Distance Makes the Heart Grow Fonder: Collaborating at a Distance via Nearpod

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Introduction

Collaboration plays an important role in providing a support system and an avenue for contributions (Hafernik et al., 1997). Consultation, collegiality, and cooperation are elements of collaboration as evidenced by Wertsch and Tulviste (1996). Educators at the University of Kentucky aim to provide opportunities to exercise each element within the teacher education program. Activities fostering collaboration provide opportunities for sharing of expertise (collaboration), relationships among colleagues (collegiality), and striving to reach a common goal (collaboration) (Goulet et al., 2003). Elements of collaboration aid in developing an educational community. Collaboration does not always happen organically (Kapuscinski, 1997) and the role of a teacher educator is to create the opportunity for collaboration.

With a differing education climate due to the Coronavirus, educators have begun to utilize technology to foster collaboration both as a necessity and to enhance student involvement in lessons. Technology has provided differing delivery options for content and transformed teaching pedagogy (Beldarrain, 2006). Jones (2010) included wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking as online methods to use in instruction. Sinha et al. (2020) provided Kahoot, Trello, Prezi, Nearpod, and Peergrade as additional online methods to be included as instructional methods. Advantages to using online instructional methods include increased motivation from a technology-savvy generation, increased participation, and easy access for students (Sinha et al., 2020). A southern university is using Nearpod to aid and enhance classroom instruction.

Students within the teacher preparation program engage in online collaboration methods through the use of the NearPod application. Online collaboration boards elicit answers from students who would not answer otherwise (Sinha et al., 2020). The use of Nearpod provides an additional teaching method for preservice teachers to use in their future classrooms. This research aligns with the National Research Agenda (Roberts, Harder, & Brashears, 2016), “Priority 5: Efficient and Effective Agricultural Education Programs” (p.43).

How it Works

The primary of objective of the teaching methods class at the University of Kentucky is to provide valuable teaching instruction in preparing preservice teachers for their future careers. An increase in technology methods are being used in the teaching methods class to reflect the increase in technology throughout the world of education. Educators have transitioned paper assignments and PowerPoint presentations to Nearpod to increase participation and speed of delivery. Nearpod is a presentation software, differing from PowerPoint in its interactive capabilities.

Nearpod provides the option to add open-ended questions, quizzes, matching games, flip grids, polls, memory tests, drawings, and collaboration boards within the flow of a presentation (Nearpod, 2020). Students follow along with the presentation on their devices. Students see the same presentation on their devices as is projected on the screen in front of the classroom. For the purpose of lessons used in the teaching methods class, the collaboration board is the primary function of Nearpod used within the methods course. The collaboration board posts individual answers to an open-ended question posed within the presentation by the educator. Educators can see which students have participated and gauge the wait time needed by the number of responses

on the board. Nearpod aids instruction by fielding answers from students who do not normally provide answers within verbal instruction.

Nearpod provides a user-friendly platform for educators. Presentations can be created in PowerPoint or other presentation software and uploaded into Nearpod. After uploading the presentation, Nearpod's interactive components can be added to the presentation. A unique class code is created for the lesson. Students type in the code to be added to the presentation, follow along in real time, and type their answers to the collaboration board. Lessons can be presented live, through zoom, or as a student-paced lesson. At the conclusion of the lesson, the instructor can print off a report including the names of students, the number of responses, and the answers each student shared.

Results to Date

Lessons using Nearpod were successfully completed during the fall 2020 semester at the University of Kentucky. Students were asked to reflect on Nearpod as an instructional method and if it has the potential to be used in their future classrooms. Feedback from students speaks to Nearpod's ability to foster collaboration, flexibility of use, and intent to use Nearpod in the future. University of Kentucky seniors stated, "I believe interaction, reflection and shared perspectives is essential in a classroom, and Nearpod is an amazing tool to do all of those", "I think it's a great way to change up instructional styles that can be used for both in-person and virtual learning", and "I plan to use it during student teaching!" Within the methods course, students have expressed interest in using Nearpod within future teachings to differentiate instruction and enhance understanding.

Future Plans

The implications from this lesson suggest students want to learn new techniques to integrate technology into the classroom. Preservice teachers often struggle to use presentation methods outside of PowerPoint, Google slides, or Prezi. These methods are often teacher-centered and hinder student involvement. Future plans for integrating technology into the classroom include continuing to use the Nearpod collaboration board, expanding the number of Nearpod functions used, and staying current with technologies to enhance instruction. To build upon this method, students will be encouraged to use Nearpod in their future teachings. Nearpod's compatibility with zoom provides the opportunity for preservice teachers to use this for distance education. Additionally, the student report provided by Nearpod should be used to improve reflection and encouraged to use the information to shape future instruction. Instructors should continue to look for additional ways to integrate technology and foster collaboration in their classrooms.

Costs/ Resources Needed

To use Nearpod, a Nearpod account and a computer with internet capabilities is essential. A silver level account can be created for free and provides access to all Nearpod features, but with limited storage capabilities and number of students who can be present in each session. Higher level accounts can be created for $120-349 a year (Nearpod, 2020). Unlimited accounts can be purchased at the district level at a price set by Nearpod (Nearpod, 2020). Lessons can be enhanced by each student having a personal device with internet capabilities to participate in the lesson. To conduct the best lesson, a computer with internet, a Nearpod account, projector, and individual student devices should be obtained.

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