

Higher Education, Emerging Technologies, and Community Partnerships: Concepts, Models and Practices

Melody A. Bowdon
University of Central Florida, USA

Russell G. Carpenter
Eastern Kentucky University, USA

Information Science
REFERENCE

Senior Editorial Director: Kristin Klinger
Director of Book Publications: Julia Mosemann
Editorial Director: Lindsay Johnston
Acquisitions Editor: Erika Carter
Development Editor: Myla Harty
Production Editor: Sean Woznicki
Typesetters: Mike Brehm, Keith Glazewski, Natalie Pronio, Jennifer Romanchak, Deanna Zombro
Print Coordinator: Jamie Snavelly
Cover Design: Nick Newcomer

Published in the United States of America by
Information Science Reference (an imprint of IGI Global)
701 E. Chocolate Avenue
Hershey PA 17033
Tel: 717-533-8845
Fax: 717-533-8661
E-mail: cust@igi-global.com
Web site: <http://www.igi-global.com/reference>

Copyright © 2011 by IGI Global. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored or distributed in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, without written permission from the publisher. Product or company names used in this set are for identification purposes only. Inclusion of the names of the products or companies does not indicate a claim of ownership by IGI Global of the trademark or registered trademark.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Higher Education, Emerging Technologies, and Community Partnerships: Concepts, Models and Practices / Melody A. Bowdon and Russell G. Carpenter, editors.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Summary: "This book is a comprehensive collection of research with an emphasis on emerging technologies, community value, and corporate partnerships, providing strategies to implement partnerships"--Provided by publisher.

ISBN 978-1-60960-623-7 (hardcover) -- ISBN 978-1-60960-624-4 (ebook) 1. Education, Higher--Effect of technological innovations on. 2. Distance education--Computer-assisted instruction. 3. Educational technology. 4. Community education--United States I. Bowdon, Melody A., 1967- II. Carpenter, Russell G., 1979-

LB2395.7.H54 2011

378.1'03--dc22

2011000121

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book is available from the British Library.

All work contributed to this book is new, previously-unpublished material. The views expressed in this book are those of the authors, but not necessarily of the publisher.

Chapter 14

Digital Partnerships for Professional Development: Rethinking University–Public School Collaborations

William P. Banks
East Carolina University, USA

Terri Van Sickle
Tar River Writing Project, USA

ABSTRACT

The following case study explores the impact of a university-school-community partnership developed in an online environment in order to address the immediate need of high school teachers in North Carolina to become more knowledgeable about responding to student writing in online and digital environments. Using a grassroots, teachers-teaching-teachers model fostered by the National Writing Project, members of the Tar River Writing Project, in partnership with a university faculty member and an administrator from a local public school district, developed and implemented an online professional development workshop to improve teacher response practices. This study demonstrates one method for using online technologies to engage community and university partners in the collaborative work of improving writing instruction and suggests a series of benefits inherent in such partnerships.

INTRODUCTION: MOVING TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ONLINE

The recent economic recession in the United States has had numerous ripple effects beyond the Wall Street bailouts, car company woes and other stories

that have occupied significant space in the national headlines. While experience suggests that district- and school-level support for public school teachers to attend conferences and other professional development events has dwindled over the last decade generally, the recent economic downturn has caused that support to dry up almost completely in our area of eastern North Carolina. This shift has caused the Tar River Writing Project (<http://>

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-623-7.ch014

www.trwp.org), a university-school-community partnership for teacher development in eastern North Carolina, to rethink the sort of standard, face-to-face teacher seminars, workshops, and institutes that it has traditionally conducted in area schools and districts. Increasingly, schools in TRWP's service region (23 counties between I-95 and the NC coast) have been struggling to fund substitute teacher pay and travel costs that arise when classroom teachers leave school for a day or more to participate in their own professional development (PD) with other educators. While such continued professional development is key to better teachers, schools, and student learning, the cost for such work in time, space, and money has come to feel increasingly prohibitive to many principals and district-level administrators.

This case study outlines one of TRWP's recent attempts to provide high-quality PD events by using Moodle, an online content management system (CMS), and thus work to reduce those peripheral costs of teacher training previously absorbed by schools and districts. Despite some difficulties, this experience has been largely productive and successful, allowing TRWP to meet some of the key outcomes of its mission: 1) increased collaboration between K-12 teachers and university researchers in a variety of environments; 2) improved teacher development through effective engagement with high-quality professional development materials; 3) increased integration of digital technologies in teacher development projects; and, 4) greater opportunities for developing teacher leadership capacity throughout the TRWP service region.

HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF RESPONDING TO STUDENT WRITING ONLINE (RSWO)

In the fall of 2009, the state of North Carolina was beginning the process of implementing a statewide Graduation Project¹ for high school seniors, one that would involve a rich portfolio of different

kinds of writing, including a major researched paper. But as often happens with top-down, large-scale approaches, the NC Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) and the NC Department of Education (NCDOE) had not allocated sufficient funding or time to provide detailed professional development for NC teachers who would be responsible for guiding students through the new Graduation Project process. As state-level discussions progressed, one local school district, NRMPS, was considering a move that would have their students' researched essays, a core component of the new NC Graduation Project (NCGP), responded to/evaluated by external constituencies. Some district administrators in the NRMPS system were concerned that students in their schools were not getting sufficiently rigorous responses to their writing; they worried that their own teachers would be tempted to "go easy" on their own students' work; central office wanted some outside (read "objective") evaluators to make sure that the students would receive valuable feedback that would inspire revision prior to the end-of-year Graduation Project assessments. NRMPS knew the qualities they sought in evaluators (e.g., teaching experience, knowledge of research writing, experience with assessing writing), but they were not necessarily sure who those evaluators should be or how NRMPS could ensure the evaluators would provide the services they sought.

This is where the Tar River Writing Project came into the picture. As with other sites of the National Writing Project (<http://www.nwp.org>), TRWP is built on a "teachers-teaching-teachers" model, one which values the contributions that classroom teachers can make when they are given the chance to wed experience with published research in order to become teacher-educators. TRWP's Teacher Consultants (TCs) are certified teachers who have been through an application-based, highly competitive Invitational Summer Institute (ISI) in which they read current research on the teaching of writing and reflect on the connections between their personal experiences and

concepts from published research assigned in the course. When those teachers finish the ISI, they participate in their own classroom-based research projects and become part of collaborative groups that support each other in building in-service and other types of professional development activities for teachers in their own schools and those in TRWP's service region of eastern North Carolina. These groups are simultaneously supported by university research faculty. These professional development workshops/events tend to be extremely successful, in large part because they are developed and implemented by local teachers who work to combine current research and best practices in writing instruction with the opportunities and constraints at work in local school districts. Because TCs are themselves schoolteachers in the same or nearby districts, they have a degree of credibility *with other teachers* that is sometimes lacking in the trainers who come in from outside the state to present similar workshops. Likewise, in developing customized professional development workshops for teachers and schools, TCs create spaces in which local concerns can be directly, rather than obliquely, addressed. In the case of NRMPS, TRWP already had two TCs in the district who had communicated to the county office the value of writing project-styled professional development. When it came time for NRMPS to think about how to support their students and teachers in implementing the new Graduation Project, and given the shortage in funding available, a partnership among NRMPS, ECU, and TRWP seemed an obvious and economically viable choice. Likewise, since TRWP is part of the National Writing Project, it is approved as a professional development provider under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act; therefore, NRMPS could use federal monies to pay for the professional development workshop with TRWP as its contracting partner.

Based on conversations with NRMPS administrators, members of the TRWP developed the online module "Responding to Student Writing

in Online Environments" (RSWO), a module that represents a significant departure from traditional, after-school professional development workshop or expensive multi-day institutes. Normally, a school might pay for its own teachers to attend a workshop or conference, learn about some new research or teaching methods, and return to their home school/district to implement that work (Penuel et al., 2007). More recently, those workshops have begun to focus on showcasing a splashy new piece of software or technology; these look exciting in the polished PowerPoint presentations, but teachers may not have a chance to experiment/play with them in order to gain hands-on experience that will help them implement the technologies in their classrooms (Huber, 2010). In the case of RSWO, because the school district wanted well-trained *external* readers for their district-wide research projects, TRWP was contracted to train those external constituents, but the district and TRWP worked together to plan the most effective method for reaching those teachers. Given that this training would be for individuals who would eventually respond to the writing of actual high school students, NRMPS suggested that we recruit and train certified teachers from *other* North Carolina school districts; they would already know much about working with NC students, the reasoning went, and RSWO would help them to learn the complexities of responding to writing in digital/online environments while using the Graduation Project rubric, a new assessment instrument in North Carolina. Because NRMPS, TRWP, and ECU were working in a partnership model, we were able to customize the project from the ground up; we could easily choose who participated in planning, developing, and implementing the workshop, as well as how teachers were trained and how the whole process was evaluated at the end. Likewise, because the teachers would be using digital technologies to respond to student writing, we were able to agree together that conducting the training in an online environment would both provide new knowledge

to the teachers *and* demonstrate how online technologies impact writing and responses to writing. After the training workshop, the teachers from across the state would then be contracted with individually by NRMPS to serve as responders to the research projects generated by students in Nash County.

Based on early discussions among the members of our partnership, the RSWO project was designed to consist of five separate modules that would move participants progressively through an understanding of best practices when responding to student writing, methods of effective communication in virtual environments, the North Carolina Graduation Project (NCGP) itself, as well as a discussion space that remained active throughout RSWO:

- *Module 1: Understanding the NCGP Research Paper* helped participants become more familiar with the NCGP Research Paper rubric and the contents of the rubric, which was crucial because evaluators would be using the rubric to determine whether students met the requirements necessary to graduate high school. The subsections of this rubric included the following: Understanding the Graduation Project Resource, Review of Informational Writing Features, North Carolina Graduation Project Research Paper Rubric (both of which are PDF documents from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and can be found at <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/acre/writing/rubrics/features.pdf> and <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/graduationproject/resources/rubrics/>, respectively), and a subsection that engaged participants in Applying the Rubric.
- *Module 2: Writing in Digital Environments* offered suggestions on how to effect an online response persona that encourages writers to think critically about the comments and to revise their work productively. It included components such as “Etiquette of Constructing Digital Responses” as well as reflections on choice of tone and vocabulary when responding to writing online.
- *Module 3: Responding to Inspire Revision* helped participants provide feedback that would prompt students into revision rather than merely commenting on the level of performance. As we noted in that module, “our goal as E-responders is *not* to edit or proofread student writing, nor to do their reading/researching or thinking for them, but to teach the student writers to do these things for themselves so they can become better and more confident writers. We want to focus on higher-order (or global) concerns in the pieces of student writing we read rather than focusing on lower-order (or sentence level) concerns.” To that end, this module included sections that helped participants think about what type of feedback is most useful to student writers, and asked them to connect higher-order concerns to the NCGP rubric and to share examples of their commentary on their own student writing and reflect upon those commentaries after reading excerpts from Knoblauch and Brannon’s “Teacher Commentary on Student Writing—The State of the Art,” Lunsford and Straub’s “Twelve Readers Reading,” and Anson’s “Reflective Reading: Developing Thoughtful Ways to Respond to Students’ Writing.”
- *Module 4: Working with Online Resources* provided links and resources divided into categories to align with the “Five Features of Writing” and the NCGP assessment rubric in order to help participants quickly and easily find resources most relevant to the feature of writing with which the student writers struggled most.
- In *Module 5: Practice Responding to Student Projects*, participants found sam-

ple research papers for use in practicing responding with comments and tracking changes, as well as forums for discussing each others' responses. These papers also served as anchor papers of sorts, calibrating participants' implementation of the NCGP Paper Rubric as they responded to NRMPS student papers during their contractual period with NRMPS the following semester.

After the online training period ended, we realized that the participants would need one more brief online workshop, *Logistics of Responding to NRMS Students*, so that they would have a better understanding of the students themselves and the contexts in which their research essays were constructed. Throughout the project, facilitators maintained *The Coffee Shop*, a discussion forum where participants were encouraged to post comments related to their expectations for the Moodle experience before they began it, as well as a space where, throughout the professional development, they could post random thoughts or ask for help. Office hours for the facilitators were also listed in this module.

It is worth noting here that our NRMPS partner had been extensively involved at the state level in developing the NCGP, so her insights into the project from both a development and an implementation standpoint were invaluable as we negotiated our partnership and built the online PD module. The five "content" modules involved summaries of current research on their respective topics, as well as connections among that research, the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (our state's standards document), and our facilitators' own experience as expert teachers. RSWO participants were able to read through the materials at their own pace and connect to the hyperlinked research or examples, and were then required to write reflective journal-styled entries wherein they made their own connections between the research and their practices as teachers. Facilitators helped

to synthesize those reflections and used them to engage the participants in further synchronous and asynchronous discussions. After the five "content" modules were completed, the participants worked on responding to a common set of sample student essays; this component gave them practice with the digital tools for response (primarily Microsoft Word's comment feature, but also the practice of narrative/holistic response) and provided a space to norm response practices.

Participants' self-evaluations suggested that they valued the flexibility that the online PD model provided. They did not need to attempt all six modules in the same session; they could return as frequently as they wanted or needed to complete their training. This provided for more reflective time throughout the PD event, a kind of time that can be rushed in single-session, after-school PD events (Penuel et al, 2007, pp. 924 – 925). Two TRWP teacher consultants, one ECU faculty member, and one NRMPS instructional coach were actively involved in constructing and facilitating the RSWO modules. Although participants completed the modules over the course of one month, the facilitators were available for follow-up consultation through the end of the school year.

TECHNOLOGY-AS-CATALYST IN RSWO

While our experience so far has not suggested that all professional development for K-12 teachers should move into digital environments, it has suggested that certain types of PD can work effectively in large part *because of* the technological environment. Organizations like TRWP, which is a grassroots collection of teachers and scholars from different schools and different levels of education, often run into the problem of technological mismatch. On the TRWP leadership team alone, for example, are two Mac users and three PC users; some use Microsoft Word, while others

use Mac's Pages program for word processing. Across such diffuse networks, having common server-based collaboration tools can be key to erasing the headaches of various formatting issues and cross-OS compatibility. Building RSWO in Moodle, an online content management system (CMS), provided a way around these and other issues and even allowed the facilitators to bring some of the best parts of face-to-face interaction (e.g., synchronous conversation) into the digital training environment.

Building and facilitating RSWO in a digital space also made more sense than traditional face-to-face interaction because the teacher participants trained in RSWO would use digital tools and networks for communicating with the student writers in Nash County. We believed at the time, and our assessment data has affirmed, that training the teachers in an environment similar to the one they would eventually use for responding to student writers would allow the technology itself to be a less cumbersome distraction later as the participants worked as online responders. We knew from our own experience that Moodle could be a fairly straightforward interface for inexperienced users, and we knew that we could customize the interface so that any functions that might distract users could be eliminated from view. The ability of the trainers to customize and control the design and functionality of the CMS allowed for the technology to not direct the teaching – which is often the case in proprietary platforms like Blackboard; instead, the technology functioned more to facilitate the vision of the trainers and allowed for the partnership stakeholders to see their needs met more precisely. As teachers, when we use proprietary systems like Blackboard, we have little space for customizing the interface, modifying the layout/theme, or adding plug-ins to augment the learning environment. CMSes, like Moodle, allow facilitators just that sort of functionality. In fact, as we were building the RSWO components, we quickly realized that some of the built-in feedback tools would not be robust enough

to capture the type of assessments we sought both during the PD event and after its completion. The university partner began to search for additional Moodle plug-ins that would assist that work, and we found that the new plug-ins allowed us to better understand when, where, and why the participants were struggling or experiencing frustration either with the RSWO content or the technology itself. Beyond that, we also knew that the NCDPI was beginning to use Moodle for some of its online professional development modules, so many of the participants would already have been somewhat familiar with the interface, and this experience would better prepare those who were not for future NCDPI professional development delivered via Moodle.

From traditional face-to-face PD models, TRWP facilitators knew the importance of interaction, of providing a space for informal conversations, questions, resource sharing, and peer coaching. In many of our previous PD projects, those interactive moments have been seen as the most effective (or at least most “memorable”) elements of professional development for teachers in our region whose evaluations of our PD events suggest that they feel increasingly walled off from their colleagues, even in their own schools, where planning periods and cross-class collaboration have been increasingly pushed to the side in favor of “efficiency” and “one-size-fits-all” professional development models. In the planning stages, the Moodle provided a common space for the facilitators to interact with the contracting partner in the local school district, as well as the university faculty member, and eventually for all three to interact with the participants. The online platform provided both synchronous and asynchronous communication experiences and was flexible enough that the facilitators could access information such as time spent on each task, numbers of posts made by each participant in each discussion forum, types of posts (voicing an “aha” moment or a moment of frustration) in order to track participants’ progress through the

modules; these tools also allowed facilitators to assess the work of the larger partnership by quickly responding to questions or posing new questions, clarifying objectives, and articulating and responding to the various needs of the participants. While there are similar ways to “track” work in face-to-face environments, they often seem obtrusive and stop the flow of the work. These assessment tools could more effectively fade into the background in a digital environment like Moodle.

FORMING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

On one level, TRWP already “works” as an effective, alternative professional development project for K-12 schools in large part because it is built on a partnership model that teachers have found valuable for over 30 years in National Writing Project sites around the country. While traditional PD tends to be offered to administrators and teachers as “top-down,” prepackaged, and “user-proof,” face-to-face PD offered by TRWP engages administrators, teachers, and university researchers in a collaboration that customizes PD in ways meant to best meet the unique needs of each group. Projects like RSWO expand upon such collaboration by creating a virtual space where teachers from various school districts across the state can work together on their own professional development, sharing knowledge related to their local contexts with other teachers across a broader network, and where university partners are viewed less as “experts” who cannot be communicated with and more as accessible partners (and collaborators) in education.

RSWO ultimately showed us that a partnership or collaborative model of professional development could continue to work in our socially networked, Web 2.0 world. Certainly, there were parts of our F2F model that the TCs missed; TCs are themselves teachers who work in traditional blackboard-and-desk classrooms, and there’s

a productive synergy that often occurs when people who share common goals come together in the same physical space. For years, educational research has valued small group collaboration (Atwell, 1987; Bruffee, 1984; Calkins, 1994; Estrada, 2005; Hull, 2003; McCann et al, 2004), which doesn’t necessarily happen in the same ways in digital PD, although collaboration certainly occurs. Likewise, any training pedagogy that involves some sort of individual writing/sharing/reflection process will necessarily have to change in asynchronous environments.

What we gave up in moving PD to an online, modular environment, seems balanced by the gains: more teachers had access to high-quality, research-based professional development, greater cross-educational collaboration was able to occur, and more authentic training occurred in large part because the context for the training represented the values of the training itself (e.g., teachers learned about responding in online environments while also responding, and receiving responses themselves, in an online environment).

COMMUNITY IMPACT ON RSWO

Because RSWO was able to move beyond a single-school, face-to-face (F2F) model of professional development, the RSWO builders/facilitators also gained a great deal from the experience. Key to various Writing Project models is the constructivist belief that all partners bring experience and knowledge/expertise to an activity; one goal of facilitating such partnerships is to convince all those members present that they have valuable contributions to make in the collective knowledge generated in that space. As facilitators, we found that our own knowledge of writing and responding to writing was frequently challenged in productive ways, and because we were involved as partners in this particular enterprise, we were able to revise and rethink the modules that had been prepared as part of the RSWO project. In this way, such

partnerships allow for the two- and three-way flow of knowledge and information that works to continually restructure the “modular” approach embodied in the RSWO Moodle, and likewise works to build leadership capacity throughout our own TRWP/NWP network.

Perhaps the most significant impact that community partners had on RSWO came in the form of building teacher leaders. In the National Writing Project model, “capacity” is a direct function of quality teacher leaders; local NWP sites like TRWP can continue primarily because of successful teacher consultants who finish the ISI and go on to build and facilitate high-quality professional development for/in area schools. TRWP’s success rests on how effectively it mentors teacher consultants and helps them to become educational leaders in their schools, districts, and region. Projects like RSWO, which involved teachers from multiple school districts across the state, not only provide a space for TRWP teacher consultants to develop their “teachers-teaching-teachers” practices and to grow as educational leaders, but also allowed them to develop their professional reputations and credibility across the state. Practice and validation go a long way in transforming teachers from mere cogs in a system to change agents in that same system.

EDUCATIONAL IMPACT: VALUING RSWO

The primary educational impact of the RSWO project was on the teachers who participated in the training modules, as they were the focus of this partnership. TRWP’s goal of engaging various teachers from across the state was achieved: 29 teachers from 21 different cities, 27 different schools, and 13 distinct school districts from across NC participated in the month-long training module. The online space allowed for a more geographically diverse and complex pool of participants than any of TRWP’s previous PD events.

Likewise, these teachers’ work in the RSWO project was immediately put to use in responding to the writings of high school students in our partner school system. As teachers who have, ourselves, participated in various PD events over the years, we know how often, with traditional, F2F professional development, teachers can struggle to integrate the ideas they receive because these ideas may have no direct connection to the curriculum of the school, or these ideas may just not be received at a timely moment when the teacher can put them to use. We recognize these as key issues with F2F teacher development, but we also felt confident that the RSWO would work against that as the teachers would, immediately after finishing the training, be responding to student writing from our partner school.

Increasingly, universities are being accused of ignoring their “town-gown” relationship as research practices and discourses seem to remove university faculty further and further from the “practical” concerns of their local communities (Eble and Gaillet, 2004; Deans, 2000). The RSWO project worked to build the “town-gown” connection in a reciprocal fashion. What the RSWO facilitators (all of whom had worked with TRWP in different settings) brought to the teacher participants was research on responding to writing effectively, as well as practice with doing so in digital environments. The contracting partner from NRMPS helped educate the university faculty member and TRWPTCs about the North Carolina Graduate Project, helping us to clarify its goals and intentions and to construct modules that would communicate that work to teacher participants. That shared knowledge then influenced TRWP’s other PD work as we integrated more knowledge about the NCGP into our other activities. Similarly, teacher participants in the Moodle often spoke of their own experiences in K-12 classrooms, experiences that helped remind the university partners about the complexities of teaching and responding to writing in K-12 environments.

STRATEGIES FOR EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS: COLLEGE, K-12, COMMUNITY

Our partnership model is multi-layered and capitalizes on at least four unique partnerships: the TRWP/ECU/NRMPS partnership, the TRWP/ECU/teacher relationship, the teacher-to-teacher relationship, and the over-arching NWP/ECU/K-12 partnership.

Too often, teachers are taught a specific professional development activity and do not have a way to use that knowledge beyond the immediate task, while research continues to demonstrate that embedded, context-specific activities are more useful to teachers and more productive for improving teacher (and student) performance (Huber, 2010, pp. 41-42; Darling-Hammond and Richardson, 2009, p. 49). The partnerships created through the RSWO venture can truly be defined as unique partnerships in the context of public education, standing against the normal communication that obtains between professional development “givers” and teacher “receivers,” because the partners involved all found uses for the work beyond the RSWO context itself, experienced the knowledge creation as reciprocal, and ultimately found the relationships that were built to be on-going. We believe this to be a powerful argument for both fully online and hybrid face-to-face/online PD models because digital environments like Moodle provide space for different types of feedback and discussion that remain grounded in the specific writings, thoughts, and experiences of the participants and facilitators. Those involved have the chance to return to these sorts of partnership spaces to resolve conflicts and pose questions (e.g., “The ‘best practices’ do not seem to be working for me; what am I doing wrong?”) in ways that might not be available in more traditional models. Once the workshop facilitators have left their schools, there may be no space for follow-up.

It is worth noting, as well, that our local partnership may have been as successful as it was because

it grew out of the partnership model inherent in the National Writing Project. As part of the community base of experts, teachers serve as experts in the development and implementation of PD work at the TRWP. Utilizing our vibrant network of teacher consultants who are themselves K-12 teachers in eastern NC, and thus experts in their field, creates a dialogue among peers that is often sought but infrequently attainable in the day-to-day work of teachers. This model of peer partnership is valuable and long-lasting, well beyond the parameters of our particular project. We find that this type of partnership is more sustainable than the majority of top-down models we frequently see and experience at work in local school systems. RSWO extends that model to an online space, and of course, parts of the partnership do not stop once the module itself has been completed by the teacher participants. During the following summer and fall, as module developers, we returned to the Web site and the feedback from participants in order to process what had worked well and what had not. Also, we debriefed the project with our public school partner, who provided feedback on where we might reshape the modules, which aspects of responding to student writing the participants struggled with, and how we might improve the modules to better address those gaps. Since then, we have made use of TRWP-sponsored writing retreats to revise our thinking and to share our experiences with other members of our network as they considered developing similar online PD projects for schools.

As for the partnership between the school system and the university, we found it to be rhetorically sound because the professional development provided was tailor-made for the school system, was based upon their expressed needs, and was evaluated by the contracting school partner for effectiveness. We realize, of course, that successful replications are necessary to lend validity to our findings.

PROBLEMIZATION AND CONCLUSION

As in any teaching situation, there are some inherent issues that must be addressed when planning and adapting instruction to meet the needs of all learners. In our online professional development model, we experienced many of the same concerns as we would in a face-to-face professional development environment, such as the need for differentiated instruction for multiple learning styles and varying degrees of investment or ability to fulfill commitments among learners (Gardner, 1999; Dunn, 2001). There are the cruise-through learners and the lingerers, those who complete all parts of every task, and those who always seem to run out of time. What we noticed is that when participants are working in an asynchronous setting, not only is there the positive effect of having time to work when it is more convenient to the learner, but also the negative effect of having so much, virtually unlimited time, to complete each task (so long as the final deadline is met), that some participants spent much more time than the Moodle creators intended on each task. As is true too frequently in instructional planning, some tasks were overly detailed and belabored the point of the activity, leaving some participants frustrated. Without face-to-face interaction, it was difficult to judge that level of hyper-processing and to intervene *at the moment*, but, through the message board postings of participants, facilitators could surmise that frustration and were able to respond to and lessen the participants' concerns. This is a benefit of online instruction—each learner's voice is distinct and may be heard; whereas, in a traditional face-to-face setting, many learners choose not to participate verbally or their voices blend together, leaving quieter participants vocally overshadowed by stronger voices.

Beyond the teacher participants, there were also struggles among the Teacher Consultants and the other facilitators. Varying levels of expertise with Moodle creation among the partnership team

was an obstacle that slowed our preparation phase somewhat. Only the university partner had expertise with Moodle and thus he found it necessary to devote much of the time scheduled for content building to the task of training Teacher Consultants and the NRMPS partner in how to create and manipulate content in Moodle. While not a daunting task, this did slow the content-building phase of the project. The upside of that situation is that the formerly inexperienced partners walked away with new knowledge in the area of digital content management systems; one facilitator went on to create a Moodle for his own high school students as a result of working on this project.

A similar problem was that some members of the group participating in the professional development came to the scenario seriously lacking what the partnership team considered standard technical abilities. Some training in posting and locating message board comments and posting photos as avatars was unforeseen, but necessary. Again, in the end, participants took away new technical abilities that would be useful as they responded to NRMPS students, but which would also be useful to their own classrooms and future teaching. On some level, because these teachers were not in a training session required by their own schools/administrators, the technology-based training was low-stakes; we think this may have contributed to their ability to push on even in moments of frustration or when there were technological glitches. In the future, we plan to investigate this idea, comparing the low-stakes/high-stakes environments and their respective impacts on participant engagement.

Ultimately, our partnership among the university, the Tar River Writing Project, and the K-12 school system met the needs of the contracting partner (NRMPS), was a positive learning and leadership experience for writing project Teacher Consultants, and helped put a community partner face on the university, bringing the “ivory tower” and “the trenches” to a common ground. As a bonus, teacher participants across the state of

North Carolina benefitted from a quality online professional development experience in which they learned more about the NCGP rubric as well as online response to writing, which they could take back to their own classrooms, and students in NRMPS received revision-inspiring responses to their NCGP papers from highly-trained respondents. Based on this positive partnership, we feel confident that digitally mediated partnerships will become an increasingly important part of TRWP's professional development work.

REFERENCES

Atwell, N. (1987). *In the middle: Writing, reading, and learning with adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Bruffee, K. A. (1984). Collaborative learning and the conversation of mankind. *College English*, 46(7), 635–652. doi:10.2307/376924

Calkins, L. M. (1994). *The art of teaching writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Cushman, E. (1996). The rhetorician as an agent of social change. *College Composition and Communication*, 47(1), 7–28. doi:10.2307/358271

Darling-Hammond, L., & Richardson, N. (2009). Teacher learning: What matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 46–53.

Deans, T. (2000). *Writing partnerships: Service learning in composition*. Urbana, IL: National Council of Teachers of English.

Dunn, P. A. (2001). *Talking, sketching, moving: Multiple literacies in the teaching of writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook.

Eble, M., & Gaillet, L. L. (2004). Educating community intellectuals: Rhetoric, moral philosophy, and civic engagement. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 13(3), 341–354. doi:10.1207/s15427625tcq1303_7

Estrada, P. (2005). The courage to grow: A researcher and teacher linking professional development with small-group reading instruction and student achievement. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 39(4), 320–364.

Gardner, H. (1999). *Intelligence reframed: Multiple intelligences for the 21st century*. New York, NY: Basic Books.

Huber, C. (2010). Professional learning 2.0. *Educational Leadership*, 67(8), 41–46.

Hull, G. A. (2003). At last: Youth culture and digital media: New literacies for new times. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 38(2), 229–233.

McCann, T. M., Johannesen, L. R., Kahn, E., Smagorinsky, P., & Smith, M. W. (Eds.). (2005). *Reflective teaching, reflective learning: How to develop critically engaged readers, writers, and speakers*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Penuel, W. R., Fishman, B. J., Yamaguchi, R., & Gallagher, L. P. (2007). What makes professional development effective? Strategies that foster curriculum implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), 921–958. doi:10.3102/0002831207308221

ENDNOTE

- ¹ The NC Public Schools Web site provides additional information about the NCGP, including rubrics and samples (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/graduationproject/>).