Chapter 4.43
Using E–Learning to Globalize a Teacher Education Program

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ABSTRACT

This case study explores the use of online distance learning technology to bring an international component to a teacher education program. By converting a course in the program into a fully online offering, the author was able to include students from Namibian teacher education programs in the class along with her own students from New Jersey. The objective was to give all students a chance to interact with peers that they would not otherwise have the chance to meet, and to explore differences and commonalities in their respective education systems. This case study describes the pitfalls and successes in meeting that objective.

INTRODUCTION

Online distance learning technologies are being used in almost every field of study these days, providing students with flexibility, which is not possible in traditional face-to-face courses. In addition, these technologies can go beyond anytime, anywhere access to course material and discussions, and can be used to open the classroom up to global collaborations. This is especially important in teacher education programs where students need to be capable of teaching in an increasingly diverse, multicultural classroom as well as being capable in preparing their own students for success in an increasingly interconnected, global community. As teacher educators strive to incorporate multiculturalism and international education into their programs, many have begun to explore the use of technology as a way of reaching this goal (Davis, 1999; Merryfield, 2000; Schoorman, 2002; Zong, 2002).

In this case study we will explore one such project in which an online teacher education course was offered to students in the United

States and Namibia as the result of a collaboration between teacher educators at William Paterson University in New Jersey (WPUNJ), and the National Institute of Educational Development (NIED) and its partner Colleges of Education in Namibia. The College of Education at William Paterson University has been preparing teachers in New Jersey for 150 years, and over the past 10 years has provided faculty and students with a wide range of educational technologies, including the Blackboard online course management system. Many of the graduates go on to teach in disadvantaged urban school districts, which now have large numbers of non-native English speaking immigrants.

Since independence in 1990, the Colleges of Education in Namibia (located in Caprivi, Ongwediva, Rundu, and Windhoek) have been preparing teachers to provide basic education to a previously disenfranchised majority, which is still working to overcome the effects of decades of apartheid. In the past few years the colleges have been striving to bring educational technology into their classrooms and are particularly interested in using technology to quickly increase the number of qualified teachers there. Regardless of country, an expectation for teacher education programs is that their graduates are able to prepare primary and secondary school students for effective 21st century citizenship, which includes technological literacy as well as global understanding.

RATIONALE FOR USING ONLINE DISTANCE LEARNING

"Technology Across the Curriculum" is a required course in the undergraduate, primary-school teaching certification program offered to students at William Paterson. Although this is a course that covers the basics of how to teach with and teach about technology, in the past it had only been taught in a traditional, face-to-face mode. In the spring of 2004, it was decided that this

course should be converted to be fully online and delivered via the university's Blackboard course management system, starting in the fall 2004 semester. This was done for a number of reasons, including the need to ensure that WPUNJ students had sufficient experience with online technologies and would be able to benefit from future online training as they continued their professional development after graduation, and also to ensure that they would be comfortable using similar technologies with their own students. Current state and national standards mandate that primary school students are able to use technology to find and process information, and to use technology to communicate their own ideas (International Society for Technology in Education [ISTE], 2000a; New Jersey Department of Education [NJDOE], 2004a; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2005).

Similarly, in Namibia the Ministry of Basic Education, Sport, and Culture (MBESC) and the Ministry of Higher Education, Training, and Employment Creation (MHETEC) are in the process of developing technology literacy standards for students as a way of ensuring that they will be able to participate in the global marketplace and job force. As governmental and non-governmental organizations such as SchoolNet Namibia (http://www.schoolnet.na) equip primary and secondary schools there with networked computers, teachers will need to know how to support their students' use of this equipment. In addition, online technologies are seen as a way to provide badly needed teacher training at a time when the teaching population is being greatly reduced by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Although the ministries do not currently have an online distance learning infrastructure in place, by having students from the Colleges of Education in Namibia enroll in the William Paterson course, they were able to trial something that could potentially meet both goals.

On the Namibia side, this project was coordinated by the National Institute of Educational Development (NIED), an arm of the MBESC that

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