Fine Design: Tutoring and Online Resources

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Analysis Phase

Dr. Bridgie Ford and Dr. Denise Stuart from the Center for Urban and Higher Education (CUHE) work with parents/guardians in Akron Public Schools. The organization’s website (2013) states that “CUHE’s specific mission is to construct and deliver quality professional development services to educational and community leaders that directly and positively impact student learning in urban settings Pre-K through higher education.” CUHE holds the following workshops specifically for parents: Communication with School Personnel, Educational Excellence for your Children, and Engagement of Significant Community Resources. These workshops provide ways to empower the parents in their efforts to make their children academically successful. In conversations with Dr. Ford, these same parents have expressed a need for tutoring resources and homework help. Dr. Ford knows that there are free tutoring services available in Akron and its neighboring areas, but there is no clearinghouse. She and Dr. Stuart would like an online, searchable database that will allow parents/guardians to find the closest location via zip code for tutoring that serves both their students’ grade level and subject needs.

The instructional design team, Fine Design, has chosen this particular problem because of a strong interest in improving K-12 education in urban settings. Fine Design includes Jessica Ford, Susan Martin, Matthew Mele, and Jennifer Wilson. Jessica is a third grade literacy tutor in an urban school, and Susan teaches English in a private high school. Matt is a school technologist in a K-12 private school, and Jennifer, a former English teacher, is a professional development facilitator. Each team member possesses both classroom experience and technological skills. All members believe that parental involvement drastically improves the academic success of students. Research proves this ideal to be true. According to Karen Smith Conway, professor of economics at the University of New Hampshire, “Parental effort is
consistently associated with higher levels of achievement, and the magnitude of the effect of parental effort is substantial. We found that schools would need to increase per-pupil spending by more than $1,000 in order to achieve the same results that are gained with parental involvement” (University of New Hampshire, 2008). In order for parents to get involved, schools, tutoring centers, and communities need to be friendly, inviting places that welcome support; if not, parents may feel they do not have the knowledge or skills to help their children with their academic subjects and homework. Helping parents assist their children allows for more success in school, as well as a stronger family.

However, parents/guardians face many obstacles in helping their children succeed in school. In fact, they may not be aware of the resources and services that are available for their children. The initial audience that this instructional design project will address will be parents who are seeking available resources to fulfill the academic needs of their children. Eventually, the audience may grow to include any parent/guardian of any student in the Akron Public Schools. Currently, there is not a centralized, online website that will allow parents or guardians to easily search for additional help with specific subjects and homework problems. Also, due to lack of confidence and direction, parents struggle to find the best opportunities for their child(ren).

The learning problem is quite unique as Fine Design must not only create a website that can be easily navigated by the intended audience, but the team must also design the instruction needed for the audience to accomplish the learning goal(s). To further complicate the issue, any designed instruction will not occur in a traditional setting. Although the intended audience of parents and guardians has an expressed need for tutoring resources, there will not be a formal instructional opportunity.
In addition to the need for a website, the design team must gather the resources that the parents will access. This has proven to be a difficult task, as there are not as many free sources available to the intended audience as originally thought. The lack of “brick and mortar” tutoring sites might lead the team to expand the scope of the website to include online resources that the parents/guardians and students can access for both immediate answers to content questions and remedial instruction in specific subject content. This may lead the team to design more detailed instruction for the learners to use these specific online sources.

Once the website is complete no matter what its ultimate content, the audience will need to be educated about its existence. Media, such as flyers, bookmarks, and postcards, will inform the audience of this new service. The media can be placed in strategic locations such as schools, libraries and churches for easy access by the Akron Public Schools’ community. The audience will also need to learn how to use the website, which will mean accessing and navigating it; therefore, the ultimate learning goal is as follows:

Parents/guardians will easily access and navigate an online database of compiled tutoring resources available in the Akron area, as well as online options, including web resources that help with homework, in order to select the most appropriate tools for their students’ success.

*Fine Design* will not have the opportunity to design instruction that will address the basic computer skills to access and navigate a website since there will be no formal training session. However, in order to reach this learning goal, the team will need to address the following objectives in the instructional design:
• The learner will download and use a QR code reader.
• The learner will access a specific website by either clicking a link, typing the URL, or scanning a QR code.
• The learner will select criteria from drop down boxes to narrow search results.
• The learner will send and receive e-mails in order to contact specific tutorial sites.

Based on the anecdotal information provided by the SMEs as stated earlier, the need for this centralized tutorial and resource database directly results from Dr. Ford’s and Dr. Stuart’s discussions with and observations of the parents/guardians in the Akron Public Schools. This need then can be categorized as both a felt need and an expressed need. According to Morrison et al (2011), “a felt need is a desire or want that an individual has to improve either his or her performance or that of the target audience” (p. 34). The authors also state that the instructional designers can determine felt needs by conducting face-to-face meetings or distributing and collecting questionnaires (Morrison, Ross, Kalman & Kemp, 2011, p. 34). Due to time constraints and lack of access to the audience, Fine Design is unable to question the learners directly; however, a face-to-face meeting with the SMEs confirms that the learners have a desire to find the best tutorial resources and homework help for their children.

Fine Design has also categorized this need as an expressed need, “a felt need turned into action” (Morrison, Ross, Kalman & Kemp, 2011, p. 35). As the team researched possible tutoring programs to include in the online database, some of the current tutoring sites are at capacity with one specific tutoring program, Urban Vision Ministries, citing a five year waiting list. This indicates that some parents/guardians have already tried to take action, perhaps to no avail.
Initially, the characteristics of the learners have been provided by the Subject Matter Experts, who have direct contact with the learners through parent workshops sponsored by CUHE. According to Dr. Ford and Dr. Stuart, the parents/guardians have access to the internet via Smartphones, or at the very least, via computers at the public library. The children tend to be more technologically savvy than their parents/guardians, so Dr. Ford and Dr. Stuart feel that the website needs to be visually appealing and easily navigable for both parent and child. The main focus of the anecdotal description provided by the SMEs is that the parents/grandparents/guardians want to help their children, but they are easily intimidated and may not follow through if they perceive that obtaining the necessary information is too difficult or complicated. These same parents/guardians have expressed a lack of confidence in approaching and talking to educational professionals; therefore, the website will offer them an easier way to obtain the information without making multiple phone calls or searching for multiple locations.

As Fine Design does not have direct access to the learners for purposes of surveying or observing them, the team has researched social economic status through public records. According to the Akron Public Schools’ website, 22,186 students attended one of the 30 schools in the district (About APS). The demographics of the student body are very diverse: 47.2% Black/African American; 40.5% White/Caucasian; 6.7% multiracial; 2.3% Hispanic (About APS). According to Akron area statistics, the breakdown of ethnicity is a bit different: 61.2% White/Caucasian; 31.2% Black/African American; 2.9% multiracial; 2.1% Hispanic (Akron, Ohio profile, 2009). Education, or lack of education, is an area where learners feel very self-conscious. Within the Akron area, 80% have a high school diploma or higher, 18% have a bachelor’s degree or higher, and it is recorded that 7.4% are unemployed (Akron, Ohio profile,
Even though the unemployment rate is still relatively low, the estimated median household income is $32,892 (Akron, Ohio profile, 2009). Understanding the learners’ backgrounds and living situations, allows the design of the resources to be personalized to accommodate their needs.

**Design Phase**

Making the website colorful, clean, organized, and creative are major goals in the aesthetic design; however, the main focus is to create a website that permits users easy navigation when accessing tutoring opportunities in the Akron area. Some users may not be familiar with online databases; therefore, developing a website that clearly maps out where to go and how to find specific information is key. Presenting the materials with step by step instructions and easy to follow links will allow the target audience to navigate through the site without apprehension.

To organize the content, the website will be broken into two web pages: one for tutoring opportunities and one for online resources. If looking for local tutoring programs, one would simply locate his/her zip code, click it, and the programs nearest him/her will be listed. The name of the program, along with the address, phone number, and additional information will be provided as well. If users decide Internet resources would better fit their need, the online resources page will list numerous links to educational games, study guides, and other tools needed to assist students.
The above chart shows the team’s initial plan for the layout of the website. One page lists all the zip codes in the Akron area, and then each specific zip code page lists the resources in the area. The initial online portion of the website would provide numerous resources instantly available for homework assistance. Tutoring Opportunities and Online Resources were the planned pages designed for the website. After a deeper look at what is actually needed and more effective or efficient for users, changing the layout slightly seemed to be a better solution. On each zip code page, two tables list whether the tutoring is free or a paid service. The SME suggested in addition to categorizing them by zip code, listing all tutoring resources on one page with them classified as free and fee-based. Another key feature added is the Help page. After looking closer at the data presented in the analysis phase, creating a video walking viewers through the navigation of the website seemed to be a must-have; therefore, this page was added. Below is the updated design document that drove the layout of the website.
The following is a screenshot of the home page. Users will be directed here from either the link or QR code. It is very colorful, yet simple to draw users in but not distract or confuse them. There are only three links at the top of the page available for users to click to navigate the website; this allows those who are unfamiliar with Internet navigation the ability to access the needed resources without frustration or confusion. At the bottom of the page, the SME requested links to social media and to the organization’s web page.
Most users will visit the website to find tutoring opportunities; therefore, this page is listed first. Below illustrates what users will see when clicking on the tutoring opportunities link located on the home page.
It was important to make the pages as simple and organized as possible. Listing too many zip codes or not having them organized well may have made some users frustrated or overwhelmed. After creating a structured chart, links to internal pages were created. The same thought process went into designing each zip code’s page: Neat and organized. This page represents one of the fourteen zip code pages.

Each tutoring resource has a description and all contact information available listed within the table. This provides users with the ability to decide what tutoring opportunities they feel will be most beneficial. If users would have chosen to look at the complete list of resources (available at the bottom of the Tutoring Resources page), this same setup with two tables
separating the free and paid for resources are duplicated. Consistency was also a major focus when deciding on the design of the website.

The Online Resources tab lists a few resources available for homework help. The initial thought was to compile multiple, accessible websites; however, overwhelming users who may not be familiar with the Internet was another key focus. The links are in pink, so they are easily identifiable; however, if the user has already visited one of the links, the color will change to grey. This allows users to revisit sites they may have already found helpful without having to remember their names.
Finally, the Help page has the most basic design. The only information needed is the video. The movie walks users through the basic functions of the website along with how to reach each page. Again, its entire purpose is to help those struggling with the setup.

Deciding on the conventions of the website seemed to be a bit challenging. Due to the organization connection to the University of Akron, changing the background and text colors to replicate the school’s colors was definitely a strong component; however, going with a brightly colored theme seemed to be more fitting for users. Displaying the website in a “youthful” way may make the audience feel more comfortable navigating the site, rather than a college-designed site. iWeb’s default fonts are used throughout the website so that they are very consistent and standard. The primary focus was to be easy to read. By using an easy to create website generator
like iWeb, the theme colors and layout are already pre-designed, which makes loading the materials very easy. The only issue when dealing with conventions, which is definitely a significant concern, has been whether to stick with Akron University colors or keep with iWeb’s theme.

This project asks users to access the Internet because the website is html. With a paper handout leading to an online source, having access to a computer, smartphone, tablet, etc. is required. The site allows users to primarily stay within the internal links; however, external links to online resources are available. Besides navigating through a series of clicks, a video is available; therefore, having a device able to view .mov is necessary. The format or multimedia users will see dealing with this project are simply .html and .mov; other than those, the only other information they will receive is from the paper handout. Since the design and development phases of this instructional design project overlap extensively, further details concerning the evolution of the design are provided in the Development Phase section.

**Development Phase**

In addition to designing the website to the specifications of the SMEs and Fine Design’s analysis of the potential users of the website, the team has also created an instructional video to show the learners both the content of the pages within the site and the navigation of the site. First, the Help link is at the top of each page, which leads the learner to a page with the instructions, “Need Help? Watch the video to learn how to navigate the site.” The video includes a control box that has an arrow to click to play. Fine Design has chosen to keep this page as simplistic in design as possible. The team knows that many of the adult learners will have some experience clicking “play” on other websites; in addition, the team recognizes that some of the adult learners will rely on their more technologically savvy children to help them
access the video. The video includes an introduction that briefly explains the purpose of the website. Then in a clear, even, and moderately paced tone, Matthew Mele uses a screencast to show how to click the links and locate both tutoring resources and online resources. The instructional video lasts 1:46 minutes, which is short enough to keep the learners’ attention and long enough to provide the necessary content.

Since the SMEs have suggested the creation of a bookmark not only as an advertising tool but also as an instructional one, Jessica Ford has made a book mark with a QR code and a brief tagline of “Need Help? Tutoring and Homework Help is Available.” The URL is clearly shown on the front of the bookmark, and contact information for CUHE is listed on the back. The bookmark uses the same color scheme as CUHE’s and the University’s website. In order to link it visually to the Akron Area Resources website, the same pictures of students are on the front of the bookmark as are in the website. Although the bookmark is in addition to the website, Fine Design still considers it an important medium to establish purpose and deliver instruction.

In developing and refining the design of the website, Fine Design has made critical decisions to aid the learners as they navigate the site and locate the content. Although the SMEs requested blue, white, and yellow as the colors, Fine Design has used additional colors for the potentially younger audience of the learners’ children and for variety. The team feels that the same layout is more important than maintaining color choices because once a learner is familiar with the placement of links and content on one page, he/she will be able to easily read and use the other pages. Changes have been made to the verbiage used in the links for consistency; for example, Tutoring Opportunities becomes Tutoring Resources to match Online Resources as the main links. Also, after much discussion, the tutoring resources are grouped by zip code and then clearly separated into two tables of “free” and “paid” locations. Since the Akron area does not
have many tutoring sites, the team feels that it is important to provide all the sites for a particular zip code on one page. Also, the team has maintained the entire list of Akron area zip codes even though the majority of zip codes do not have any tutoring sites. Although the team has had difficulty adding resources to the website, the design of the website has not required any other changes to aid the learners.

As Fine Design has known from the start of this project, the SMEs have requested an unusual and unique project because the team has had to locate the learning material for the instructional design. Although the SMEs have requested this website as a resource for Akron area parents/guardians, they have not provided many of the informational resources needed. However, they have provided leads for Fine Design to investigate and evaluate. Team members Jessica Ford and Susan Martin have searched for and contacted possible tutoring sites to include in the resource list; however, there are few free tutoring sites in the Akron area. The SMEs have continued to provide leads as the team has continued the instructional design process. Even though this has been an unavoidable problem, it has made the design and development of the website quite fluid. The team has had to be flexible as the informational content of the website has changed. In an effort to aid the learners in their quest to find resources to help their children achieve academic success, Fine Design has also included easily accessible online resources for students. Many of these online resources have been created for school-aged children, making these websites simple and effective. So although the purpose of the website for this instructional design project has been clear from the beginning, the informational resources have been gathered by the team, not the SMEs.

For now, Fine Design has provided the following temporary web address:

http://tinyurl.com/finedesignproject, which leads to Jennifer Wilson’s university web folder.
Therefore, the URL does not meet the needs of the instructional design at this time. The website needs a permanent host and a more recognizable URL. In addition, the SMEs also want a link to the website on CUHE’s website. Fine Design is still exploring how this can be accomplished through the proper channels at the University of Akron.

Fine Design’s plan for formative assessment includes both providing an online survey as an additional yet temporary page within the website and interviewing the SMEs about their observations of the instruction. The team has used Survey Monkey to create a short, multiple-choice questionnaire. Since the website will be shared during a parent workshop conducted and hosted by CUHE, the sample audience will have limited time to view, explore, and evaluate the website. The following five statements are on the survey with the choices of strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree:

1. The Welcome page clearly explains the purpose of the website.
2. I understand the difference between Tutoring Resources and Online Resources.
3. The text on the web pages is easy to read.
4. I can easily find my zip code and click it to find resources.
5. The video on the Help page is easy to understand.

The sample audience’s opinions of these statements will help the team to evaluate and refine the design of the website and the instruction to meet the needs of the broader audience. Furthermore, since the SMEs have asked for this website, the team is most interested in obtaining their opinions of the design, delivery, and reactions as the sample audience views it for the first time. These two methods of formative assessment will provide guidance as the team provides a usable resource for Akron area parents and guardians.
Implementation Phase

The days leading up to implementation phase of the Akron Area Resources Tutoring website were fast paced, frantic, and a bit stressful. A tremendous amount of communication took place the day before between all team members and the SMEs. Before actual implementation, all group members, as well as, the SMEs tested the site to check for malfunctions or any other errors. One major concern was the link to the survey for parents to participate in after they viewed the site. For the SMEs, the link would not work from the site directly. Communication between all involved in the project allowed for the team to find a suitable solution to this dilemma.

The first step to implementation of the site took place Tuesday, April 16 during a presentation by Dr. Ford to CUHE’s collaborating partners’ board members. This board is comprised of administrators and other school leaders from the following districts: Akron Public Schools, Barberton City Schools, Canton City Schools, and Cleveland Metropolitan School District. According to Dr. Ford, the response to the website was overwhelmingly positive and the members expressed interest in expanding the site to their respective districts.

With this positive reaction to the site, Dr. Ford and Dr. Stuart were anxious to present it to a group of parents who participate in the Akron Public Schools Parent Engagement Project (APSPEP). This project stems from a grant written by and awarded to Dr. Bridgie Ford through Akron Community Foundation’s Memorial Fund, allowing for a partnership between the Foundation and CUHE.

The full implementation of the website took place on Thursday, April 18 at The University of Akron in the Student Union. Seven parents attended this particular workshop; the
attendance was lower than expected due to illness. The workshops are intended for parents to learn the following:

- Strategies to increase parent and teacher communications
- Updated information about school academic standards and student progress
- Ways to increase parental involvement in school activities
- How to access and use home and community resources to promote schooling success

The website that Fine Design has created and implemented meets the needs of the last objective listed. Dr. Ford and an instructor from Akron Public Schools conducted the workshop. Parents were given the bookmark so those who possessed smartphones could scan the QR code to gain access to the site. All parents were provided the temporary link, www.tinyurl.com/finedesignproject, to begin browsing the site. The true test of the success of the site has been through the use and reactions of the parents at this workshop.

Initial response by parents to the site was positive. The display of the site was visually appealing to the eye and the site was easily navigable by all parents, even those with very little prior computer/technical skills. Parents expressed enthusiasm and gratitude for the site because it helps them fulfill an expressed need to help their children achieve academic success. Also, parents were eager to show the site, especially the online resource section, to their children, who may have more technical knowledge.

After the parents explored the site, they were asked to participate in Fine Design’s survey. Dr. Ford presented the survey in two formats, paper and online, to meet the needs of all participants and to avoid any possible malfunction with the survey link. The survey addressed the concerns from the parents’ perspectives. The major concern was and has been the lack of free
tutoring sites in Akron and its vicinity. Unfortunately, the lack of resources is not in Fine Design’s control, and Dr. Ford explained to the parents that as more resources become available they will be added to the website.

Throughout the implementation phase, Fine Design has been able to meet to discuss all concerns that arose and to implement changes as quickly and efficiently as possible. After the implementation of the website at the parent workshop, Jessica Ford met with Dr. Ford to discuss concerns, praises, and proposed changes. The content and results of their discussion allowed the team to complete the final evaluation of this project.

**Evaluation Phase**

Fine Design has attempted to evaluate the instruction throughout the entire process. The collective experience of the team members has allowed the team to determine how to utilize the data provided to evaluate every step from analysis to implementation. In the analysis phase, the team was unable to pre-assess the learners, but Susan Martin met with Dr. Ford and Dr. Stuart to obtain their professional opinions about the computer skills of the target audience. These observations have helped the team to narrow the scope of instruction because one key piece of information provided is the fact that either the target audience has very basic computer knowledge, e.g. how to use or mouse, or the audience has children who have more advanced computer skills. The consistent observations by the SMEs have also helped the team to develop the instructional materials to meet the audience’s needs and skill level.

As the team progressed to the Design and Development Phases, the increased communication between Dr. Ford and Jessica Ford has led the team to create the five-question survey via Survey Monkey for formative assessment of the website. Since this website is a work in progress that will develop more completely under the auspices of CUHE and has not been
presented to a larger target audience, the team is not able to develop any formal summative evaluation.

Six members of the target audience have completed the survey: Five using paper surveys provided by Dr. Ford and one participant completing the survey online. To the five survey questions previously provided, none of the participants have chosen “disagree” or “strongly disagree.” Although the pool of participants is very small, the results have helped the team to assess how well the website met the original learning goal:

Parents/guardians will easily access and navigate an online database of compiled tutoring resources available in the Akron area, as well as online options, including web resources that help with homework, in order to select the most appropriate tools for their students’ success.

The following table provides the exact dispersal of the responses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The Welcome page clearly explains the purpose of the website.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand the difference between Tutoring Resources and Online Resources.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The text on the web pages is easy to read.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I can easily find my zip code and click it to find resources.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The video on the Help page is easy to understand.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to these responses, Dr. Ford has also provided the following specific comments from these six participants:

- “No video”
• “[Video] hard to find and took special pull-ins”
• “4 Smartphone I got to Home Page”
• “Not explained” (The difference between Tutoring Resources and Online Resources)
• “Hard to find the help button” (The video on the Help page)

These comments have given direction to Fine Design as the team tries to finalize the website for the SMEs and CUHE.

Obviously one of unforeseen flaws of the website is directing the audience to the Help video. As a result the team has changed the background color of the Welcome page so that the navigation bar, where the Help button is located, is more easily seen. Another flaw in the design of the website may be the explanations on each page for the content that page contains; however, the team feels that the explanations are clear enough and do not need further revisions. One factor that Fine Design has taken into consideration is the small number of users, which certainly skews the survey results. A second factor that may skew the evaluation data is that the small number of participants viewed the website together, which means that these participants may have influenced one another in their survey responses.

Fine Design has received a list of changes from Dr. Ford and Dr. Stuart, who compiled their suggestions, plus those of the Advisory Board, the CUHE Board of Directors and the parent/guardian audience. Most of these changes have been easily made by the team. For instance, more information has been added to the Welcome page to highlight CUHE’s involvement. Also the team has added icons for Twitter, Facebook, and Google+. The inclusion of social media icons is advantageous to the SMEs and CUHE to share this resource with as many viewers as possible. In terms of instructional design, one suggested change that Fine
Design feels will help the learner is the addition of a complete list of resources on the same page as the zip codes.

In general, Dr. Ford and Dr. Stuart are quite pleased with the overall design of the website. Dr. Ford hopes to present the website and the bookmark at CUHE’s Summer Institute 2013, Transforming Urban Education: Engaged Communities Matter.
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