the program. The website claims “The usability is so high that we receive an average of 2 support questions per day per 1000 teachers.” (TeacherEase, 2010) While I consider the program fairly intuitive, I am not sure all would agree.



Group Rating:





OurStory is a browser based collaborative Website that creates multimedia timelines for sharing the highlights of a person's life. Users can upload photographs, videos, and posts to showcase events that are meaningful to them. These timelines can be viewed by scrolling either to the left or to the right.

These timelines are truly collaborative as emails can be sent to interested parties anytime there are updates. In turn, this group of email recipients can then collaboratively add their own pictures, videos, and comments where appropriate. The owner of the timeline determines who can add each memory and where third parties can add multimedia files and comments. Timelines can be set up chronologically or by time periods such as decades.

This online company is relatively new and supported by funding from respected venture capitalists. The company received 6.3 Million in Series A funding in January of 2006. OurStory was originally named Wisdom Ark in the early 2000's. The concept was promoted and backed by a leading entrepreneur-focused, early-stage venture capital firm named El Dorado Ventures. Venrock Associates is also a chief investor of this company. Venrock Associates was founded as the venture capital arm of the Rockefeller Family.

A library of stock questions is provided for use for delving deeper into topics. These questions can be pinged to relatives and friends for help about events. Responses are then stored on the Website for easy retrieval.

An auto-search function is another neat concept. This search function actually seeks out photos on the Web related to the topic or event you are writing it about. Videos can also be uploaded.

OurStory is free to use. However, the free version does have limitations. You will need to upgrade to the premium version for \$39.99 if you want more than one timeline. The premium version also allows you to keep your timelines private and searchable by people in your trusted network. There is also not a printing option. Timelines can be printed as hardcover books.

In the classroom, OurStory could be used as a great way for students to work collaboratively on preserving an activity or school event by uploading photos, videos, and comments. Another way the Website could be used would be to create a timeline of historic events or of a famous character.

An example of a learning objective connected to the use of this assessment tool is one taken from the Iowa Core Curriculum, “Demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology.”

Our assessment toolbox now includes resources for assessment including peer-to-peer collaboration using WebEx and course tracking using TeacherEase. While the level of technology of each of these may not have perfectly matched our particular situations or needs, investigating these tools provided us with a valuable lesson in the use of technology for assessment, which will serve a two-fold purpose for us in the future. One, we now possess a higher level of technological skills that will prove useful in exploring future assessment tools. Secondly, we now have tools with which to compare other tools to in our search to obtain the information that will help us deliver online instruction more effectively and promote student learning, the ultimate goal of assessment.

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