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What Does Instructional Technology in Education Mean?

Description of Capstone Experience and Results

To begin my capstone project, I sent an email during pre-planning, informing teachers that I might visit their classroom to speak with them briefly about technology needs for the upcoming school year. I wanted teachers to be prepared with any information that could give me. During a less-stressful day of pre-planning I spoke with teachers from every department about their technology needs. Several had immediate questions about setting up their computers, laptops, printers and student computers. Several math and science teachers voiced their concerns about using their Smartboard and ELMO (opaque projectors/document cameras) in the classroom. Teachers from every department were confused about creating their classroom webpage as the format had recently changed and no training had been offered. I asked teachers about the resources they use in their classrooms and gave specific examples to help with brainstorming. This is where I was able to see what teachers were and were not using on a regular basis with their students. Speaking with teachers for a few hours gave me ideas of the kinds of trainings I could offer to support the faculty in technology integration at my school.

After speaking with teachers, I created a rough outline and timeline of trainings I would like to offer to support teachers. I emailed our content coaches and administrators to set up a time where we could discuss technology. I also needed to have my ideas approved before I began making any plans. I was able to meet with two content coaches and one administrator to discuss technology needs. Each person in attendance knew I was working on my M. Ed. degree in instructional technology and were supportive of my ideas and efforts. The mathematics content coach also offered to help with trainings and materials needed. My administrator was also very supportive and offered ideas of which

training to host first. My administrator felt it was necessary to begin with training on creating a classroom webpage through FirstClass. Our administration is adamant about using a webpage to keep students and parents informed of what is going on in the classroom and school.

I prepared for the webpage (Homework Hotline) training and posted a sign-up sheet in the faculty mailroom. The training was hosted at the end of September in the computer lab and about twenty-five teachers attended. I also had our mathematics coach and two administrators attend as well. During this training, I was also able to talk to teachers that were interested about using Twitter in the classroom with students and parents. The training lasted longer than I expected as teachers needed more help setting up their webpages than I originally anticipated. However, the training went well and teachers stayed as long as they could. Over the course of the next few weeks, I checked the webpages of the teachers that attended to see how they were doing on using their webpages. I was very impressed by the content and creativity teachers used on their webpages. Teachers had different uses for their webpages in order to support their students and parents. Our administrator also sent out an email about a month after the training, as she was happy to see teachers using their webpages and keeping them updated. A few weeks after the training, I sent a survey to teachers that attended the training. I received very positive feedback and encouragement for more training. This training gave me more confidence in helping teachers with technology integration.

Throughout the year I made myself available to teachers in case anyone needed help with technology use. I was happy to get emails or phone calls on a regular basis asking for my help with a variety of technology resources. I was able to help many teachers with what

they needed. There were a few times where I had to refer the teacher to our technology department, as I was not able to help with the technology issue. While helping teachers on a regular basis, the idea came up about helping parents with technology use as well. During our annual CMS night, I set up a computer lab on the main hallway in order to help parents with PowerSchool, Homework Hotline (teachers webpages) and Study Island. I had several other teachers in the lab with me as we had many parents to help. We were able to inform parents about keeping up with their child's grades and weekly lessons. We were also able to share with them how their child can practice content they are learning about online.

In December, I was able to host training on using Google Docs and Gmail with students. Just as before, I informed teachers over email of the training and posted a sign up sheet in the faculty mailroom. I had about fifteen teachers attend this training. I feel the turn out was not as high as the earlier training as it was near the end of the semester and teachers were feeling overwhelmed. This showed me that it is best not to host trainings too early or too late in the semester. The training went well and I was able to show teachers how their students can use Google Docs for papers, presentation and collaboration. Many teachers had never used Google Docs before and were happy with the ease of use. Many also commented on not having to keep up with flash drives anymore. Shortly after this training, I was able to meet with our mathematics content coach and administrator again to discuss technology integration progress. They were both happy with the work I was doing and encouraged me for the next semester.

In February, I was able to host training on basic Notebook software. The only teachers with Smartboards are mathematics and science teachers. These are the only teachers that would be interested in using Notebook software. About 12 teachers attended

the training. Mostly 6th and 7th grade mathematics and science teachers attended. I walked teachers through the basic tools and then showed them some fun tricks they could use. I also showed them how to use gallery items in order to create games, practice and interactive activities. Teachers were on different levels of Notebook software use. A few had never opened the program before. A few weeks after training, I emailed a survey to the teachers that attended the basic Notebook software and Google Docs/Gmail training to assess training. Teachers suggested creating a tutorial video so they could go back and review material we discussed in the training. Teachers were happy with the trainings and mentioned that they were sharing what they learned with their teammates.

In March, I decided to create a wiki for teachers to be able to access in order to find online tools for the classroom. I decided not to have training but share the wiki with the faculty at my school. The tools shared could be used for any grade level and a variety of activities or projects. A few weeks after sending the web link out to faculty over email, I spoke with teachers to see if they were using the site. Many teachers said they looked at the site and were happy to have these tools available for when they needed them. A few teachers looked at the tools and brainstormed ways to use them in the classroom. A few other teachers said they did not have the time to look through the tools yet. I expected this reaction as teachers were busy trying to review for CRCT and seemed stressed out. At the beginning of our next school year, I will remind teachers of the wiki as they may have more time then to view the online tools and come to me for any questions.

Throughout this time, I am still helping teachers or departments on an as-needed basis. Throughout the year I have also been able to help parents with online resources. Whenever our team met with a parent, I asked them if they were able to access

PowerSchool or the Internet. For those that could, I walked them through logging on to PowerSchool and checking their child's grade. I also shared sites that their child could use in order to practice for the CRCT and review classroom material. I also showed parents how to access our classroom webpages for the most up-to-date information and lesson plans. If parents had cellphones that could receive text messages, I informed them of following us on Twitter. Parents would be able to receive the same text message alerts their child does and the parents can keep up with what their child is doing in the classroom. Parents were happy for the extra help and almost every parent signed up to receive text message alerts as it was difficult for their child to communicate assignments or keep up with work.

Overall, I feel my proposed capstone project went to plan. My administration supported my efforts and so did many of the teachers at my school. Since I teach in a small system and we do not have many technology training opportunities, I feel teachers were responsive to what I was able to provide. I think I was able to help teachers the most by being available to help them on an as-needed basis. Once I helped a teacher, he or she was able to share that information with teammates or other colleagues.

Throughout this capstone experience, I had to learn or stay up-to-date with several technologies. When teachers requested help or I planned training, I wanted to make sure I knew enough to be able to assist teachers in a productive way. I knew how to use many of the technologies but at times, I needed to learn more in case teachers had more specific questions or decided to use the technology in a different way. There were also times where I had to contact our technology department to gain access to blocked sites or to ask for help on technical issues I was not sure about. Throughout the trainings, I had to be patient with

teachers as they were on different levels of technology use. Some teachers needed more assistance while others were ready to move on. I wanted to balance and keep both happy but it was sometimes difficult to do that. The obstacles I faced while working on my capstone project did not hinder me from completing what I intended to accomplish.

Throughout the year, I evaluated my capstone project by surveying teachers, speaking with teachers on a regular basis about what they were doing and observing their finished products when possible. My evaluations showed that teachers were happy with the trainings and the one-on-one help. If teachers had not been able to implement something new they learned they intended to use it at some point in the future or for a specific unit. My evaluations also showed that teachers would continue to need help with technology use. Several teachers wanted to attend trainings but were not able to. I may need to think about offering different days for trainings in the future to ensure as many teachers as possible can attend.

Because technology is always changing and new tools are available on a regular basis, I feel that it is important for me to continue supporting teachers with trainings and one-on-one technology help. This will help colleagues with technology integration as well as keep me up-to-date with emerging technologies. I want to continue to support teachers and I hope that this will lead to other teachers being able to lend technology support as well.

Discussion and Reflection

A technology facilitator and leader should share the technology vision throughout the school. They should be able to model the use of technology and teach educators to use it with students to engage learning. Technology facilitators must be able to work with a

variety of people and their technology abilities. Just like teachers, technology facilitators must be patient and teach. It will not help teachers to do the work for them; they have to be able to learn about as well as troubleshoot the technology they are using. I found that teachers become easily frustrated with technology if it does not work the first few times. Technology facilitators must be able to calm the teachers down and work through the problem with them. Technology facilitators must know what teachers need in the classroom and be able to plan the most effective trainings. They need to work closely with teachers on a regular basis in order to know teacher needs. Technology facilitators must also be up to date with current and emerging technologies in order to be useful to teachers. Many teachers do not have time to research or find new resources available to them. This is where the technology facilitator comes in to keep teachers updated to maximize student engagement inside as well as outside of the classroom. I also learned that it is tough to break old habits. Many teachers choose to use the same piece of technology, as they do not want to learn about new technology. I do not want teachers to get in the habit of doing the same thing everyday as this becomes boring for students as well as teachers. I want teachers to be willing to learn about new resources as well as how to use them. I believe getting teachers on board is the most difficult part of being a technology facilitator. Many are willing yet; many are comfortable in their old ways.

My advice to someone addressing similar needs is to know your teachers and their needs. Talk with teachers before beginning anything to discuss available technology and what technologies would be useful to them in their classroom. Do not push integrating technology on a teacher but listen and help when needed. It is good for teachers to know their options and ways of implementing technology. This is how they can come up with

their own ideas to meet the needs of their unique classroom. I would also advise using some of these technologies in your own classroom to give teachers ideas and show results of successful implementation. Teachers may be skeptical and need valid outcomes for assurance. After speaking with teachers meet with an administrator for extra support. Teachers need to know that administration supports technology integration. Administration can also inform teachers of the school vision and how technology can support it.

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