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Google Documents

Kimberly Mulkey

Diffusion of Innovations MEDT 8461

University of West Georgia

Abstract

Google Documents is an online collaboration tool. It allows various people to contribute to the same document in real time. There is a choice of a document (similar to Word,) spreadsheet (Excel,) presentation (Power Point,) and a form which can be used for surveys in which the results feed directly into a spreadsheet. For the implementation of this innovation, forms, spreadsheets, and another tool called Jing were used.

The purpose of this implementation was to aid in the process of getting children to the appropriate transportation each day. It has been extremely successful, and there have been fewer errors in the afternoons. The change model that parallels this implementation is Ely’s Conditions of Change. The tool and the environment are vital to its success.

Google Documents

The Setting

The Woodward Academy Primary School is a division of the independent school, Woodward Academy. The main portion of the academy is located in College Park, Georgia with approximately 2900 students ranging from P-K through 12th grade and spreading over 4 separate facilities with an additional facility in Duluth. The Primary school has 384 students from Kindergarten through 3rd grade. There are 22 classrooms with teachers and full time paraprofessionals in each room. There are 13 support teachers for art, science, P.E., music, computer, dance, guidance counseling and library. Each classroom is equipped with a Smart Board, 6 computers, digital camera, and two printers (one color inkjet and one laser black.)

Woodward Academy prides itself on being one of the most diverse independent schools in the Atlanta area. However, the majority of our students are from higher income earning families, due to the fact that tuition ranges from $12,000 (P-K) to $19,950. All of the students have access to computers outside of school.

The Innovation

Students come from a 50 mile radius each day using various modes of transportation, such as, bus, car, and Marta. There are extensive after school opportunities for the students (after-school care program, tennis, golf, karate, piano, newspaper club, Spanish club, chess, and more) which can be an issue with getting the students to the proper transportation in the afternoon. This was the motivation for creating a better system of making sure the students and teachers knew the correct destination in the afternoon.

Every teacher and paraprofessional has a Google account and has access to the Transportation Google Spreadsheet. Every morning the teachers enter the mode of transportation on which their students will go home that day. If there are changes via phone call from parents, child went home sick, or cancellations of activities, the office or teacher can make changes. There is a color coded system for which person made the change. At the end of the day, the teachers and bus coordinators are able to check the up-to-date document to ensure the students get to the correct place.

This innovation was implemented in August of 2008. There have been many obstacles and problems to address, but it has been successful. The bus coordinators are now informed that a child went home early instead of waiting for them to get there. There have only been a few mishaps, since the change.

Analysis

Is it the tool or the environment that allowed the successful implementation of Google Docs? Google Docs is a great innovative tool and could be integrated into many situations; however this writer would have to emphatically state both. As Ely stated, “the characteristics of the innovation are not the only factors influencing its adoption” (Ellsworth, J.B., 2000, p. 66). The implementation of the Primary School’s transportation document paralleled Ely’s eight conditions of change.

The first year the Primary School was open, there were various trials for how to make sure the students went to the correct destination. There were basically 22 different ways that it was being done (each teacher did it their way.) It wasn’t working effectively. There were too many mistakes affecting the student, teacher, parent, bus coordinator, and the office staff. There was “dissatisfaction with the status quo” (Ellsworth, J.B., 2000, p. 67).

There were several ways the teachers were aided in the implementation of this endeavor. With the thought in mind that, “one of the most common causes of non-adoption or discontinuance is insufficient training of teachers and staff” (Ellsworth, J.B., 2000, p. 68) this venture was introduced face to face in a faculty meeting. There were also how-to videos created using Jing to remind teachers as needed. The technology staff was available to help and answer questions.

Ely’s third condition of change, “which requires that resources are available” (Ellsworth, J.B., 2000, p. 69), wasn’t an issue at all. Each teacher has their own computer and the paraprofessional has a laptop. They were able to create their accounts in their classroom and can access their information from any computer. Google Documents is a free online application, so there was no cost or installation of software.

“Implementers must have time to learn, adapt, integrate, and reflect on what they are doing (1990, as cited in Ellsworth, 2000, p. 69), which is the premise for the fourth condition. As stated earlier training began face-to-face, and the teachers had video and availability to technical support. During the implementation we continued with the old way for backup. The teachers tried it and gave feedback. Changes were made daily for about 2 weeks, such as, color changes, dates, refresh or re-sign in at the end of the day. There are still issues if both the teacher and the paraprofessional are absent, because the substitute does not have access. The office usually takes care of that classroom.

The fifth condition is the only condition that is not completely in existence. The reward for this innovation is an intrinsic one. The teachers should feel good that they accomplished getting students to the correct place in the afternoon. Since some students take Marta or ride a bus 45 minutes away, somebody has to be waiting for them at their destination. Another incentive is that they are interrupted less during the day. In the past, the office called each room with changes to daily transportation.

Participation in this innovation was not an option, which aided in its success. “Recognized leaders, both formal and informal, in the environment communicated explicitly that general participation in the innovation was expected” (Ellsworth, J.B., 2000, p. 71). However, feedback from the participants was encouraged and considered with all of the changes. This allowed the teachers to “buy in” to the change.

As for the final two conditions commitment (seventh) and leadership (eighth,) they were codependent. There was evidence of leadership, so the teachers were more apt to commit. The goal is to provide an educational setting, nurturing environment, and protect our students to the best of our abilities. The leadership sees this as a priority; the teachers see this as a priority, so therefore everyone is committed.

Results

The real success of this innovation is that teachers are learning a new collaboration tool. They are seeing the value in how a technology tool can aid in accomplishing tasks easier and more efficiently. Even though this innovation does not directly affect instruction, it can aid in time management to allow more instructional activities to occur. It will also open possibilities to collaboration with others around the world.

References

Ellsworth, J.B. (2000*). Surviving change: A survey of educational change models.* ERIC Clearinghouse on Information and Technology, IR-109. (Eric Document Reproduction Service No. ED 443 417.