Chapter 2

Enhancing the Quality of Educational Website Design through Assessment for Learning Strategies

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ABSTRACT

To improve the quality of a website, many principles or guidelines have been suggested in the literature. However, the application of related principles is not a straightforward issue. It requires the web developer with high level of self-awareness to continuously review his own works and to justify the design based on related web design principles. The web developer should behave as a reflective practitioner for creating a high-quality website which fulfilled web design principles in various aspects. However, reflection cannot be implicitly assumed as an inborn ability. Certain experiences or training must be provided so as to enable the web designer to develop high level of self-reflection. In this connection, this chapter introduces a series of assessment for learning strategies with self- and peer-assessment components for transforming a web developer into a reflective practitioner. Detailed implementation, its effectiveness and participants’ opinions of the self- and peer-assessment strategy of a case study will be reported.

INTRODUCTION

Large number of websites with various themes and applications have been developed in past decade. The creation of a general purpose website has become relatively easy with the development of different web design software which help to remove lots of technical hurdles. The emphasis of web design has shift from the foundation of how to create a website to the requirement on the quality of a website. A website can be regarded as an electronic medium to convey information. Whether the presentation of information and the design of a website can enhance users’ comprehension is a challenging and important issue in web design. In the literature, criteria, guidelines and principles were suggested to improve the quality of
web design (W3C, 2008; Zaphiris et al., 2005; Ivory & Hearst, 2002; Farkas & Farkas, 2000). However, although many web design guidelines or principles are available for reference, the application of related guidelines for creating a high-quality website is not a straightforward process. It depends very much on the ability of the web developer to continuously review his own works. The web developer should be able to sustain the awareness on related guidelines during the process of web design. It involves a high level of self-reflection to monitor the design procedure. In the literature, few studies can be found to suggest strategies to enhance the web designer’s competence of reflection in the process of creating a high quality website.

To transform a web designer into a reflective practitioner, strategies are required to allow him or her to engage in a mindful process of web design. In this connection, the self- and peer-assessment strategies have been recognized with the impact of encouraging individuals to become more reflective in their own working process (Dochy et al., 1999). The underlying rationale is based on the assessment for learning initiative which has been advocated in recent years especially after the contribution of Black and Wiliam (1998) who conducted extensive review on related research and confirmed beneficial evidences in improving performance. For the sake of improving the quality of a website, this chapter aims to introduce a self- and peer-assessment strategy to enhance a web developer’s awareness on the application of web design principles in the web creation process. The chapter will also reports the experience of implementing the strategy. Actual improvements on the web design and participants’ opinions toward the strategy will also be elaborated.

BACKGROUND

This section provides a discussion on what competence a web developer should acquire so as to create a high-quality website. The author attempts to elaborate the challenge of creating a high-quality website. It follows with an introduction on some suggested web design principles or guidelines on various aspects for improving the quality of web design. The issue on the requirement of a web developer to mindfully reflect on the application of web design principles in the process is identified at the end of this section.

The Challenge of Creating a High-Quality Website

The design of a website can be regarded as a complicated process since it demands knowledge and skills in various domains. The fundamental purpose of creating a website is to convey information to the target audiences. The strategy to appropriately arrange texts, graphics and other elements in the website is critical for creating an effective communication with target users. Research can be found to address the communication issues in web design. For example, in Burch’s (2001) article, it explored the communications issues in web-based distance education and discussed related web design considerations. Geissler, Zinkhan, and Watson (2001) also conducted a study on web page complexity and further suggested that communication effectiveness is related to web page complexity. As reflected in the nature of a website, a web developer should equip with certain level of understanding on communication theory for creating a high-quality website.

The aesthetic design of a website can also be regarded as an important attribute of a high-quality website. A website is required to be appealing so as to attract target users to explore the website. It is interesting that most users’ first impression on a website was the impression of beauty (Schenkman &

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