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July 16, 2011

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Fall, 2010

Online Professional Learning for Educators



CAPSTONE PROPOSAL

Master's Degree in Instructional Technology

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Date:	7-16-2011
Capstone Title:	Online Professional Learning for Educators
Is this a Capstone Project or Study?	This is a project to develop an online professional learning course for educators in the Cherokee County School District
Client Name & Description	<p>Cherokee County School District</p> <p>This capstone project will provide all teachers in grades K-8 in the Cherokee County School District the opportunity to complete an online professional learning course which will earn them 1 PLU. This course will cover seventeen online resources that the district currently has a subscription. The course will also give the teachers the experience of collaborating with other teachers while exploring these resources and creating projects to support and improve their student learning.</p>

1. CAPSTONE PROBLEM OR NEED

Professional Learning is vital for educators to improve student learning, support instruction in the classroom, and to give educators opportunities for their own personal learning growth. However, professional development funds are continuing to be cut from the state and local budgets. In addition, teachers have many meetings, parent conferences and other family commitments after school that make it difficult for them to commit scheduled time to attend a face-2-face class. After consulting with Debbie Childress, Supervisor of Instructional Technology, Jackie Miller, Supervisor of Professional Development, and Esther Brenneman, Facilitator of Instructional Technology, we determined there was a need for professional online learning for the educators in our district. We also decided that the course should promote our online subscription resources whose usage statistics had been low over the last several years. I will be developing an online course designed for teachers to earn professional learning units, improve their classroom instruction and have the flexibility to complete the class requirements when it is convenient for them.

2. OBJECTIVES/DELIVERABLES

Based on the need for professional online learning for educators in our district, I plan to accomplish the following goals:

- Demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively integrate technology into their own teaching practice and to collaboratively plan with and assist other educators in utilizing technology to improve teaching, learning, and assessment.
- Develop and implement technology-based professional learning that aligns to state and national professional learning standards, integrates technology to support online

components, models principles of adult learning, and promotes best practices in teaching, learning, and assessment.

- Design and create an online course to promote usage of online subscription resources and support lesson development that integrates higher order thinking skills to improve student learning.
- Develop, model, and facilitate the use of online and blended learning, digital content, and learning networks to support and extend student learning and expand opportunities and choices for professional learning for teachers and administrators.
- Design and implement program evaluations to determine the overall effectiveness of professional learning on deepening teacher content knowledge, improving teacher pedagogical skills and/or increasing student learning

3. PSC STANDARDS

Standard 2: Teaching, Learning, & Assessment

Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively integrate technology into their own teaching practice and to collaboratively plan with and assist other educators in utilizing technology to improve teaching, learning, and assessment.

Element 2.1 Content Standards & Student Technology Standards

Candidates model and facilitate the design and implementation of technology-enhanced learning experiences aligned with student content standards and student technology standards.

Element 2.3 Authentic Learning

Candidates model and facilitate the use of digital tools and resources to engage students in authentic learning experiences.

Element 2.4 Higher Order Thinking Skills

Candidates model and facilitate the effective use of digital tools and resources to support and enhance higher order thinking skills (e.g., analyze, evaluate, and create); processes (e.g., problem-solving, decision-making); and mental habits of mind (e.g., critical thinking, creative thinking, metacognition, self-regulation, and reflection).

Element 2.5 Differentiation

Candidates model and facilitate the design and implementation of technology-enhanced learning experiences making appropriate use of differentiation, including adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment based upon an analysis of learner characteristics, including readiness levels, interests, and personal goals.

Standard 3: Digital Learning Environments

Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to create, support, and manage effective digital learning environments.

Element 3.1 Classroom Management & Collaborative Learning

Candidates model and facilitate effective classroom management and collaborative learning strategies to maximize teacher and student use of digital tools and resources

Element 3.2 Managing Digital Tools and Resources

Candidates effectively manage digital tools and resources within the context of student learning experiences.

Element 3.3 Online & Blended Learning

Candidates develop, model, and facilitate the use of online and blended learning, digital content, and learning networks to support and extend student learning and expand opportunities and choices for professional learning for teachers and administrators.

Standard 4: Digital Citizenship & Responsibility

Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to model and promote digital citizenship and responsibility.

Element 4.2 Safe, Healthy, Legal & Ethical Use

Candidates model and facilitate the safe, healthy, legal, and ethical uses of digital information and technologies.

Standard 5: Professional Learning & Program Evaluation

Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to conduct needs assessments, develop technology-based professional learning programs, and design and implement regular and rigorous program evaluations to assess effectiveness and impact on student learning.

Element 5.2 Professional Learning

Candidates develop and implement technology-based professional learning that aligns to state and national professional learning standards, integrates technology to support face-to-face and online components, models principles of adult learning, and promotes best practices in teaching, learning, and assessment.

Element 5.3 Program Evaluation

Candidates design and implement program evaluations to determine the overall effectiveness of professional learning on deepening teacher content knowledge, improving teacher pedagogical skills and/or increasing student learning.

4. CAPSTONE DESCRIPTION

The Cherokee County School District has numerous online subscription digital resources available to their teachers and students. The digital resources for K-8 are divided into four

different categories; research tools, interactive learning resources, test prep resources, and specialized resources. The resource tools the district intended for students and teachers to use for research include Galileo, Galileo for Kids, Grolier Online, Grolier Online for Kids, Nettekker, NoodleTools, and Nystrom Maps and Globes. Interactive learning resources include Discovery Education, QUIA, Brainpop, and Brainpop, Jr. Test prep resources are USA Test Prep for 6th-8th grade and the Georgia Online Assessment System (OAS). Specialized resources include Soundzabound, which allows students to download royalty free music for projects and Pearson SuccessNet, which is supplement to the language arts textbook for K-5th.

Many teachers do not take and/or have the time to explore these many digital subscription resources on their own time. Currently, our district can pull school usage data for the majority of these resources. However, many times teachers are using other teacher logins or they have transferred to another school and their prior school is receiving the usage data. School usage data for the subscription resources is pulled once a year and sent to the school principal. Individual usage data can be requested for some of these digital resources, but not all. For evaluating individual usage, participants will be polled at the end of the course and again in six months for which subscription resources they are using and how often.

The online course I will be creating will have several goals for the participants; the course will give teachers the opportunity to explore all of these digital subscription resources, to participate in discussion forums with others in the class about the resources and units created, and to develop two common core lesson units that will support and enhance higher order thinking skills integrating the subscription resources in a high quality way with their students. The participants will also have the opportunity to begin a support community with members of

the online course that will be sustained during and after the course completion. There will be handouts and video tutorials within the online course to assist with directions of assignments and descriptions of the various resources to help with login and navigation. The participants will be submitting their lesson units, several student examples from the unit projects, rubrics and student and teacher reflections of the project. They will also add links to all of the digital resources that will be utilized by their student on their class website for their students to access from home or school.

This experiment will benefit my school district in several ways. The first benefit will be that it will create another learning option for teachers to earn professional learning units and develop an online community of educators in which to collaborate and share teaching strategies. Teachers today lead busy lives and professional learning is often hard to fit into their schedules. Online learning gives them the opportunity to conduct their learning during a time that is convenient for them and also saves them time commuting to a face to face class. Online learning also gives them the opportunity to build an online community with other educators to share ideas, improve teaching strategies, and further their own learning beyond the online course content. A benefit for students will be the development of lessons that incorporate higher order thinking skills with the integration of these online resources into the student learning. The next benefit is twofold. The online course will increase usage of the digital online resources the district currently invests a large amount of money in each year. And, the increased usage will benefit the students and teachers because these resources are safe and reliable resources that will enhance teaching and learning through research tools, interactive learning tools, and test preparation tools.

The online course will be developed and reside on our district Moodle server. The timeline for the online course will be five weeks beginning April 30th and ending June 4th. Participants will spend approximately ten hours on this course and earn one professional learning unit. All of our technology professional learning classes are currently ten hour classes. This online course will be available at this link [Elementary and Middle Online Resources](#). The course will be available for guest logins by typing “ksu” as the guest password. 2011.

My personal learning goals for conducting this experiment with online learning include:

1. Understanding and applying skills supporting and relating to our district’s Learner Management System, Moodle
2. Creating and designing online learning courses for educators.
3. Evaluating the increased usage of the district’s digital subscription resources.

Through this experiment and understanding of Moodle software, I will be able to support teachers who are using the Moodle system with their students for online learning. Secondly, I will be able to continue creating and designing more online learning courses for educators, and possibly students in the future. Third, this experiment will allow me to learn more about how to increase usage of the district’s digital resources, as well as other software the district has invested to increase teacher and student learning and improvement.

5. EVALUATION PLAN

The quality and integrity of this online course is very important. The teachers need to gain knowledge and be able to apply their learned knowledge to their classroom teaching strategies in new innovative ways that will improve their student learning by integrating the resources using

higher order thinking skills; analyzing, evaluating and creating. Participants will be inspired not only by the course content, but by the collaboration with other online classmates within the course as they build an online community with each other. The participants will be allowed to login any time after the course is completed to review information or communicate with colleagues from the course.

Participants will be developing two common core lesson units that will support and enhance higher order thinking skills integrating the subscription resources in a high quality way with their students. These lessons will be evaluated using a rubric. The participants will have another classmate peer-review their lesson using the rubric before submitting their lesson to evaluate the level of the lesson's student product; analyzing, evaluating or creating.

The next step to measuring the success of this professional development course will be an evaluation tool at the end of the course. This tool will include five open ended questions that relate to the how the teachers will integrate the course with their students, their opinions of the quality of the discussion forums and assignments, and how they feel course components and course layout could be improved. There will also be four additional Likert scale questions that focus on course content and instructor responsiveness. In addition, the participants will have a space for free comments. This evaluation will be created in QUIA, one of our resources highlighted in the online class. This evaluation is linked within the course and will be available for guests to view.

The third step in measuring success of this online course will be to conduct a follow-up evaluation in six months with the participants that will inquire which resources are being integrated in their classroom with their students currently and how often. In addition, they will be asked what primary level of integration they are using with these resources. This evaluation will

also ask if they have logged into the online course for review, information, and/or to collaborate with other participants.

6. RELATED RESEARCH OR LITERATURE

After reading the study, *Professional Development at a Distance” A Mixed-Method Study Exploring Inservice Teachers’ Views on Presence Online* by Holmes, Signer and MacLeod, there are several key components necessary for the online course. Teacher presence, social presence and cognitive presence are important to the success and level of learning of the online course. Learners felt feedback from the teacher was vital. However, they wanted private feedback from the teacher for negative criticism. Social presence was evident by the learner placing value on the discussion responses from their classmates, in addition to learning from them. Cognitive presence was evidenced by the participants wanting to apply their learning to real-life situations and to incorporate their learning into their instructional strategies. Results of the study survey also found with the growth of social networking and an increased ease of use of Web 2.0 tools, teachers want to use this kind of online interaction with their classmates and instructor in their professional lives, as they do in their personal. The study also found quality online courses to include these key areas; content, instructional design, student assessment, technology, and course evaluation and management. In this study, *Professional Development at a Distance: A Mixed-Method Study Exploring Inservice Teachers’ Views on Presence Online*, researchers wanted to know the participant’s perspective of their online professional development experience relating to course satisfaction, the factors and features that contribute to their satisfaction and the impact on the active classroom from the online professional development experience. Inservice teachers that took online courses over the course of one year were invited to participate in the survey at the end of the course they took. From seven courses, 95 out of 103 participants completed the

online survey. The teachers participating represented K-12 urban private school teachers. The results indicated that social presence and teacher presence served as the greatest factors related to participants' learning and satisfaction in the online experience. Social presence involved interactions with other colleagues. These interactions allowed the participants to develop relationships that promoted learning. There were also suggestions that related to instructor presence in the online course. Suggestions included more feedback and interactions, faster responses and more guidance from the online instructor.

In the study, *Transfer of Online Professional Learning to Teachers' Classroom Practice*, (Herrington, Herrington, Hoban & Reid, 2009) the researchers were evaluating the effectiveness of online professional learning and how that learning was transferred to the teachers' classroom practice in K-12 classrooms. The study focused on the challenges and consequences for the teachers transferring this professional learning, the conditions that supported teachers in their teaching and professional learning of information and communications technology, and the impact of teacher professional learning on student information and communications technology experiences. The pilot implementation of the professional learning course included 170 teachers as participants, from 85 schools. Then, 36 of the 170 teachers were targeted to participate in the study which included two phases. The first phase was a telephone interview with the teachers that covered development of work programs, implementation of lessons, outcomes, challenges, impact on students, and willingness to improve. These interviews were recorded and analyzed. The second phase involved selection of in-depth cases. A sample of eight teachers were chosen to participate in the more in-depth inquiry based on their willingness and the recommendation of the researcher who interviewed the teachers. The data collected from the eight cases included teacher and class observations, teacher interviews, student interviews and additional artifacts,

such as lesson plans and student work samples. The main observations that emerged from the analysis related to the design and implementation of the online modules and the teachers' need for a community of support which would include not only other teachers, but also technical support. Transfer of learning to the teacher's classroom was successful when their online learning experience was positive and valuable. The data collected in this study indicated that teacher professional learning through the online modules impacted the students substantially by engaging them in authentic and meaningful learning experiences, the students taking greater control of their learning, responding well to technology and using the technology to express themselves.

In another study, *Emerging Innovative Teacher Education from Situated Cognition in a Web-Based Environment*, the researchers' purpose was to propose principles to establish web-based learning environments incorporating situated cognition to support teacher education (Lin, Hsu, & Cheng, 2011). This study included 29 participants who were pre-service teachers in the field of biology. The three principles proposed included enhancing peripheral participation, strengthening cognitive apprenticeship, and forming special interest groups online. A website, named Technology Enhanced & Assisted Curriculum Headquarter (TEACH) was created to provide support to these pre-service teachers as they took part in course activities of their teacher education. An online self-report survey was used to collect the participants' usefulness of the program through the use of the TEACH website. The survey results indicated that the function of enhancing peripheral participation in the teacher education course was perceived as quite useful, the pre-service teachers showed positive opinions toward the cognitive apprenticeship strengthened by TEACH in their teacher education program, and the pre-service teachers perceived the function of forming special interest groups online to

be useful at a level slightly over neutral. The online environment offers a level of convenience for the participant, because it can eliminate the need for travel, childcare and scheduled class sessions. The online learning format tends to be cost-effective and more appealing overall (Holmes, Signer & MacLeod, 2010).

References

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