

SCHOOLLINK: A DEMONSTRATION OF WEB-BASED, INTERACTIVE MULTIMEDIA MATERIALS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Stacey Kyle
Gevirtz Graduate School of Education
University of California, Santa Barbara
United States
skyle@education.ucsb.edu

Jessica Villaruz
Gevirtz Graduate School of Education
University of California, Santa Barbara
United States
jvillaruz@education.ucsb.edu

Abstract: *SchoolLink* creates web-based, interactive multimedia professional development modules that support team-oriented professional development in schools. This demonstration serves two purposes: to present *SchoolLink*'s latest module, created in collaboration with a school in southern California, but more specifically to highlight the implementation stages of the project as illustrated by the creation of our next module in Hawaii. Both modules are focused on multilingual and multicultural issues-- issues teachers encounter in classrooms throughout this country everyday. Students are selected for the focus of the study because they represent a larger population of students that have historically demonstrated low performance in academics. The implications of the technology and capacity-building inherent in this model of professional development allows for widespread implementation in California, Hawaii, and potentially other states.

Problem

It is largely understood that students learning English as their second language perform lower academically than their peers who learned English as their first language. This achievement gap is significant as over 2.1 million public school students in the United States are identified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) students. Furthermore, 31% of all American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic students enrolled in public schools are classified as LEP (NCES, 1994). The *SchoolLink* project has tackled this problem in the state of California through its development of innovative interactive, multimedia modules for use in professional development. However, the project has recently expanded to the state of Hawaii, which is struggling with parallel educational issues.

As Hawaii is one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse states in the nation, educators are faced with the challenge of meeting multicultural and multi-linguistic needs in education. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reports that 45% of fourth graders in Hawaii performed at a "basic" achievement level on the 1998 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) in reading (NCES, 1998). Furthermore, in Hawaii, 6% of fourth graders were classified as LEP when the 1998 NAEP was administered. In the plight of facing these challenges, teachers in Hawaii must be able to identify and utilize effective methods of instruction to educate this population of students.

Filipino immigrant students are the largest group served by the Hawaii State Department of Education's program for Speakers of Limited English Proficiency (SLEP). Teachers of Filipino immigrant students have identified problems that seem unique specifically to these students and assert that these problems persist and predictably involve the areas of language learning, motivation and classroom interaction (Chattergy & Ongteco, 1991). To date, few studies have examined second language acquisition among this particular population in Hawaii. In the following section, we will explain how the problems identified in the

Hawaiian educational system may be addressed through a model of professional development developed at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB).

Project Description

Problem based learning (PBL) originated in medical schools. Medical educators created PBL as a way of teaching students how to frame problems, how to inventory, examine and search for new relevant information, and how to apply information to solving problems in the context of team decision-making. Bridges and Hallinger (1996) adapted the PBL approach to training educational administrators at Stanford University. Soon after, UCSB adapted this instructional method to create a new systematic approach, called CASELINK, for using interactive multimedia training modules for pre-professional teacher trainees in special education as part of a 3-year federally funded (OSEP/USDOE) research effort (Gerber, English, & Singer, 1999). This innovative model of professional development has been refined and amended over the past two years as *SchoolLink* was funded by a gift from the Verizon Foundation to begin the process of using this model for impacting the education of English Learner (EL) students. The model has been further extended by a companion project, CASETrainer (OELA/USDOE) to address the critical professional development needs of all teachers of English Learners.

The project's primary focus is an innovative instructional design strategy that, by joining information technology with a problem-based pedagogy, brings actual practice to professional development in a way that is authentic and supportive of the collective experience of teachers-in-practice. Module design consists of actual case stories, or "dilemmas" within local schools illustrating significant problems of professional practice with actual students and their families, and engages with problem-solving the multiple contributions of "teams" of teachers and other professional personnel in a group knowledge construction process.

The utilization of multimedia distance learning interactive technology to provide authentic "hands-on" experience with real life instructional challenges experienced by teachers of EL students in effect transforms "research-to-practice" pedagogy to "practice-for-research." Instructional challenges suggested by school professionals are framed, researched and resolved with the learner as participant in the process. The quality of content in professional training is enhanced by the project's emphasis on the organizational construct of *Communities of Practice*. A term coined by Palinscar, Magnusson, Marano, Ford & Brown (1998), *communities of practice* refers to the cumulative and qualitative benefit of the sharing of professional and personal perspectives in practice. It is conceptually related to the notions of "*embodied knowledge*" (Gerber, English, and Singer, 1999) which presumes that collective knowledge resides in and is uniquely imparted from the experiences of an individual; and "*funds of knowledge*" (Moll, 1992), which presumes that all households, even those of students considered to be the most "deprived" or "at risk," are rich in socio-cultural resources and thus have unique ways of shaping the minds of their members.

Importance

States are currently facing an intense period of education reform, spurred by the recent *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*. As part of this legislation, professional development was identified as being crucial to maintaining the high quality nature of instruction provided by U.S. teachers. Furthermore, Hawaii is in the unique situation of being geographically isolated from much of the education research currently being conducted. It then becomes increasingly important for school administrators and teachers to utilize advanced technological methods as a means to address these issues. *SchoolLink* utilizes an innovative model that integrates both teachers and school leaders who work collectively within one school team in collaboration with university researchers for the purpose of improving student achievement.

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