Using a Community of Practice Model for Enhancing the Classroom Practices of Faculty in a Pre-Service ESL Teacher Program

Christina Gitsaki[*1]

[1]Zayed University – Émirats arabes unis

Résumé

The use of mobile technology for teaching and learning in higher education contexts across the globe has gained significant popularity, especially since the advent of the iPad. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), federal government universities expect faculty to adopt mobile technologies as a medium of content delivery and a vehicle for implementing innovative teaching practices in the classroom. This session describes a professional development (PD) program designed to facilitate faculty use of mobile technologies for teaching and learning. The program adopted a Community of Practice (CoP) approach, which is an effective model of PD (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas, 2006). According to Lave and Wenger (1991) a CoP is an activity system that engages faculty in social communities in their professional context, and provides opportunities for sharing experiences and best practices in order to seek potential solutions to problems that they encounter in their classrooms. The CoP framework adopted in this PD program was based on transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 2000). In order for educators to achieve long-term transformation in their teaching practice, they need to be involved in critical reflection stimulated either by self-examination of their own practice or through communicating with others. Only through such a process they may begin to think about how they might redefine their practice in new ways. Based on an explicit and structured CoP framework developed by Wang (2010), the PD program engaged faculty in the College of Education in a federal higher education in the UAE. The faculty were teaching in a pre-service ESL teacher training program. There were a total of 8 faculty in two groups attending 1-hr weekly meetings facilitated by the program designers for a total of 6 weeks. Each group underwent cycles of learning that comprised reflection, sharing of experiences and best practices with colleagues, critical review of mobile apps and tools for teaching as well as pedagogical models of learner-centered use of mobile technology. The effectiveness of the PD program in transforming teaching practice was evaluated using evidence collected through a pre- and post-PD questionnaire, reflective blogs, and semi-structured interviews with the program participants. This session will present the results of the study and its implications for the development of future PD programs. Session participants will be provided with an overview of the CoP program, the types of reflective activities and teaching materials included in the program as well as the results of the evaluation of the PD program. Those involved in designing faculty PD will benefit the most from attending this session.
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[*]Intervenant

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Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., & Thomas, S. (2006). Professional Learning Communities: A Review Of The Literature. *Journal of Educational Change, 7*, 221-258. Wang, P. (2010). *Professional Development through CoPs: A Case study of EFL Teachers in China.* Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.