How Can University Professors and Elementary School Teachers Work Together in Virtual Teams?

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Abstract

A three-year virtual teaming project that connected professors from several universities with in-service teachers from diverse schools has led to some interesting discoveries about the nature of on-line work groups. These teams focused on the process of virtual teaming and produced an outstanding collaborative product for future use.

I. Overview of the Team Formation and Objectives

Across the state or across the street, people from different institutions with different roles and responsibilities came together on-line with a common purpose. In the first year of the project, their goal was to find out what works and what does not work in classroom technology integration. Eight distinct teams with subject matter focus posted weekly messages on a discussion board about attempts to integrate technology into teaching and learning.

The second year of the project built upon the foundation of the first year of trial and error in attempts to integrate technology into classroom instruction and relate to team members with different job responsibilities and philosophies of education. The team members had either achieved an acceptable comfort level or dropped out of the project. Some teams remained intact from the start of the project while other teams experienced a high dropout rate. The objectives for the second year were product based rather than process based, unlike the first year. The professors and pre-service teachers on the teams cooperatively wrote technology enhanced lesson plans according to the ISTE and Sunshine State Standards and published them online. The elementary teachers on the teams supplied the topic to be addressed and field-tested the lesson plans. The interaction between the team members took place via e-mail, posted discussion boards and chats. In some cases, the professors and the pre-service teachers made visits to the elementary school classrooms.
In the third year of the project, the teams will be multidisciplinary. Professors and pre-service teachers will be paired up with elementary teachers. They will cooperatively write multidisciplinary technology enhanced units according to the ISTE Technology Standards and the Sunshine State Standards. Although most of the work will still be accomplished online, there will be times for the paired groups to meet in person in the elementary teachers’ classrooms.

II. Lessons Learned from Distance Virtual Teams

An analysis of the teams that were successful and the teams with high dropout rates were used to determine the qualities of team leadership that make for successful on-line work groups. Other factors such as the quality of the work produced were also taken into consideration. With attention to both the relational aspects of on-line learning and a focus on quality control from the team leadership, the components of an on-line environment for productive and comfortable on-line work groups will be discussed.

III. The Result of Cooperative On-Line Group Work: A Valuable Resource for Future Use

The ninety-six resulting technology enhanced lesson plans that are available on-line, written according to the ISTE Technology Standards and the Sunshine State Standards and field tested for Math, Science, Reading/Language Arts, ESE, ESOL, Curriculum and General Methods will be shown as resources for session participant use.