HOW DOES DEVELOPING AN ONLINE ECOLOGY COURSE TO SUPPORT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IMPACT MY GROWTH AS A TEACHER?

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INTRODUCTION

Virtual learning is becoming much more common. According to iNACOL’s (North America Council for Online Learning) 2015 report, “Promising Practices in Blended and Online Learning”, more than 40% of high school and middle school students have expressed interest in taking an online course. Teachers who teach in both online and traditional classrooms are called trans-classroom teachers. (Lowes, 2008).

I teach at an independent high school (N=409) in the San Francisco Bay Area, Marin Academy. Marin Academy is part of the Bay Area’s BlendEd Consortium. Five independent schools in the Bay Area make up BlendEd. The five schools jointly offer a set of online classes.

This Action Research (AR) takes place over the last three years during which time I have been taking online courses at MSU, developing and teaching an online course for the Bay Area BlendEd Consortium, and teaching traditional courses at Marin Academy.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Primary Research Question: How does developing an online field ecology course for high school students impact my growth as a teacher?

Sub question 1: What changes to my teaching practices can I describe and illustrate as a result of my transition to online teaching?

Sub question 2: How does online teaching impact my traditional teaching?

Sub question 3: How does my own growth as a trans-classroom teacher compare to other trans-classroom teachers?

METHODOLOGY

To understand how developing an online field ecology course impacted my growth as a teacher, I collected data via course surveys, pretests and posttests, an observation instrument, teacher journaling, a catalogue of teaching practices, a trans-teacher survey, and a member checking survey. In order to understand how my online teaching impacts my traditional teaching, a gall ecology lesson was used as a case study. The gall ecology lesson shows off applications of teacher change in my traditional classes. In order to compare my growth to other trans-teachers a survey was distributed to trans-classroom teachers in the Bay Area BlendEd consortium, Global Online Academy (GOA) and Eight School Association (ESA).

REFERENCES


INTERPRETATIONS

Changes to Teaching Practices

During the 2014 school year many of these teaching practices were not used in my classes. By the 2016 school year, science notebooks, screencast videos, citizen science were regular practices.

Changes to Face-to-Face Course Since Teaching Online

Over the last three years, I have made changes to my teaching practice as a result of my transition to teaching online. When students in my online course were asked to rate my preparation, resourcefulness, enthusiasm and ability to provide feedback, the level of positive student response within all of these categories increased over a three year academic cycle. Online teaching has diversified the way I teach. Online teaching has allowed me to bring the flexibility and individualization of online learning to my traditional classroom. Like 70% of teachers that I surveyed, I have eliminated poorly designed lessons since teaching online. Like others, I have found online teaching to be a chance to reinvent myself professionally.