Teaching Beyond State Standards: Using Technology to Enhance Elementary Teachers’ Social Studies Preparation

Abstract: With increased curricular and classroom demands, many elementary student and classroom teachers do not use technology in social studies planning or instruction. Presenters will demonstrate two software tools, Tapped-In and PrimaryAccess, that support teachers’ lesson planning, organizing, and critical thinking in the social studies content areas. Applications to pre-service teacher training and professional development will be discussed.

Roundtable Session Objective
To facilitate pre-service and classroom teachers’ planning, creating, and publishing of social studies instructional models and materials using an on-line educational resource community (Tapped-In) and digital historical movies featuring on-line documents (PrimaryAccess).

Introduction & Purpose
Knowledge of civics, economics, geography, and history facts figure prominently in many states’ social science standards of learning for elementary school students. Although student learning standards are clear, teachers often question how to choose and organize grade-level appropriate resources to teach social studies content areas. Primary source documents are useful tools to introduce content and to engage students learning (Wineburg, 2001), but many elementary teachers do not use letters, maps, or photographs in their lessons, citing lack of planning time and the demands of managing many basic instructional duties (Darling-Hammond, 1998). Yet, primary sources and selected children’s literature in elementary social studies teaching are key components that aid students’ concept building and inquiry skills (Seefeldt, 2003).

In recent years, technological advancements have increased on-line access to state standards of learning, primary source repositories (e.g. National Archives and Smithsonian), and literature databases (Ertner, 2003). However, ongoing content and technology integration in elementary classrooms remains a challenge. Social studies teachers, in particular, perceive few choices for standards-based materials that can be easily adapted to classroom use.

The purpose of this study is to design an effective instructional model to train elementary pre-service and classroom teachers to locate, analyze, and design content-specific lessons integrating technology using two software tools: Tapped-In and PrimaryAccess. Tapped In is an on-line international community of educational professionals. As a free virtual platform, teachers discover a variety of resources, participate in chats, and share work with fellow users. Primary Access is a web-based digital video editor that allows teachers to construct digital movies that incorporate on-line primary source documents with an ease and flexibility that have not existed previously. Both aid teachers in creating, publishing, and planning instruction across the curriculum to teach content, inquiry, and critical thinking skills.

Methods
Presenters will introduce the teaching model through the use of a sample syllabus that targets pre-service teachers’ knowledge of content, pedagogy, and technology. The presenters will then demonstrate uses of Tapped-In and PrimaryAccess, and present teacher-oriented products designed for social studies instruction. They will also explain their emerging research design for integrating technology in an elementary social studies methods course and invite feedback from the audience on their evolving research study.
Implications

A well developed and monitored instructional model that purposefully integrates social studies content with technology can improve teachers’ critical thinking skills, effective lesson planning, and successful long term implementation of course curriculum. Working together, college of education faculty and technological administrators can support teachers’ professional growth by helping them to identify, use, and assess effective tools to teach beyond required state standards of learning in the social studies.

References


