Designing an Interactive Online Seminar Course for Distance Learning Interns: Combining Technology Tools and Facilitating Meaningful Discourse

Lori Caudle
Western Carolina University, lacaudle@wcu.edu

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Designing an Interactive Online Seminar Course for Distance Learning Interns: Combining Technology Tools and Facilitating Meaningful Discourse

Lori A. Caudle, Ph.D.

Cathy L. Grist, Ph.D.

Myra K. Watson, MA.Ed.

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Objectives of this Session

- Discuss preliminary findings from phase one of a SoTL research study and how this informed changes to course structure and delivery
- Brainstorm ways to develop effective field-based teacher education distance learning courses, such as internship seminars
Online Learning

- Educational use of technology and teacher-student/student-student interactions key evaluation components of online course effectiveness (Badia, Barberà, Guasch, & Espasa, 2011)
- Model of Community of Inquiry: development of social, cognitive, and teaching presence (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000)
- Incorporating student surveys as ways to positively influence course design (Lee, 2009)
- Peer mentors (Darabi, Arrastia, Nelson, Cornille, & Liang, 2010) and student facilitators (Hew, Cheung, Ling Ng, 2010) meaningful in enhancing critical reflection and cognitive presence within online discussions
- Students’ preferences for synchronous versus text-based lectures (Skylar, 2009) and discussions (McBrein, Jones, & Cheng, 2009)
- Use of e-portfolios with preservice teachers (Kecik & Aydı̈n, 2011)
Goals of Internship

- Learning to practice *in* practice (Darling-Hammond, 2010)
- Applying knowledge acquired in program
- Making real-life decisions while under umbrella of teacher preparation program
- Acquiring knowledge of informal or *hidden* teaching practices and duties not obtained in coursework or prior field experiences
- Learning from *expert* practitioners through apprenticeship model
- Reflecting on self and others as process of forming beginning ideas of teacher identity
WCU Birth-Kindergarten Program

- Distance learning undergraduate program with optional licensure track
- Blackboard learning management system
- Current program enrollment ≈250
- Majority of students have A.A. degrees upon entry into program
- Diverse student population, including many non-traditional, first-generation college students
- Field experiences throughout coursework
- Two internship semesters (part-time and full-time) for licensure track
- Internships frequently in students’ own classrooms with cooperating teachers (mentors) both in and out of classrooms
Research Questions

- How can faculty (a) best meet the diverse learning needs of experienced and novice interns enrolled in an early childhood distance learning teacher preparation program and (b) encourage interns to become reflective practitioners?

- How can faculty combine synchronous and asynchronous technology tools within an online seminar course for distance learning interns as a way to develop an effective learning community?
Phases of Study

Fall 2011
- 10 intern participants
- Pre/post survey
- Synchronous bi-weekly seminar discussions via synchronous software
- Bi-weekly blogs: specific, predetermined topics

*Seminar separate section from internship in learning management system

Spring 2012
- 8 intern participants
- Pre/post survey
- Synchronous bi-weekly seminar via new synchronous software
- Critical friend dyads
- Bi-weekly blogs: general reflection and discussion extensions from live class sessions

*Seminar and internship sections combined in learning management system
Intern Age Ranges

Age of Interns

Frequency

Age

24 27 28 30 31 33 34 38 45 52 55
Intern Classroom Settings

The bar chart shows the number of interns in different classroom settings:

- Head Start: 6 interns
- NC PreK: 8 interns
- Kindergarten: 4 interns
Intern Years of Experience

[Bar chart showing frequency of different years of experience]
Phase One: Preliminary Results

- Interns found the technology challenging and/or frustrating at times.
- Experienced interns would have benefited from different levels of discussion.
- Based on self-reports, synchronous and asynchronous tools contributed to the interns’ learning.
- Blog participation was surface-level.
- Synchronous chats focused on dissemination of assignment expectations and Q & A rather than development of online learning community.
Phase One: Survey Data

- All interns found the blogs to be beneficial.
  - No elaboration on why or how
- All interns, but one, found live sessions to be beneficial.
  - I loved the live discussions for seminar! It was a great way to collaborate with my instructors and fellow interns to share ideas and discuss concerns… . I believe that the live discussions are key to the online internship course's success. I would highly suggest continuing these discussions.
  - Loved that component. Made the distance education much more personal.
  - The material covered was more for younger unemployed teachers.
- Half of the participants ran into technical problems with learning management system and/or synchronous software.
  - [Learning management system] had some technical issues this semester which caused difficulty.
  - I did not think that the live discussions were beneficial. I like the idea behind the sessions but felt that the technological quality was very poor. I hope that this gets improved for future online learners!
  - The live classrooms were challenging to understand at best. They continually cut out as students clicked on and off to talk or raise their hand. Overall I feel that the software needs to be updated.
Phase One: Blog Example

Q: Reflect on what you believe in terms of guidance for young children.

- Rachel: “…We must demonstrate the behavior we want them to use. Make sure the children are interested in what you are doing and always stay consistent. Children should be given clear direction for the rules and know that they are not going to change. Teachers and assistants must stay on the same tasks to ensure children see consistency.”
  - Sally: It is important for both teachers in the classroom to be on the same page. If each teacher has her own way of doing things and they do not work together, the children will be confused. (You would know LOL).

Q: Reflect on how you feel about class-wide or school-wide behavior management systems.

- Rachel: “…I feel that classrooms have to have rules but all children are not the same. We have to adjust our expectations for each child and help them succeed at their level. Behavior management is dependent on the individual not school-wide…”
  - Tina: I feel the same way about how all children are not the same so adjusting the expectations is needed. Classrooms do need rules but it is also true that some kids need more and different rules.
Phase One: Live Discussion Examples

- Mainly covered assignments and answered questions
- Encouraged others to share as a way to build community, but sharing did not lead to comments or apparent reflection by other interns
- Technical challenges emerged within most live class sessions
Connections between Phase One & Two

Synchronous chats focused on dissemination of assignment expectations and Q&A rather than development of online learning community.

Modified format of live discussions.

Blog participation was surface level.

Based blogs on content from live discussions and lived personal experiences/reflections.

Experienced interns would have benefitted from different levels of discussions.

Assigned critical friend partners for support and feedback.

Interns found the technology challenging and/or frustrating at times.

Implemented live sessions through new software.
Phase Two: Live Discussion Example

- More sharing of authentic experiences combined with some Q & A
- Coverage of assignments moved to office hours and small Power Point slides embedded in learning management system course
- Reflection on weekly challenges and successes
Blogs as Discussion Extensions

For seminar this week, we would like you to respond to the following:

**Please respond to #1 & #2 if you are in a classroom with your CT.**
**Please respond to #3 & #4 if your CT is out of the classroom.

1) Last week in seminar we discussed how challenging it can be to take over control of the classroom and share responsibility with your CT. If your CT is in the classroom teaching with you, how has this been going? Do you feel comfortable stepping in? Why or why not?

2) How are you feeling about being in charge for ten weeks? What are your worries?

3) What challenges are associated with your CT being outside of the classroom? How are you dealing with these challenges?

4) How has internship transformed your teaching strategies/approaches so far? What are you thinking about differently now?
I have been the lead teacher in my head start classroom so I think it has been easier for me because I already know the routine and the children and families. I already have been developing the lesson plans and leading the classroom for some time. I also know where the children are at in terms of learning. I think internship so far has really allowed me to be more organized and more in depth in my planning of activities in the classroom. I also feel like it has allowed me to reflect more on myself and what things are going well in the classroom and what things I can do better. It is also great to be able to see the ideas and lessons of others. I always feel like the more ideas one can gather the more it stimulates ideas for your own lessons, or things you may want to try. I also think it is tying together what I have learned in all the classes I have taken at Western.

Hi N., I think it is very different for those of us who are already the lead teacher in a classroom. I imagine it would be much more difficult if I was an intern coming into a new classroom for the first time. I feel the same about the way this class has made you be more organized and in depth in your planning. I also agree about wanting to try some of the activities that I see in other people's lesson plans. In fact, I really like the way you have planned your circle times each week. I might start using that format for my own lessons. Have you always done it that way? I am referring to the way you list out the gather, energizer, calm and attend for each day? Great job!

Hey L., So yeah I agree it would be harder to get to know a new class and the routine. I am glad to already be in
Looking to the Future

- Integrating new technology tools as needed
- Making intern teaching practice visible within learning communities and providing time and opportunities for social cohesion and co-construction of knowledge
- Continuing combined use of synchronous and asynchronous tools—keeping interns actively thinking, sharing, questioning, and reflecting
- Partnering through critical friends
- Forming stronger relationships with Cooperating Teachers (mentors)
References


Questions?
Discussion: Designing Successful Online Internship Course Formats