

Development and Implementation of an Online Support System for a Multi-University Novice Teacher Induction Program

Abstract: Recognizing the dire consequences of a 20% novice teacher attrition rate, the Texas State University System (TSUS) was recently awarded a \$2.75 million grant from the Houston Endowment to implement a Novice Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) at six TSUS institutions. Universities established partnerships with area school districts and employed newly retired educators as full-time mentors. Novice teacher participants in NTIP were supported by full-time mentors, bi-weekly face-to-face graduate seminars and an online support component. This presentation describes how free web-based tools were used to provide online support to three hundred novice teachers and thirty mentor teachers in six universities and 30 school districts during the novice teachers' induction year of teaching. Roundtable discussion will share preliminary analysis of discourse communities of novice teachers engaged in highly interactive and collaborative conversations in order to develop greater understandings, and insights into the issues and challenges of the induction year.

Texas is facing a serious teacher shortage and policy makers and school districts are working to develop ways to attract new teachers into the classroom. Just as important, however, is retaining new teachers once they enter the profession. In fact, nearly one out of every five beginning educators leaves teaching after only one year. When novice teachers leave and are replaced by novice teachers who then leave and are again replaced by novice K-12 teachers, it stands to reason that students are surely deprived of the quality of instruction that they would have received if novice teachers had instead stayed in their communities, and with the support of more experienced colleagues, had developed awareness of the community context, and had refined their teaching skills to address students' learning needs. Recognizing that induction and mentoring of novice teachers is crucial to retaining novice teachers in the profession if students are to receive consistent quality instruction many districts and universities have undertaken mentoring programs to support novice teachers.

The dire consequences of a 20% novice teacher attrition rate, prompted the Texas State University System (TSUS) to seek and secure a \$2.75 million grant from the Houston Endowment to implement a Novice Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) at each of the six TSUS institutions. Each university established partnerships with area school districts and employed educators as full-time mentors. Novice teacher participants in NTIP were supported by a full-time mentor, bi-weekly university graduate seminars and an on-line support component. The university seminars were co-taught by university faculty and NTIP mentors. NTIP teachers received 6 hours of graduate credit for participating in the program. NTIP mentors generally carry a caseload of 10-12 novices and are supported through initial mentor training, followed by bi-weekly mentor seminars, and on-line support.

Evaluation of the program over the past three years has shown many positive benefits to novice teachers and the value of online support systems. This presentation describes how free web-based tools were used to provide online support to three hundred novice teachers and thirty mentor teachers in six universities and 30 school districts during the novice teachers' induction year of teaching. The online environment, tools, and resources were effective in building a community of practice between faculty, mentor teachers and novice teachers. It also provided a 24/7 means of helping novice teachers address and solve their problems, for sharing resources and expertise and to provide both professional and social support. Roundtable discussion will share preliminary analysis of discourse communities of novice teachers engaged in highly interactive and collaborative conversations in order to develop greater understandings, and insights into the issues and challenges of the teachers in their induction year and the ways that online tools and resources may be employed to support teachers in their induction years. This presentation will share the mentor program structure, and evaluation data and analysis of novice teacher concerns as reported in online interactions.