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FIELD EXPERIENCE IN THE CLOUD: AN OPEN GLOBALIZED TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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Field Experience in the Cloud: An Open Globalized Teaching Experience

Synopsis:

Students enrolled in EDUC 581 of the master's degree online Educational Technology Specialist Program are required to complete a 20-hour field experience in a PK-12 educational environment. They were engaged in a cloud-based global teaching practice with 10th grade students at a Canadian high school for the field experience. This research explored the impact of the globalizing teaching practice in the open online environment on students' pedagogical and technological knowledge.

**Field Experience in the Cloud:
An Open and Globalized Teaching Experience**

The “Instructional Design in Technology” is a major graduate course in the online Educational Technology Specialist Program at SUNY Oneonta. The students enrolled in the class are in-service teachers pursuing their Master’s degrees. One key project of the course requires students to complete a 20-hour on-task field experience in a P-12 educational environment. This year, to give students an opportunity to collaborate with teachers and students in a foreign country without leaving their own classroom, a cloud-based global teaching assignment was developed. The 10th grade students from the “Build the Future” program at an applied learning school in Calgary, Alberta, Canada was selected for this field experience activity. This research project explored if globalizing teacher education practice in an open online environment improved the pedagogical and technological knowledge of the in-service teachers.

“Globalization is a powerful and emergent influence on education...and is influencing teaching practices and teacher education” (Wang et al. 2011, p. 119). Therefore, schools need to develop new skills, new experiences, and new knowledge as required by global transformations and international standards. (ISTE, 2011) Conversations should be encouraged among teachers about the role of global education in today’s world and the manner in which we may collaborate with others who may be geographically distant, but with whom we share common goals. P-12 students are already living in this connected culture; however, teacher practice has not kept pace with the global changes impacting our students’ everyday lives (Kleiman, 2004; Thomas &

Brown, 2011). It is important for teachers to adapt themselves to this new reality and develop globally-focused instructional designs and practice.

This project introduced graduate students (in-service teachers) to an open education practice through cloud based tools, such as blogs, twitter, Google sites, and ZOOM. To help design and deliver lessons on digital literacies, the in-service teachers conducted needs assessment first to: a) identify high school students' current perceptions about the professional online presence, b) identify the social networks high school students currently participate in and the purpose for that interaction, and c) identify the extent to which high school students believe they "belong" to current professional learning communities and how they control their privacy and audience. In order to meet the high school students' needs, the in-service teachers took into consideration the student demographics, what the high school students knew, and what they liked when they designed their lessons.

The field experience began in January and ended in April. During the 10-week field experience, the high school students learned 8 lessons from 4 groups of inservice teachers and participated in several interviews and online needs assessment surveys. The in-service teachers used the interview transcripts and the survey responses to help them demonstrate cultural responsiveness in their lessons. They worked in groups to design lessons to empower the diverse learners. This practice helped promote their own professional development too. Their experience also led to a new appreciation of different cultures and the positive impact social media has on students' life in and out of the school. They believed that this appreciation was developed despite the sometimes negative stigma that can come with improper social media use. The in-service teachers in the group of 'Global Citizenship' designed a video lesson to teach the high school students to retweet on Twitter to virtually connect with people in the world. These students

learned how to collaborate with other organizations through networking to advocate the awareness of kindness. At the end of week 10, the in-service teachers wrote a paper to analyze and report their field experience. They reflected in the analysis that not only did they help expose students to the power of networking using social media, but also helped them understand how important and influential this tool is and the impact it can have on people that they will never meet. One in-service teacher concluded from the practice that “this field experience was a very enlightening, engaging, interactive, and collaborative experience. The willingness of group members to collaborate and communicate played a vital role in the success.”

Some important lessons were learned in the evaluation of the global field experience project. First, due to the cultural difference and the special demands from the Canadian high school academic program, the ‘Build the Future’ students’ responses to the lessons and assignments were not quite what we had expected. They had almost no social media activities after school. Second, because of the cancellation of meetings between the teachers and students and unreliable network connections, one group had to change their teaching to the asynchronous format. They design video lessons and deliver them online using the Zoom Video Conferencing tool. Both the in-service teachers and the ‘Build the Future’ students benefited from the modification because they could do the lessons at their own pace and make the best out of the resources. For this reason, our future field experience activities will use the format of asynchronous interactions and lessons. We will also set clear task requirements for both sides. To ensure success of this collaborative field experience, it’s crucial that in-service teachers and high school students develop mutual respect and become co-learners. Conducting a field experience in an open and globalized environment is complicated. There is much more to learn for this global learning experience to benefit both in-service teachers and students.