Let’s Get It Done Together: Engaging and Supportive Professional Development for Lee County K-5 Schools Capstone Report

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**Description of the Capstone Experience and Results**

In this experience, the candidate aimed to improve the professional development of the faculty at four schools serving students in grades Kindergarten through Grade 5 in the Lee County School System: Kinchafoonee Primary School (KPS), Lee County Primary School (LCPS), Lee County Elementary School (LCES), and Twin Oaks Elementary School (TOES). In working with the instructional supervisors at each school, the candidate developed a schedule for professional development targeted at improving teacher understanding and the use of twenty-first century skills in the development of lessons. The focus of the year’s development was to promote the four C’s (Collaboration, Creation, Critical Thinking, and Communication) with the use of new technology recently purchased for each school. The goal of the candidate was to create engaging professional development centered around this focus, transitioning from the traditional, lecture-type development to a hands-on, experiential model while also providing coaching when needed and virtual support through a technology assistance website. Research shows that when teachers learn how to develop technology-infused lesson with the instruction and support of a coach, they will be much more effective at effectively integrating technology on a consistent basis (Beglau, et al., 2011, Knight, 2007, Welch, 2014).

Overall, the capstone did not go exactly as planned. The technology assistance website was generated and was helpful for faculty who took the time to access it. The website which can be found at [What’s Going On? Trojan Tech Teachers](http://trojantechteachers.weebly.com/) displays videos and tutorials about various apps and web tools, recognizes teacher technology leaders every month from schools in the district in the “Spotlight,” and includes a weekly blog which the instructional technology staff co-author. However, the other objectives, though fully implemented, did not have the desired effect. Teachers enjoyed the Digital Playground and discovered new web tools and apps that could be utilized in their classroom. They felt that this was more effective than a traditional session because of the active learning. They also felt that learning about the four C’s through a panel discussion was more effective. However, once teachers were asked to create their own lessons using this knowledge, they struggled. This conclusion was established through a number of periodic walkthroughs by instructional technology staff and administrators, lesson plan analysis, faculty share sessions, and an end-of-year survey. Though most teachers felt the professional development was effective and their skill levels had increased over the year, only a small percentage were actively implementing the skills they were taught in the classroom. The spring assessment and interviews with teachers indicated that there were two reasons for this: 1) teachers were being asked to use the purchased technology for specific drill software and felt that they lacked time to fully implement lessons incorporating the four C’s and 2) teachers felt they needed further development of technical skills to increase their comfort level prior to being able to successfully implement these types of lessons. Though a skills and needs assessment was issued at the beginning of the school year, prior to any development, a further review of the assessment exhibited a lack of specificity of questions that would have better assessed the audience’s skills and comfort level.

These two barriers to implementation have actually helped shape next year’s professional development plans as they relate to technology. Though there are no plans to eliminate the drill software that occupies the computer lab time, there are specific times that will be set aside that will be designated for implementing technology-infused, project-based lessons. In addition, the candidate will provide co-teaching and support during lesson plan development and implementation. The candidate has also worked with instructional supervisors to develop professional development aimed at increasing teacher’s technical knowledge and comfort level so they will feel more confident implementing these types of lessons independently.

**Discussion**

There were many skills, dispositions, and knowledge required and exhibited by the candidate in order to complete the capstone project. Standard 1.4, Diffusion of Innovations & Change, asks that candidates be able to “research, recommend, and implement strategies for initiating and sustaining technology innovations and for managing the change process in schools” (ISTE, 2012). In this capstone experience, the candidate worked alongside instructional supervisors in each school to research, recommend, and ultimately implement selected professional development strategies in order to improve teacher knowledge and skills related to twenty-first century skills. High-engagement strategies, like active learning and instructional coaching strategies were research-based strategies chosen for professional development.

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” (ISTE, 2012). In this capstone experience, one of the key areas of professional development required the facilitation of the “design and implementation of technology-enhanced learning experiences” (Standard 2.1) and facilitating the use of “research-based, learner-centered strategies” (Standard 2.2) by teaching faculty about the four C’s and assisting in the creation of technology-infused lessons (ISTE, 2012). This same piece of the capstone required the candidate to facilitate the instructional design of authentic lessons that required higher-order thinking skills.

Standard 2 requires that “candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to create, support, and manage effective digital learning environments” (ISTE, 2012). While working on the technology-enhanced learning experiences with teachers, the candidate provided suggestions of various appropriate digital tools and worked in the classroom alongside teachers on managing digital learning environments. The candidate also promoted cultural digital literacy by suggesting techniques in which teachers could “utilize digital communication and collaboration tools to communicate locally and globally with students, parents, peers, and the larger community” (ISTE, 2012) by suggesting web tools to use in ways that teachers could make these connections, like social media, platforms like ePals, and class websites and blogs.

The most important piece of the capstone experience was providing needed professional development as it relates to instructional technology. Standard 5, Professional Learning & Program Evaluation, asks that “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” (ISTE, 2012). During this capstone experience, a school and system-wide needs assessment was conducted at the start of the year to determine professional development goals. Technology-infused professional development sessions were created and implemented to reach goals outlined in school and system strategic plans and provided both face-to-face, through group sessions and individual coaching sessions, and online support, through a technology help website and very recently through a learning management system. At the end of the school year, an evaluation was generated and issued through an online survey to determine program effectiveness and establish program goals to be included in the following year’s strategic plan, with specific goals aimed at improving teacher pedagogy.

Upon evaluating the effectiveness of the proposal, it is recommended that someone aiming to improve and enhance technology-related professional development first determine teacher comfort level specifically as it relates to implementing technology-enhanced lessons. In this case, teachers felt it was important to first improve their own technology skills and this would increase their execution of innovative, technology-enhanced learning experiences. In addition, it is recommended that there needs to be a comprehensive evaluation of the manner in which school technology is currently being used and requirements set by administration. This group of teachers, at all schools, felt pressure to use the purchased drill software in the time they were in the computer labs and when they were using mobile laptop labs. This interfered with their desire to implement creative, authentic lessons because they felt they may suffer consequences for not meeting requirements. A compromise between instructional technology staff, administration, and teachers regarding how lab time may be used has been reached for the following school year. This compromise, along with very focused, specific professional development will prove to make this proposal much more effect.

**References**

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