Gloucestershire College: Social media wiki providing an invaluable staff development resource

Summary

As part of the European Comenius Project, Gloucestershire College have developed an intuitive social media wiki called ‘Learn 2 Teach’. The wiki has been created as a staff development resource, which is enabling teachers to gain valuable knowledge about web 2.0 tools and how to use social media effectively in the classroom.

The wiki has enabled teachers to provide students with greater support and access to technology and e-learning tools than before.

Screen shot showing the home page of the Learn 2 Teach wiki

About Gloucestershire College

Gloucestershire College is a Further Education college, which has over 21,000 students spread across several campuses in Cheltenham, Gloucester, Forest of Dean and several smaller sites in Kingsditch and Tewkesbury.
The main college campus at Gloucester was formally located at Gloucester Docks.

It offers Higher Education up to and including HNC, HND and Foundation Degree levels.

In 2008 the college won the Civic Trust Award for the Best Climate Friendly Scheme.

**The challenge**

Initially when the project between the European partners met to discuss the output of the programme there was some scepticism around whether a wiki was the best way forward. It soon emerged that many staff were very unfamiliar with social media and the platform of a wiki was a cost-effective and easy to access solution.

In terms of the teachers, because many had limited experience of using web 2.0 tools and social media, it was quite a challenge for them to learn new systems and see the benefits of using them in the classroom.

The wiki environment, which looks similar to Wikipedia, is also one that many of the project leaders had little experience of using or developing. This meant that they had to devote time into learning the system and the creation of relevant resources and content to populate the wiki.

**The activity**

As part of a European Comenius Project, Gloucestershire College were invited alongside 11 other European partner educational establishments to formulate and develop a teacher training programme with the view to enhancing a knowledge-gap in social media amongst teachers.

The Project is headed up by the University of Dortmund and there are a cross-section of schools and colleges responsible for different areas of the project.

The first phase of the project was to determine the initial idea and organise the structure and output for the project and this was when the ‘Learn to Teach’ wiki idea was formulated.

Gloucestershire College were responsible for the dissemination of the project, which included creating the logo, flyers, website and some of the design of the wiki.

Once the planning for the wiki had been finalised the partners involved in the project split the wiki down into the following sections and sub-sections:

**Pedagogy**

- What are social media?
- How Social Media are Changing the Worlds of Work, Education and Leisure
- Good IT Manners
- Security/safety when online
• How social media change school culture
• How social media change teaching methods
• Teaching Skills

Software

• Beginners’ programmes/Office software
• Social software
• Video sharing/editing software
• Audio sharing/editing software
• Skype, VOIP
• Cloud applications

Hardware

• Mobile phones (GPS: geo location technology; augmented reality)
• iPads and other tablets/touchpads

School subjects

• Maths
• Foreign language
• Arts
• Students exchange and interchange
• Physics (...in a foreign language)

Each partner was given a section to write articles for and Katrina Diamond, Head of School for the Education and Training Department was tasked with producing content around mind mapping, working in groups, using social media to work in groups and maths.

Once all the articles and content had been written, the partners met to peer assess and critique the work. In order to do this subjectively they used the ‘Mrs Jones’ lenses’ approach, which was to look at the resources as someone who had little or no experience of social media. After this exercise had been completed the partners made improvements to their content to make it ready for publishing.
As part of their promotion of the wiki Gloucestershire College were invited to present at CeBIT, which is the world’s largest international computer expo, held in Hanover. Six students from Gloucestershire College, working across three different programme areas in maths presented their work using a variety of web 2.0 applications, such as Prezi, Edmondo and also used audio and social media.

The outcomes

One of the positive outcomes for the wiki has been the experience of the students involved in presenting at the prestigious CeBIT expo and how they have been able to meet other like-minded students from other countries. The expo has given those students experience of presenting and using technology highlighted by the wiki.

The wiki has provided a very useful educational platform, that has helped provide teachers with the knowledge around how to use social media effectively in the classroom. It also provides staff with important information and resources around areas such as e-Safety and plagiarism.

“Social media is a great tool to enhance the educational interactions during the course (and not only mathematics). They do not only serve as media for socialisation among teachers and students, but also prompt the students to work with mathematics (or other subject) outside of the classroom while being entertaining and raising the interest.” – Gloucestershire College Student

“A major outcome for us has been raising the profile of Gloucestershire College across Europe and the opportunity to be involved with these types of projects and moving the embedding of educational technology forward.” – Katrina Diamond, Head of School for the Education and Training Department.

The teaching skills area of the wiki, is proving to be an invaluable resource to teachers to help them to use...
social media and web 2.0 tools effectively and gives them relevant advice and support, helping them with:

- Improving your students’ reading skills
- Improving your students’ writing skills
- Correcting written work electronically
- Using mindmaps to enhance social media
- How to present material more interestingly via social media
- How social media can help you write reports
- How to find information quickly via social media

All of the above areas contain activities and tasks that teachers are able to use to follow examples of how to develop the skills they need to provide their students with better support through social media and web 2.0 tools.

“It’s really helped with the actual staff involved with the project in terms of their knowledge and development of using web 2.0 applications, but also in-house it’s really helped with the people that have been involved with the project, who have been able to get involved in different things that they’ve never really experienced before.” – Katrina Diamond, Head of School for the Education and Training Department.

The impact

Although the wiki is in its early stages, teachers have been using it as a staff development resource and uptake has been very good.
In terms of the feedback from teachers and students, it has been very positive with a distinctive improvement in the number of web 2.0 tools being used in the classroom to help support social media use.

“I feel the opportunity to involve social media in learning maths is really helpful. Using tools like Edmodo opens up a lot of possibilities, it’s easy to learn how to use and is great for holding discussions around specific topics. As social media is internet based, this means other sources such as videos, images and links can easily be incorporated and accessed by everyone.” – Gloucestershire College Student

For students who may not necessarily enjoy maths, but are required to study the subject, social media presents an enjoyable way to learn.

“I feel incorporating social media into a maths curriculum is ideal for group projects, the setting and discussing of homework, it provides the opportunity to consult peers for advice and so on.” – Gloucestershire College Student

“We think from the feedback from the students and the teachers involved in the project so far that the collaborative element of social media is fantastic.” – Katrina Diamond, Head of School for the Education and Training Department.

The lessons learned

One of the main aspects has been the coordination between partners spread out throughout Europe. An important factor has been to find out what level of knowledge each group has initially for the first meetings with regard to social media and web 2.0 tools before embarking on a big project and allocating roles and responsibilities.

“Collaboration is key, open communication is key – we also had three key advisers on our project that were recommended by the partners on the project that were there as critical friends and there would be at least one of those at each meeting. They would feedback to us at the end of the meeting with some hard facts and with some very critical but constructive feedback and advice which was invaluable in moving the project forward.” - Katrina Diamond, Head of School for the Education and Training Department.

Useful links

Gloucestershire College

Jisc RSC South West

Learn 2 Teach

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