Teaching-Learning Interchange: An Online Support Community for New Teachers

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Abstract

The Teaching-Learning Interchange (TLI), a federal Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers to Use Technologies project, will be in its second year of developing an online support community for “pre-intern teachers,” a designation in California for new teachers who are not credentialed and have not passed subject matter competency. The intent of the pre-intern program is to provide a way for those wishing to enter the teaching profession to attain subject matter competency and a credential while they are working in the classroom. The program originated because of a severe teacher shortage in California; 30,000 new teachers are needed each year for the coming ten years. TLI has partnered with 15 county offices to have access to pre-interns and corporate partners who are developing emerging technologies that are being piloted with select mentor and pre-intern teachers. This paper will describe how new technologies are being applied to the needs of pre-interns.

Introduction

The Teaching-Learning Interchange (TLI) is piloting a study to determine the effectiveness of several emerging technologies in an online community to support the neediest of new teachers, California’s “pre-intern” teachers, a designation in California for new teachers who are not credentialed and have not passed subject matter competency. The study asks the following questions:

- What are the essential requirements for a successful online support community for new teachers?
- Can new teacher mentoring be effectively augmented through the use of electronic communication tools?
- What are the detractors to the technology enhanced mentoring experience?
- What were the unexpected outcomes from the technology augmented experience?
- What are the perceived benefits of the various communications tools to the program and to the mentoring process?

Description of Technologies for Pre-intern Needs

The TLI includes several corporate partners who are developing emerging technologies that have potential to address the needs of new teachers. Lesson Lab provides online video of classroom practice that is particularly useful in helping pre-interns understand and plan for the complexities of classroom management and lesson delivery. Lesson Lab has a unique software package that allows instructors and pre-interns to time index a video of classroom practice while online. For example, an instructor can create an assignment to demonstrate a particular teaching practice, like responding to the efforts of learners. The assignment can then require pre-interns to view all or some of the entire video and mark where they see examples of effective or ineffective practice and write narrative descriptions of their perceptions. When the assignment is completed by all the pre-interns, a chart showing all the examples marked by pre-interns can be displayed, forming the basis of a dialog on examples marked by many and those marked by only one or two. Both instructors and pre-interns can create annotated notebooks with time codes, allowing easy access to examples of classroom practice by all concerned. Threaded discussions can also incorporate this time code feature, adding richness to dialog. The advantage of this approach is that teaching is shown within a realistic context including both effective and ineffective teaching practice. Pre-interns can explore practice via synchronous and asynchronous online discussions to obtain deep levels of understanding of the complexities of teaching. Both instructors and pre-interns are expected to report that this technology is very helpful in improving their classroom management, lesson planning and delivery. Barriers might include difficulties learning the interface.
Apple Computer recently redesigned its Apple Learning Interchange (ALI) to include video cases along with Units of Practice for particular lessons and links to related resources. A search engine is included on this portal that links Units of Practice to state and/or subject standards. Pre-interns will be given structured access to the ALI. They are expected to report that the ALI is useful in obtaining and adapting lesson plans, viewing examples of successful practice and accessing resources and standards. Barriers may be information overload.

ClearPhone provides software for conducting video conferences among small groups anytime/anywhere via Internet access. TLI identified a number of subject matter science specialists (the area of greatest need) from the Exploratorium. They are being connected with pre-interns who need to attain subject matter competence. Each participant will be given a net cam, whiteboard and software. Online meetings will be conducted in which several pre-interns can meet with a specialist and discuss topics covered on the Praxis science test. The whiteboard allows participants to share lesson plans and student work samples. Expectations are that both the specialists and pre-interns will give ClearPhone high marks in the ability to meet from distant locations. Those in rural areas with long distances are expected to have similar benefits to those in congested urban areas, notably the efficiency of meeting without the disadvantages of travel to a common location. The pre-interns in the project are expected to score higher on subject matter exams than pre-interns in general.

InRessonance is a contracted service that is experienced in supporting web-based communities. It will provide technology-integrated model lesson plan training and online conferencing services.

**Conclusion**

The experiments of the TLI in providing such state-of-the-art technology to new teachers is expected to produce a wealth of useful applications that have great potential in future teacher preparation programs, as well as identifying a number of potential problems that go along with such innovations.