Tumbleweeds, Rattlesnakes, and Beautiful Vistas: Implementing IVC in Rural K-20

MERIT, a Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to use Technology grant. This grant uses Interactive Video Conferencing (IVC) to supervise student teachers placed in rural areas of the western United States. Implementing IVC in rural western states presents unique challenges and wonderful opportunities. The remote geography often results in inadequate bandwidth, and technical issues not found in urban centers. However, using IVC for the supervision of student teachers in rural schools provides the incentive to overcome the challenges.

**Project Development Goal:**

To implement the use of low cost Internet based interactive video conferencing and web-based software for mentoring and supervision of student teachers in rural schools and pre-service programs at colleges of education and to develop an interactive learning community for these teachers.

**Project Partners**

- Southeast Education Service Center located in Price, Utah
- Fort Lewis College located in Durango, Colorado, in the southwest Colorado Rocky Mountains.
- Lewis-Clark State College located at Lewiston, Idaho, on the border of Idaho and Washington.
- Southern Utah University, located in Cedar City, Utah.
- Western State College of Colorado located in Gunnison, Colorado, in the central Rocky Mountains.

The MERIT presentation will discuss the risks, barriers, and challenges (tumbleweeds and rattlesnakes) related to implementing IVC in the remote, rural areas of Colorado, Idaho and Utah. More importantly, the rewards and successes (beautiful vistas) will be shared. Specifically:

1. Introduction to MERIT, a Preparing Tomorrow’s Teachers Through Technology (PT3) grant.
2. Explanation of the need for IVC to meet the needs of a quality student teaching experience in remote, rural areas of Colorado, Idaho, and Utah.
3. Discussion of the risks, barriers, and challenges faced during the first two years of the project.
5. Exploration of next steps.

MERIT (Mentoring Emphasis for Rural Intern Teachers) – The goal of the MERIT program is to implement the use of low cost, Internet based Interactive Video Conferencing (IVC) technologies for mentoring and supervision of future teachers in rural schools. Research focus for the grant is to develop a new mentoring model between colleges and local rural schools that directly benefits their student teachers. The unique feature of the MERIT program is the context of rural schools where teacher shortages and teacher’s retention are great concerns in light of the “No Child Left Behind Act”.

1. Introduction to MERIT
The MERIT Program uses both synchronous and asynchronous technologies and will be transportable to other rural communities and school districts to help level the playing field when it comes to attracting future teachers.

2. The need for an IVC solution.
Student teaching supervision is an integral part of the teacher education program. The student teaching supervisor serves as a liaison between public school teachers, student teachers, the Teacher Education Program, and K-12 school/district leadership. This supervision includes working closely with public school teachers in supporting and evaluating each student teacher's progress.

Long distances significantly obstruct meaningful relationships between rural school districts and Institutions of Higher Education. The logistics associated with the supervision of student teachers in small, remote schools has traditionally dictated limited placement beyond a predefined radius of the colleges of education. As a result, very remote schools often do not experience the influence that a student teacher and supervising professor can have on the classroom in a rural school. Conversely, the opportunities and challenges associated with rural education are rarely explored in college of education teacher preparation programs.

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