

Showcasing Agricultural Education Programs with Book Creator

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Introduction/Need for Innovation

Educating preservice teachers on the integration of technology in the classroom is a focus area for many teacher education programs (Chai, Koh, & Tsai, 2010). With the introduction of technology to classrooms, students become active constructors of their own knowledge, aiding in the promotion of constructivist teaching and learning approaches (Chai et al., 2010). Training preservice teachers to use technology in an educational context strongly influences their efficacy and use in their own classrooms (Hammond et al., 2009).

Additionally, the use of field experience schools to help prepare future teachers is a recognized practice in education. Students in the teaching methods course, prior to the student teaching semester, work with area high school agriculture teachers to plan and teach four lessons. The students are in teams of 2-3 and travel to two schools.

In the past Kansas State University students were transported as a group to see all of the field experience schools. This took two days of instruction, faculty time, and vehicle transportation expense. Therefore, two years ago it was changed to allow each team to conduct a site visit to their first field experience school. This allowed them to meet the teacher(s), see the facility and technology available, and become more comfortable with the first group of students they would be teaching in a couple weeks.

In order to capture their observations and share those with their classmates, they created an e-book. Book Creator (n.d.) is an online tool teachers and students can use to create digital books. The e-books allow for creativity and storytelling while students prepare for their first round of field experience teaching. It also allows for students to read each others books and learn more about the field experience schools.

How it Works/Methods/Steps

Agricultural Education students in the teaching methods course at Kansas State University visit their first field experience school at the start of the fall semester. They ask the field experience teacher(s) questions regarding courses, student-learning needs, classroom resources, and technology. In addition to questions, they are also required to capture video and take pictures of the program. Students interview the teacher(s) and incorporate their responses into the narrative of the e-book or as a video response in the e-book. They are able to record responses, video, and take pictures using their personal smart phones and/or the Ag Ed iPads. I created an e-book to communicate the expectations of the assignment and feature a few of the features they could use to create their own e-books.

Each student was required to complete their own e-book. Therefore, members of the same travel team were encouraged to discuss the items they planned to include in each of their books in order to reduce duplication. After they completed their visit and gathered all of their content, they used Bookcreator.com to create an e-book to share with their classmates. As the instructor, I was able to create a library and provide a code to the students for them to share their e-books all in one location. Students were encouraged to view other students' e-books to learn more about the other schools and prepare for the school they would visit for their second round of practice lessons.

Results to Date/Implications

Nineteen students visited seven field experience schools on August 30, 2018. They captured video, took pictures, interviewed the teacher(s), and gathered supplemental documents to help them teach in the school a few weeks later. After gathering the information, each student created an e-book and submitted it to the shared library two weeks later.

Students provided feedback as to their view of the assignment and areas of improvement. Some students struggled with the new technology, getting text to fit on the page as they wanted it to, inserting pictures, and being creative with the process. On the other hand, several students found it very user friendly and allowed them to display their creativity. Overall, it was evenly split between those who enjoyed it and those who did not.

Key pieces of advice provided by the students included allowing more time to complete the book, permitting them to submit after they actually teach at the school, allowing for one e-book per travel team, assistance with inserting video and photos, and more support on how to use the iPad app. Students did mention they liked having key questions already developed before the site visit to help direct their attention and focus. Many students mentioned that they took the time to review their classmates' books prior to submitting their own.

Future Plans/Advice to Others

After the use of this tool for this particular assignment several items were adjusted for future semesters. The Fall 2019 teaching methods students had the choice to create an e-book or video. Of the nine groups, all but one choose to create an e-book. They were also allowed to work together as a team to complete the project.

Advice for others wanting to use Book Creator include incorporating this tool in other courses and for other assignments to help them utilize it more than once. Requiring all students to view each other's books is recommended, but hard to validate. One student suggested having a document to cite one interesting thing from each book while a few others suggested reading just a couple of other books. Making this expectation more explicit may help push students to take the time to read all the books. Providing an example e-book to the students can help communicate the expectations and showcase the different features of the book, but it will not help them troubleshoot problems. Students will need to be supported as they work through any technical issues.

Some students did have technology issues, while others completed the assignment without any problems. Students who have Apple devices did have trouble using it on their computer, but there is an iPad option. Encouraging students to work through their issues and learn from them will help them face future situations when the technology does not work, as it should.

Costs/Resources Needed

Book Creator is free up to 40 books in the library. They do have plans offered at a fee ranging from \$60 per teacher per year for 180 books to \$120 per teacher per year for 1,000 books (Book Creator Pricing, n.d.). They also offer a plan for schools and districts. The website includes a large number of resources by grade and subject area. They are helpful in showcasing how the website/app can be used. The e-book can be created using an iPad or Google Chrome.

References

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Book Creator Pricing (n.d.) Retrieved from <https://bookcreator.com/pricing/>

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