

Reflection: Using Google Docs in an educational setting

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MEDT 7462- Module 8

Google Docs is a service that is obviously the culmination of several milestones in Web 2.0 technology. Just being able to store and retrieve documents (similar to "Cloud Computing") is a fantastic feature that will draw many to it initially. The next obvious achievement is a fully functional online office suite with editing features that are well designed and offer the user most every common editing tool. (The automatic saves are a fantastic addition that some paid word processors still have not gotten right!) Even with all of these features, though, the real magic of Google Docs is the sharing and collaboration. These features have been integrated nicely and allow for targeted sharing and permissions.

I first encountered document sharing similar to this with Microsoft's SharePoint system... a high cost and overly complicated tool that misses many of the marks that Google Docs has perfected. Looking back on it now, I wish that Google Docs had been my first experience with collaborative file sharing. It's a far superior tool in that respect.

For group-based activities where student teamwork is required, Google Docs is the ideal tool, allowing for asynchronous collaboration of ideas. Students can add or edit portions of the assignment from where ever internet access is available and on their own schedules. This closely models the collaborative activities found in many of today's businesses and is an excellent way to allow students to practice using Web 2.0 tools in a structured environment.

Also, not to sound repetitive in this series of reflections... but I must shake my head in wonder again that this tool is offered for free. That may be its greatest innovation of all.