Collaborating Across Boundaries to Form Technology-infused Learning Communities

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The term, “learning community” has many meanings and is often used in a general way to describe any community of learners. Our PT3 catalyst grant adopted a definition of learning communities that was very specific and consistent with a curricular approach common to The Evergreen State College. We asked faculty in teacher education courses to create technology-infused learning communities by purposefully restructuring curriculum to link together courses and create an interdisciplinary experience for students that faculty would collaboratively plan and perhaps team teach. Technology would be an integral part of the community.

How technology was integrated into the learning community experience was left in part to the discretion and creativity of the faculty. We did specify two requirements, however. One stipulated that students would have opportunities to participate in an electronic learning forum. The second asked the faculty to create opportunities for preservice students and Generation www.Y students to work together on technology-related projects. Generation www.Y is a program designed to train K-12 students with the technology, collaborative and pedagogical skills necessary to help teachers integrate technology into learning.

Fundamental assumptions of this project were that it would be beneficial for students aspiring to be teachers to 1) experience learning that was collaborative, authentic and integrated; 2) view K-12 students as sources of knowledge, particularly in the areas of technology and learning; and 3) acquire and apply technology skills in context.

Nine colleges of teacher education and 16 K-12 schools were part of the consortium that tested these assumptions. And, as might be expected, nine different learning community models emerged. The story of each learning community is not one we can tell in an hour-long presentation. But stories told from different perspectives might offer a glimpse into the benefits and challenges a technology-infused learning community can present. A panel will also model the very nature of the collaboration that this project has been about.

In this panel presentation, five individuals —two teacher education faculty members, a Generation www.Y teacher, a teacher education student, and a Generation www.Y student—will discuss the following questions:

1. How was technology integrated into this learning experience, and what were the benefits and challenges of teaching and learning about technology in this way?
2. How did you participate in this learning experience both as a learner and as a teacher?
3. From your perspective, how can this type of learning experience contribute to the education of a teacher?
4. What role did technology play in building community?

Each participant will preface his or her remarks with a brief description of the learning community he or she has been associated with.