OLE: Personal Economics

http://yhspersonalecon.wikispaces.com/home

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The Personal Economics Wiki serves as a required semester course for grade 12 students at Yavne High School. Solely face-to-face until now, this course uses the curriculum provided by the National Endowment for Financial Education (NEFE) with additional material obtained and evaluated by the teacher. The main objective of the course is for students to gain financial literacy that will help them plan for and succeed in their future endeavors. In addition to the terminology, concepts, and practices of personal finance, the students will make decisions about what financial practices will meet their financial goals and values. The Wiki is divided into six modules: Money Management, Borrowing, Earning Power, Investing, Financial Services, and Insurance. Each module consists of a short list of objectives, financial terms related to the topic, assignments, additional resources, and discussion. In addition, summative assessments are included on a separate page. Accessible student tools include an events calendar, a project page with team assignments, a teacher contact page, and a general discussion page for any financial advice the students would like to share. Ultimately, this Wiki can stand alone or be used in conjunction with daily face time.

The Impact of TPACK

The transition from face-to-face to an OLE has been guided by the principals of TPACK. In terms of content knowledge, the NEFE materials are already arranged in a way that allows students to build their financial knowledge sequentially with learning activities to reinforce terms and concepts. Blended pedagogy is the best approach for the content of this course. Behaviorally, students will learn the terms of each module. Cognitively, students will reflect on the financial concepts and how they might apply them to their lives. Constructively, students
will create meaning through project-based learning, supported by the creation of their own wiki pages, as well as an eventual ePortfolio. The technology tools in this wiki support the learning activities for the content and the learning styles of the students. One online tool is a voiced presentation to replace the traditional lecture. The advantage is that students can view the presentation when and where they can give it their full attention. Another tool is a practice quiz using Quizlet, which allows for self-assessment. An option in one of the discussions includes VoiceThread for students who would like to speak instead of write their responses. Also, students will complete a Google form for a previously paper and pencil survey that the teacher tallied and analyzed. Now Google forms will allow for immediate results that even the students will view and discuss. Although these Web 2.0 tools are simple to implement, they each serve a purpose to improve the delivery of the content to the students.

Design and Development

A wiki best matches the needs of this course and its learners. First, a wiki is simple to create and maintain. Both learning materials and activities can be easily posted, accessed, and revised. Also, a wiki allows students to work collaboratively using Web 2.0 tools. Since security is of great concern to the administration, a wiki has secure privacy settings and can be self-contained so that students are not leaving the site. For all of these reasons, the Personal Economics Wiki is hosted by Wikispaces.

One concern of design includes the organization of the modules; therefore, each of the six modules has its own page within the Wiki with a link on the sidebar. This makes it easy for students to keep track of where they are in their learning process. Each module wiki page closely matches the organization of the booklets provided by NEFE. The student learning objectives are listed at the top of the page with a link to a NEFE pdf file that describes each
objective in more detail. This is an effective way to communicate the ultimate goals of each module to the students.

Knowledge of financial terminology is imperative to increasing the students’ financial literacy; therefore, a table listing the terms from each module is the next item displayed. Included in this section is a Quizlet link to a practice quiz that the students may review at any time but are encouraged to take the quiz after reading the module booklet. Quizlet allows a quick review and immediate check of their answers. The students can also change the format to match their learning style, from simple matching questions to a timed matching game. Based on previous courses and discussions with these particular students, they like to explore various online resources, so this will be a great way to introduce a technology tool that they can use in this course, as well as in others.

Next, each assignment is briefly described with links and due dates when applicable. For the most part, this is self-paced content that is in the suggested order for completion in order for the students to build their knowledge in a logical way; however, students may choose to complete the assignments in the order that best matches their learning style and time constraints, as long as they meet the necessary deadlines. Also, Additional Resources include previously approved pdf and Word files and fantastic websites that will further engage the students in the content. However, these external links may need to be deleted if the administration does not approve them. Certainly, this would be a shame, but the school’s policy must be followed in order to implement this OLE.

Assessments, both formative and summative, are based on the learning objectives. In addition, every effort to make use of 21st century skills has been implemented. For instance, formative assessments make use of the discussion widget in the Wiki so students can not only
express their own opinions but also respond to others. Other formative assessments separate specific objectives by utilizing NEFE exercises. For the Module 1 summative assessment, teams will create a wiki page that allows them to collaborate and share their understanding of a particular financial value. Although criteria are specified, students will need to be creative with their use of technology. As it is important that students internalize the concepts, the final Module 1 project is an individual one that asks them to apply what they have learned in order to create a realistic budget.

The Students

The students in this class are not familiar with online learning environments; however, they are technologically savvy in their personal lives. Therefore, the teacher expects that they will need an introduction to the basic workings of a wiki but that they will explore and master the navigation mostly on their own. Although an instructional video on using the Wiki will be added, this course will begin with face-to-face interaction to alleviate the students’ discomfort with this new format. Both demonstration and guided practice will allow the students to increase familiarity within the OLE.

Once the students are familiar with the layout of the Wiki, they will begin to address the content and the assignments on their own or collaboratively for certain projects. The teacher will be available to answer questions in person, on the wiki question page, and via email so students should not feel that they are taking this course alone. As a side benefit, the students will be able to continue with the course when a substitute teacher is needed resulting in consistency in their learning.
The Future

Although this Wiki is ready for student use in the first module, future enhancements will be made as time allows. Of course, the development of Modules 2-6, as well as the ePortofolio instructions is a priority. Also, since this is a semester course, edits and revisions can be made to improve the Wiki for a different group of students. A small but impactful enhancement is to make the pages more visually appealing by adding images related to the content. Lastly, the use of more Web 2.0 tools will not only improve student participation and success but also allow the teacher to monitor the students’ progress more easily. Overall, this wiki is expected to increase individual student involvement with the content and with each other without sacrificing the relationship with the teacher.