Using Web 2.0 Tools to Support ELL Students in the Elementary Classroom

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ITEC 7500: Capstone Experience and Portfolio

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Description of the Capstone Experience and Results

The purpose of this capstone experience was to utilize Web 2.0 tools while working with ELL students. During the 2015 – 2016 school year, Alcova had 286 students or 23 percent of the school's population enrolled in the ELL program. Many of these students tend to fall behind in the grade level content; especially if no English is spoken at home. The capstone experience was designed to give teachers ideas of how to enhance their reading and writing instruction by using Web 2.0 tools to benefit not only just their ELL students but also their entire class.

Teachers truly do have an incredible responsibility when instructing ELL students. Many of these students do not get much help at home since English is not always the language spoken, but the fact remains the same that "ELL students need to be competent in academic language skills in order to cope with academic demands at North American schools" (Huang, Cunningham, & Finn, 2010, p.68). As a result, teachers need to work twice as hard with these students – they need to make sure that the students understand the English language and master the content they are supposed to learn. Utilizing Web 2.0 tools is a great way to do this because of the differentiation it provides to accommodate for all students' needs. Various Web 2.0 tools such as blogs and podcasts are known to be very beneficial to ELL students because "they provide unique enhancements to the learning process: the learner constructs knowledge through active exploration, observation, processing, and interpretation while interacting with others" (Kim and Jang, 2014, p. 208). These meaningful learning experiences are what really gets through to the students and transforms their learning.

According to a study done in Turkey (Kurt, 2010), many teachers resort to using very simple technologies in their classrooms such as videos or CDs. The reason that this happens is simply because teachers are not educated in other ways to use technology effectively. As a result, this capstone seeks to solve that problem by providing teachers at Alcova Elementary School

with the technology training necessary to transform education for their ELL students. This will, in turn, impact all students since the teachers can use these tools for both their ELL students and their general education students.

The goal of this capstone experience was for the technology coach to train classroom teachers in technology tools and resources to assist them in supporting their ELL students. Throughout this training, teachers will learn about a variety of technology tools that they can use for the purpose of strengthening their ELL students in the content areas of reading and writing, and they will also have the opportunity to implement these tools with their students with the assistance of the technology coach as needed. Originally, the technology coach had hoped that at least one member of each grade level would sign up to attend this workshop. In January, after receiving administrative approval and support for this capstone project, she sent out a survey to the staff to determine the interest level for this after school workshop. A total of fourteen teachers took the survey, and thirteen of them said they would be interested in participating in the workshop. However, once all of the logistics were worked out, only five teachers were able to commit. Participants included a first grade teacher, a fourth grade teacher, a third through fifth grade special education teacher, and two ESOL teachers. This ended up being a very good number for this workshop because it allowed for a small group atmosphere made up of incredible discussions and collaboration.

Prior to the beginning of the workshop, the technology coach created a website via Weebly that listed the majority of the technology tools to be discussed throughout the five months that the workshop would go on (see Appendix A). This website included links to all of the resources to be discussed throughout this workshop as well as some student work samples done using several of these tools. The purpose of this website was for workshop participants to

see these tools in action before going back and implementing them in their own classrooms. As a general rule, teachers are more likely to want to try something with their students when they have seen an example of how the project would mostly likely turn out.

This workshop met twice a month. The first meeting took place at the beginning of the month, and the purpose of that meeting was for the technology coach to introduce a Web 2.0 tool to the teachers for them to take back to their students to try out. The meeting consisted of the technology coach first showing the participants what a final product created using the tool would look like or sound like. Then the rest of the meeting was dedicated to teaching participants how to use the tool and then assisting them in coming up with a way to utilize the tool with students. The participants had the opportunity to sign up on the technology coach's schedule if they wanted to receive additional help in their classrooms during the implementation process. The first meeting of every month always went very smoothly. Teachers were very excited about each new tool they learned, and they expressed incredible enthusiasm about trying these tools out with their students. Everyone always signed up for the technology coach to assist them in their classrooms during the implementation.

One way that this project deviated from the original proposal is that the technology coach decided to implement these tools in her second, third, and/or fourth grade specials classes to test them out before introducing them to the workshop participants. The purpose of this was to catch any problems or glitches with the tool and how those could be best resolved. This ended up being very beneficial to all of the participants since any problems experienced were able to be discussed and ironed out during the first meeting of the month. It also allowed the technology coach to gather some recent work samples to share.

The second meeting of the workshop took place at the end of the month for the purpose

of debriefing how implementation of the tool worked. Teachers were asked to post at least one student work sample to a Padlet page that would be shared at the meeting (see Appendix B). These meetings ended up being very productive. Teachers voiced any concerns or struggles they had using the Web 2.0 tools, and everyone enjoyed viewing all of the student samples. The student samples also promoted great conversations, and they gave teachers other ideas for how they could utilize the tool with students.

Another way that this project deviated from the original proposal is that the Padlet page was not consistently used. Teachers posted student work samples to the Padlet for two meetings, and then the use of the Padlet fell off. Instead, teachers just logged into the projected computer at the meeting and pulled up the student work sample they wanted to showcase. The technology coach attributed this to the teachers just being so incredibly busy and not having time to do an extra step. As a result, she decided to let the idea of the Padlet go.

One of the obstacles to completing this capstone experience was the lack of time. In April, Milestone testing took about two weeks, and as a result, virtually no technology projects could get done because most of the school's computers were being used for online testing. In addition, the technology coach was assisting during testing; and therefore was unavailable to assist any of the participants in integrating projects with the few laptops that they had left in their rooms.

One final way that this capstone deviated from the proposal was that many teachers who were not involved in the workshop heard about the activities that the participants were doing, and they wanted to get on board and try these out with their own students. As a result, they signed up for the technology coach to assist them in implementing some of these tools with their students. It was very exciting for the technology coach to see the enthusiasm travel throughout the school.

Teachers ranging from kindergarten all the way through fifth grade began trying out these tools. This is definitely the sign of a successful program. The knowledge gained in the workshop was not contained among just the five participants. Instead, it spread schoolwide.

At the end of the workshop, the technology coach sent out an evaluation to the participants about the workshop as a whole (see Appendix C). The results of the survey were very positive. Only three out of the five participants took the survey, and they all said that the workshop was very beneficial to them. When asked what they would change about the workshop for any future workshops, one teacher said that he/she would have liked more time. This was encouraging for the technology coach to hear since it showed that that teacher truly benefited from the material introduced.

Follow-up from this workshop will consist of the technology coach continuing to coach and assist these teachers as they utilize technology with their students. In addition, the technology coach will work with other teachers who did not attend the workshop but expressed interest in what they heard from the workshop participants. The ultimate goal of a successful workshop is for the participants to benefit and for it to spread beyond just the workshop participants, and that is exactly what happened.

Discussion and Reflection

Through the process of completing this capstone experience, the technology coordinator was able to experience firsthand what is involved in designing a technology workshop from the ground up. A big struggle that teachers experience is a lack of time, and that is the reason why only a handful of people signed up to participate in this workshop. However, she realized that sometimes a smaller environment can make for more meaningful conversations. The teachers who did participate in the workshop truly got better in their use of technology. They became

excited about the possibilities that technology can have for any classroom, grade level, and diverse populations of students – such as ELL. Leading this workshop proved to the technology coordinator once again that teachers must see technology in action before they will buy in and implement it with their own students. Several teachers who did not consider themselves to be technologically savvy attended the workshop, but by the end, they were doing all kinds of technology activities with their students. They also jumped right on utilizing technology with their brand new classes when the new school year started in August.

Every school needs a solid technology leader, and this capstone experience reminded the technology coordinator of the importance of leadership. As a result, she tried out a lot of these technology tools right along with the workshop participants or a couple weeks in advance. This allowed her to test the tools out to determine if there were any problems with them. In addition, it was good for the participants to see that she was trying new things along with them. That is one crucial aspect of leadership – a strong leader must be willing to go through various processes along with everyone else instead of just being the person teaching or facilitating.

The learning that took place throughout this capstone aligns to the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required of a technology facilitator and a technology leader. First, the technology coordinator demonstrated visionary leadership. Alcova has always been passionate about meeting the needs of all learners, and this capstone has supported that by focusing on the ELL learners especially. All workshop participants worked together to implement strategies to sustain technology innovations throughout the school. In addition, the entire goal of this capstone was for the technology coordinator to assist other educators in utilizing technology to improve teaching, learning, and assessment. In order for this to be successful, the technology coordinator had to have a solid understanding of how to design lessons to meet the needs of all learners so

that she could pass that knowledge on to her workshop participants. She also had to have a positive attitude toward technology and how it can improve classroom instruction. Enthusiasm can be contagious. Chances are that when one teacher sees someone excited about a new tool to try out, they will be inspired to try it out as well.

This capstone experience encompassed a variety of research-based learner-centered strategies. Technology is a great way to differentiate instruction, and the audio and visual components that it can include make it perfect for ELL students to utilize. It also makes for very authentic learning experiences. Technology opens the door for students to complete authentic activities such as STEM, project based learning, and other activities that the students are genuinely invested in. Plus, students are so comfortable with using technology since so many of them have access to some type of device at home.

All of the technology tools taught and implemented throughout this capstone promoted higher level thinking skills. They specifically focused on the create, evaluate, analyze, and apply levels. Technology tools really help these students learn how to think outside the box, and they really assist students in applying the standards they are learning.

If other technology coordinators were to implement this type of capstone experience in their school, it is of utmost necessity to get the administration on board. It could even be a good thing to have the principal introduce the workshop to the staff at a staff meeting. That way, teachers would be motivated and encouraged to attend. It would also be helpful if teachers received professional learning credits for attending this workshop. This would go on their professional learning transcript and would be a part of the hours of professional learning that teachers are required to have each year.

This would be a great project for a technology coordinator to do at the beginning of the

school year instead of in the spring. There is so much going on during the second half of the school year, and it can sometimes be difficult to get everyone together for the workshop meetings. There is also lots of testing going on that the technology coordinator needs to be involved in, and as a result, she is not readily available to assist teachers in implementing technology in their classrooms. Also, the beginning of the year is the perfect time to get students familiar with various technology programs. That way they are comfortable with using these tools throughout the entire school year in a variety of contexts.

This capstone experience was a great way to introduce some great technology tools to teachers. These technology tools were geared towards the ELL students, but the exciting is that all students can benefit from them. Technology truly can be used to enhance learning for all students.

Appendix A

Weebly Website

Appendix B

Padlet of work samples

Appendix C

Teacher Survey for the end of the ELL Workshop

Survey Results

References

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