LMS Implementation

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June 2019

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Fall 2017

**Description of Capstone Experience**

This capstone experience was centered on a major district and school initiative, which involves the implementation of a learning management system. Canvas is the learning management system that is being used by the district. Implementation of the system has been optional for the past several years and the district has provided several training sessions for teachers interested in becoming early adopters. The goal of this project was to ensure that teachers are aware of the resources available and provide support to make them more comfortable with using it. The capstone was prompted by the reluctance of many teachers to embrace Canvas and benefit from the available tools.

This experience was focused on the math department. The math department was a great place to begin this process since there is a variety of levels of technology experience within the department. Within the department are teachers who are experienced with using technology, teachers interested in using technology, and some who are resistant to using technology. There were also several new teachers to the department who have never used Canvas before. As a member of the math department, it was a seamless transition to use the connection already established with several of the members and it was easy to build that connection with new members. Jim Knight’s partnership approach served as an inspiration for much of the coaching (Knight, 2007). He states that having best practices and knowing a lot about teaching are only a part of successful coaching (Knight, 2007). Having a positive relationship with the individuals you are coaching is just as important (Knight, 2007).

Leading up to pre planning for the 2018-2019 school year some time was spent preparing resources and identifying updates in Canvas. During preplanning, teachers participated in an introductory session to Canvas. This was an opportunity for experienced teachers to get a refresher and hear about updated features and new teaches were able to learn about what is available. After the introduction, teachers received training on how to provide content through the LMS. This increased the buy in of several teachers, as they were able to see the wealth of resources available. They also appreciated the value of the LMS in getting these resources into the hands of their students. These resources ranged anywhere from an instructional video posted online, notes or explanations posted online, online resource that provides immediate feedback to student work, or a file that they were able to post to their course and share with their students. The next topic covered was assessing the knowledge of their students through the LMS. Teachers were able to learn about the types of questions that can be incorporated into a quiz. The typical question such as multiple choice, true or false, matching, and fill in the blank are definitely available. Questions that were significant to the other math teachers included numerical questions, formula questions, and essay questions that required students to explain their work. Forms of assessment that are not typically seen in a math classroom were also discussed, such as discussion boards and Flipgrid assignments. Towards the end of the semester, teachers learned how to use the LMS for collaboration with each other. Many of these topics were discussed during professional learning community meetings, which occurred twice every month. Several one on one coaching sessions occurred each month in between each of the professional learning community meetings.

After the fall semester, teachers continued to receive one on one coaching sessions on an as needed basis. A plan for supporting all academic departments was developed with the blended learning and support team. Work was completed with this team to create a template course that will provide explanations on using different features within Canvas. This course also provides examples of a variety of ways that Canvas could be utilized in the classroom. This template course was shared with all staff at the end of the 2018-2019 school year and will be an ongoing form of professional learning. Teachers will be able to access all of these resources at their convenience. They have the opportunity to work on their own if they would like to look through the resources on their own pace. They can also request one on one coaching from any of the blended learning and support team members.

For the most part this capstone experience went as planned. There were however, some barriers and obstacles to overcome. One major obstacle that existed through this experience was the varying technology skill levels that were present in the group of teachers. Working with a smaller group of teachers made this barrier slightly more manageable. There are only nine teachers in the math department. This made it possible to spend more time coaching individual teaches in a one on one setting. In a larger group, it would have been necessary for more peer coaches to be available to assist more teachers. Another barrier that is common across education is time. A teacher’s time is valuable to them and they need to be able to see that the work they will be doing is beneficial for them and their students. Many of the participants quickly realized this value. It became immediately obvious to them that they work they are doing within Canvas will eventually save them time. Their grading practices can become much more efficient. They will eventually be able to save time creating lesson plans since courses can be copied from year to year. Collaboration can also be done much more efficiently. In the end, the teachers saw a value in what they were doing.

The outcome of this project is that every math teacher has an awareness of what Canvas can do for his or her classroom. They are also able to at least create a course, content page, assignment, and quiz. They are also able to use Canvas to collaborate with other teachers. This includes sharing resources and working together to create content within Canvas. Their progress was regularly assessed throughout the project through surveys and informal conversations. Follow up will continue to happen at one of the monthly professional learning community meetings. Teachers will be updated on new resources and updated components within Canvas. Follow up will also occur with individual teachers in order to assist them as they continue to create content.

**Discussion and/or Reflection:**

This capstone experience gave me many opportunities to learn about technology facilitation and leadership. Teachers are constantly participating in professional learning and have many opinions about how this learning should take place. Because of this experience, there is now a much greater appreciation for many of the previous professional learning sessions observed. A lot of work goes into preparing a professional learning initiative. All sessions must be adequately prepared for. Time must be efficiently used with working with teachers in order to maintain their interest. A technology leader also needs to be prepared with a variety of technology resources that can address needs as they arise. A significant factor that arises with training that involves technology is the skill level of teachers involved. A plan must be made in order to support these varying levels. During this experience, some of the teachers needed additional coaching sessions. Their confidence level coming in made some of them a little reluctant to implementing technology. In a study, Tallvid identified five different explanations for this teacher reluctance (2016). These explanations are lack of technical competence, not worth the effort, insufficient teaching material, diminishing control, and lack of time (Tallvid, 2014). It was a goal of this project to not let these issues interfere with teacher participation. These all served as a great thing to consider as the experience was reflected on.

A technology leader should have knowledge of a variety of technology resources. In this experience, it was necessary to be aware of what tools are available within Canvas. It was also necessary to know how each of these tools can be used effectively. There are also many external tools that can be embedded into a Canvas course. This requires the knowledge of how these can be incorporated. The knowledge of Canvas resources and external tools increased the readiness of the professional learning as teachers’ needs could be addressed. Several Professional Standards Commission (PSC) standards are related to knowledge of a technology coach that this project covered. A coach should know how to use technology to differentiate learning for their students. As the standard States, they should be able to adjust content, process, product, and learning environment in order to meet the needs of participants (Instructional Technology Standards, 2010). This standard applies to preparing teachers to provide differentiation for their students using Canvas. It was also necessary to differentiate learning for the teachers participating in the professional learning.

Several skills are essential for a successful technology leader. One skill that immediately stands out is the ability to communicate and collaborate. The PSC standard states that a technology leader should be able to use digital tools to communicate and collaborate with a variety of stakeholders (Instructional Technology Standards, 2010). This skill was essential for completing this experience. A variety of digital tools were used to communicate and collaborate with teachers in between group sessions such as e-mail, discussion boards, Google applications, and a collaborative Canvas course. It was also essential to show teachers how to use these tools with their students. Another essential skill of a successful coach is basic trouble shooting. The PSC standard states that a leader should be able to troubleshoot basic issues that may arise with either hardware or software (Instructional Technology Standards, 2010). Experience using the hardware and software that will be used leads to the ability to provide support the end users.

A technology leader should have a calm and patient disposition. The leader should be able to work with stakeholders who have varying skills and abilities with technology. Some colleagues are going to be able to pick things up quickly and move at a rapid pace. Other colleagues are going to need much more one on one support and time to ask questions. The coach should be willing to take the necessary time with everyone to satisfy his or her needs. All stakeholders need to feel valued and respected. This requires the leader to go through constant reflection. According to the PSC standard, leaders should be able to reflect on the effectiveness of their practice and disposition. This gives the leader the opportunity to make frequent adjustments in order to improve the learning. One major adjustment made during this experience was necessary because of the varying technology skill levels that were present. Several participants needed additional coaching sessions.

I encourage anyone who considers implementing professional learning for a Learning Management System to do it. This was a very rewarding experience. A LMS is an essential tool for providing opportunities for differentiation, collaboration, and students to build skills that they will need in their futures. At the beginning of implementing this professional learning, it is important to collect as much information as possible about the future participants. This information will help determine the skill levels and knowledge about everyone. An effective strategy for this experience was build strong relationships with all participants. This will make all participants comfortable and make it easier for them to ask questions. Collect frequent feedback from all participants and reflect on that feedback. This will allow for adjustments in the process of the professional learning. Similar to a classroom, no two groups will complete this process the same and it is important for some personalization.

**References**

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