Complimentary Perspectives: Special Education and General Education Pre-service Teachers’ Reflections on Technology Tools in the Classroom

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Abstract
As part of a digital literacy course, Special Education and Elementary Education pre-service teachers reflected on their uses of various technology tools while also creating an accompanying technology artifact. A content analysis of these diverse reflections yielded interesting and useful results for teacher educators who prepare pre-service teachers to use technology. Both groups of pre-service teachers considered issues of diverse learning needs as well as ways to differentiate for all students using technology. Other themes emerging from the reflections included how technology can support professional development, the Common Core and Essential Standards, and ways teachers can use technology collaboratively in the co-teaching classroom. Students’ artifacts will also be shared to demonstrate that both the Special Education and General Education Elementary pre-service teachers have complimentary rather than competing perspectives on using technology to meet the needs of all learners.

Presentation Overview
Pre-service Elementary Education majors take a required course in digital literacy as part of their program of study. Traditionally this course is comprised of general education pre-service teachers majoring in elementary education. However, recently many Special Education pre-service teachers are also enrolling in the course as part of a secondary academic concentration in Elementary Education and
so that they may better understand the integration of technology from an inclusion and general education perspective. As a result of the mix of majors in the course, a richness of shared understandings emerges between the students in each program.

The course is designed to develop, in pre-service teachers, critical thinking about technology as it directly relates to each of their chosen fields and to how it can be used to support the work of teachers (e.g. instruction, professional development, communication with families, etc.) To meet this overarching goal, all students in the course engage in deep reflection on all the topics introduced in the course. They do this in online discussions as well as with in-depth reflections submitted as part of a technology portfolio of artifacts on each of the tools they learn about in the class (e.g. Interactive White Boards, Web 2.0 tools, Digital Storytelling, Multimedia).

An analysis was conducted on the reflective writings of all pre-service teachers in the course to determine if perspectives on how to use technology in their practice differs greatly based on their diverse programs (Special versus Elementary Education) or if, as teachers, they are more alike than different. Preliminary results indicate the latter but with interesting themes emerging from the analysis related to differentiation, socio-emotional learning, teacher professional development, and Common Core and Essential Standards. These results will be shared as will selected artifacts from the students technology portfolios.