Using Wikis to Stimulate Collaborative Learning

Background
- Wikis have attracted interest in higher education as they facilitate the processes required for developing student group assignments. Potential advantages of wikis are that students can collaboratively construct knowledge and provide peer-to-peer feedback.
- Collaborative group projects within a wiki environment can mimic communities of practice that nursing students will face as future health professionals.

Challenges
- Uneven and unequal contributions among group members
- Students’ apprehension about being the first member to initiate the project
- Students’ lack of comfort and familiarity in editing their peers’ work.
- Students’ unease with exposure of individual draft work and accepting editing of their work by peers.
- Student group differences in the use of wikis. Some groups embraced collaboration within the wikis and other groups worked and only submitted their final project through the wiki tool.

Key Insights
- The critical need to create an effective and supportive wiki learning environment.

The Project
Goal: To assess the implementation of wikis in two online elective courses comprised of nursing students in third or fourth year undergraduate levels in interdisciplinary health sciences courses.
1) Advanced Pathophysiology course (18 students) that involved five self-appointed groups who developed a case study-based assignment with milestones.
2) Women’s Health course (84 students) in which 15 self-appointed groups engaged in a two-phased group wiki project that was made available for all students in the course to view online.
Evaluation: Online surveys and instructor observations.

Benefits
- Allowed instructors to provide feedback to each group within the wikis prior to due dates; identify individual student contributions by comparing document versions; clarify each group’s timeline progression towards the final project; and observe and intervene into group dynamics.
- Allowed students an ease of collaborations due to the online availability of assignment drafts; the ability to collaborate synchronously or asynchronously; and clarification of each student’s contributions through time stamping.

Benefits
- Use of a systematic approach such as the STOLEN approach (Foord, 2007): Specific aims that match wiki use with learning outcomes; clear Timelines for students; guaranteeing Ownership of the work to the group; developing a Localised and modelled structure of collaborations and construction; establishing clear rules of Engagement; and proposing a course-specific Navigation path within the wiki platform. (www.creativeeducation.co.uk.)