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CEP 820 - Teaching K-12 Students Online

Developer's Notebook Entry 1 - 7/8/11

Grade Level:
5th grade, 6th grade

Subject:
Language Arts/English

Particular Curricular Unit you are thinking of developing:

The head of my middle school is interested in developing some web-based remediation for students who struggle with reading and reading comprehension. I would like to develop a course that could include independent reading, some guided readings, and perhaps a reader's notebook. I know this is sort of a broad topic, but I feel like I don't have much knowledge yet of how this is done in other schools. I know that one of the best way to teach reading comprehension is to model strategies for students. We work with students in class on questioning, inference, making personal connections, and other strategies. I would need to discover how to make those work in an online environment, and find other strategies that lend themselves to the technology.

It would also make sense to build in some other assessments of reading skills, like fluency and reading level. This is something that we don't typically assess in my middle school, except through the standardized tests that students take every fall. I don't have an elementary background and am interested in learning skills and strategies that will help my adolescent readers. Since I stopped doing round-robin readings years ago and instead model by reading aloud our group texts, I feel that in some ways I am not as knowledgeable about my individual students reading fluency. I can assess their writing and comprehension easily, but the middle school schedule doesn't allow for as much time as I'd like for 1:1 listening of students read and giving feedback. In an online course, I might like to build in some activities where students record themselves reading. This could provide a baseline to which I could compare later readings and assess progress.

What do you want your course to look like?

I would like the course to be interactive and allow for discussions between groups of students as well as between me as the instructor. In some ways, independent reading lends itself towards a self-paced structure, but I would want some common readings to allow for group discussion and assessments of comprehension. I would like my students logging their reading, so I and their classmates can see what types of books are being read. I would also like students to write about their independent reading choices. Having a lot of choice built in will also help keep the students engaged in the activities. I want to keep the class fun and enjoyable, while also making them think deeply about what they read.

In my sixth grade class, we currently require students to write in a reading journal a few times

a month, generally by answering a prompt that relates to story elements we are studying (plot structure, word choice, characters, suspense, etc.). In an online course, I would like to have more reflective writing going on as well, so students are writing about what they are reading and discussing their thoughts about it.

What your ideas/thoughts/dreams for class interaction for both teacher and students?

I would want regular interactions between students and myself. I would like them asking questions and sharing revelations about the books they are reading. I would want to give them regular feedback on the writing in their journals and on the discussion boards. Depending on the size of the group, I might want to create sub-groups to work on some group assignments.

How do you think you will assess students?

I think the assessment should be regular and varied. There would be comprehension quizzes on the shared readings. Maybe quizzes on vocabulary on those as well. Progress charts to show how they are doing with their fluency and the reading logs and readers notebook would all be parts of the assessment.

I don't envision this to be the type of class that I will give a letter grade at the end though. Because it is a remediation class, I think a digital portfolio of the students work will show their progress (the logs, quizzes, writings, etc.) and I would give a written assessment at the end describing the student's progress and areas that may need continued attention.

What are some of the social, ethical, legal, and human issues surrounding the participation in your online course?

I think the nature of the course being for remediation would be important for how it is presented to the students. I am sensitive to students feeling "dumb" because will be working through this course, especially since I will be pulling out groups of students to work with me each trimester.

I am also sensitive to the workload and overburdening students. The head of my middle school has rearranged our schedule to provide a new 45-minute "skills" block each week. The plan is for me to work with a group of students during the time each week, but this will be in addition to their regular course load. If I envision the online class I am creating to be the one I ultimately will use this school year, I need to keep some of these constraints in mind. I can plan for this 45-minute block to be part of their "work" time on the computer, or come up with a blended strategy where they are doing some of the assignments at home during the week, and I can use the face to face time to give feedback, extra help, have discussions, etc. I just expect there to be possible parental push-back if the expectations of the online course become burdensome.

Another thought is to collaborate with the English teachers to incorporate some of their class requirements, into my online course (for example, if they require reading journals, work with them to use the same prompts or see if an allowance can be made to accept the online work the students complete for me). Again, I will have to work well with my colleagues and division head to make sure this is a team effort and the best interests of the students are met while keeping up expected standards and expectations for core courses.

Developer's Notebook Entry 2 - 7/14/11

What surprised you?

I was hoping to find a free hosted solution through the search and was disappointed that all the open source matches had to be installed on my school servers or could only be hosted for a fee. I was also expecting to find more matches for the features I selected, but think I had too many "requirements." I actually went back and redid my search with fewer options to see what else would be recommended. Sakai was mentioned and Olat, but again, they were pay-to-host. I actually didn't find what I was looking for using this tool and that surprised me. I thought one of the options would fit my needs.

What didn't surprise you?

The CMS choices seemed to be very close in features and it made me realize that really any tool could be used effectively. The open source choices were similar to the paid choices also. I have found lots of great free resources for teachers and I think open source is definitely a rival for the commercial companies.

Which CMS are you going to use for this course? why?

I wasn't happy with my choices and began thinking about the LMS alternatives that I found in the article I posted earlier. I went back to an article I found through my CMS search on a great blog I found called EmergingEdTech.com. The site described EctoLearning which is a free hosted LMS, something like I was looking for. I registered and noticed it looks a lot like Moodle, but still felt it wasn't as engaging looking as I would like. I decided to do a Google search for free LMSs and found this article:

<http://c4lpt.co.uk/Directory/Tools/instructional.html>

Looking back over the lab directions, this link was given to us, but I missed it. It was SO helpful. All of the free systems are marked with a yellow "free" star, so I just focused on those. I found that Blackboard has a free site called CourseSites where teachers can create up to five free courses. I finally found a site called Schoolology that I realized I had bookmarked last year. I didn't know about online courses then and didn't pay much attention to it. This year I had used Edmodo with my kids and I realized that Schoolology seems to combine the best features of Edmodo (social networking) with a course management system. After registering for a free account, I found it VERY easy to navigate and use. It looks like Facebook (which Edmodo does also) and think it would be very engaging for my students.

Why is this CMS a good match for your course and curriculum?

It has all the important CMS features (discussion boards, testing functions, calendars, dropboxes, group functionality, etc.) and looks a lot like Edmodo, which I LOVED using with my classes this year. Students could still message me directly and there is the ability for me to get text notifications. There is also an iPod (iPad) app and an upcoming Android app. This mobile functionality will be very useful for student I think.

The site also has added some Google Docs integration which is something I feel my school will find useful. I believe we will be moving towards Google Apps for Education to solve our student organization and storage issues and a strong integration in an LMS is great.

The site also has the ability for parents to have access to student calendars and course information. For middle schoolers, this is important as they are still learning time management and organizational skills and need parents to be aware of what's going on in their classes.

What additional tools/functionality might you need beyond the features available in the CMS you have chosen?

I can't see any features yet I will need that I don't already have. I expect to embed content from other websites in my course pages though.

What support do you need to be successful with this endeavor?

I will talk to the school technology director about perhaps looking at a premium account. I want access to some higher admin features and I CAN designate myself as admin (since no one else in my school uses this site yet), but then I would be responsible for creating all new user accounts (individual teachers could no longer create for themselves). I would rather NOT do that, but if we opted for a premium school account, the technology director could designate multiple admins so we could have several people helping to manage the site. I could definitely see this as something our entire middle school faculty could use. They don't necessarily have to create online courses. They could just use it to post their class resources, host discussions, receive homework, and post to class calendars. It's very flexible.

7/23/11

Thoughts and Updates

The schedule for the face-to-face meetings has changed due to the needs of some other departments, but I think it will actually work better for my course. Rather than meeting for 3 week periods, we'll meet for 12-weeks in a row (once per week) then three weeks again at the end of the year. I'll have gotten all the kids through the course by February and will have a second round for some review and another project at the end of the year.

The new format has allowed me to scale my lessons back to 10 from 15 (whew!) and give a little more continuity. Since I won't see one group until November, Dan, my principal, came up with the idea to do either a screencast or a live Skype intro from my session to the group he is working with in the library. I need to figure out the technical logistics if we decide to do it live, but it could be fun. I will probably go with the screencast though since it is more controlled and can be replayed if the kids need to see it again. My goal for the screen cast or Skype is to introduce the course, help them register for Schoology, and maybe do my Lesson 1 (or just the reading inventory).

I was given funding from school to purchase Camtasia and am busy learning how to edit. I used Audacity to record my audio separately so I could gauge the timing and did the video with

Camtasia. Now I am learning how to edit my clips together.

7/30/11

Course 2.0 Feedback - <http://screencast.com/t/iNctKb3bTERe>

Developer's Notebook Entry 3 - 7/31/11

Learning goals for unit:

My learning goals for this unit are that students will have developed a vocabulary and understanding of the process of reading and how to monitor their own learning. The lessons and assessments should give them a picture of their own progress in the various reading skills areas and help them set some goals. It will also provide valuable information for classroom teachers and administrators for providing additional remediation and referrals for students who may need it.

I also want to develop independent learning and time management skills through the self-paced structure of the class. Students will learn how to self-assess skills at different points and track their progress. The blended structure will allow for scaffolding of these skills since students will be unfamiliar with this type of class.

I also want students to develop a facility with various web tools for communicating, creating and collaborating. I plan to work in lessons on digital citizenship and copyright as students begin creating during the project phase of the course.

Learning outcomes for unit:

By the end of the course, students will demonstrate increased proficiency in oral fluency, word recognition, vocabulary, and reading comprehension as measured by their end-of-the-year reading assessment.

In addition, the two projects produced during the year should allow them to demonstrate their grasps of these skills in a creative way. Even though students will have a choice of which project they complete, all of the projects will require good comprehension of reading material, ability to read text fluently, and organization of thought.

Potential methods of assessment:

I purchased several middle grades reading skills books that have given me a variety of forms and assessments to use with students to track their proficiency in different skills. They have also been very useful in helping me organize the lessons in the course around specific skills. I will use the grade-level assessments in "[3-Minute Reading Assessments: Word Recognition, Fluency, and Comprehension: Grades 5-8](#)" as the baseline, mid-year, and end-of-year overall assessments. I also plan to use some of the reading conference forms I have found in "[Assessments for Differentiating Reading Instruction](#)." My plan is to create a shared Google Document between me and each student keeping track of all of these surveys, forms, and data points. These would be visible to them in the My Progress area. Since we are not a Google Apps school (yet), I still need to think about how to do this without requiring students to use

personal email addresses. If I use a class Gmail address, I can't monitor which student is viewing which document. I may need to rethink and have students send me the information on Schoology (or keep it if I am the recorder) and think of another way to share it with them.

Some of the other books I purchased as resources are:

- [Teaching Reading in Middle School \(2nd Edition\): A Strategic Approach to Teaching Reading That Improves Comprehension and Thinking](#)
- [Building Background Knowledge for Academic Achievement: Research on What Works in Schools](#)
- [What Really Matters for Struggling Readers: Designing Research-Based Programs \(3rd Edition\)](#)
- [Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension](#)
- [Pathways to Independence: Reading, Writing, and Learning in Grades 3-8](#)

Obviously, I haven't had time to read all of these books cover to cover yet, but they have helped me get started and will guide me as I continue to refine the course during the school year. Along with other books I already own (like Stephanie Harvey's "[Strategies That Work: Teaching Comprehension for Understanding and Engagement](#)" and Donalyn Miller's "[The Book Whisperer: Awakening the Inner Reader in Every Child](#)"), I feel like I have a lot of resources to support my continued work on how best to assess student progress in reading.

As far as assessing the student projects, I will use rubrics to help me evaluate. I plan to give the students the rubric along with the project description and directions so they will know exactly how they will be evaluated. The rubric will focus on the the reading skills to be demonstrated as well as the technical execution of the projects.

Course Communication Policy:

In my FAQ section, I tried to explain to students how communication will work. Since it is a blended class, they will see me once a week for a trimester and can certainly talk to me at any time during school. Schoology has an excellent messaging system and I will enable text alerts so I am aware of messages promptly. My goal is always to respond to questions within 24 hours, but from using Edmodo last year I found that usually I can respond within a few hours.

Occasionally, students might be asked to work with a partner for an activity. I will try to structure those activities so students can use the class meeting time or perhaps a study hall if needed. Student-to-student communication will only occur on the discussion threads. The "virtual classroom" is meant to be a backchannel area when kids can ask each other questions. There are also two other main forums for book discussion. Individual lessons may have a discussion thread for students to respond to a prompt or share their thoughts.

Schoology has recently disabled student-to-student messaging due to safety concerns and I am supportive of that. Edmodo didn't allow student-to-student messaging either and I like the idea that all student sharing is open for other students and the instructors to view, reducing the possibility of any negative or inappropriate commenting.

As far as parent communication, I will prepare a handout for parents about the course and how they can communicate with me and plan to give that out at Parent Night. I expect there will also be a dialogue with parents about all of the classes in this new skills block rotation, so I can also explain more about the course at that time.

The lab activity this week definitely makes me think about how I can be proactive to avoid any of the communication problems that arose in the scenarios. Since it is not a graded class, they won't see a report card comment from me, but I will think about other ways I can send information about the work their child is doing.

Again, Schoology may provide the answer with the parent access accounts. We would have to have a school administrator who could link student and parent accounts so they could view the courses and calendars. I don't think that may happen for this year, but if we decide to adopt Schoology as a division that will probably happen.

Of course, they can certainly access the course through their child's account to see what they are learning and view whatever progress information I post for the students to see. I want to be careful about this though, because if the parents are in their child's account a lot, it will skew the analytics information I will see about when and how students are accessing the course. What I may do is build in a few sharing "assignments" for students to do with their parents so they can see what is going on that way.

Developer's Notebook Entry 4 - 8/5/11

<https://spreadsheets.google.com/spreadsheet/viewform?formkey=dDZDaEpfUmxiaFEzQIBMa3kzVEM4OFE6MQ>

I started doing book trailers with my students last year as a way to encourage them to creatively share their book choices. I offered the project as an extra credit opportunity and the work was done totally outside of class and without much direct involvement by me. It was a great success, but in adapting that project for this course, I had think hard about what I was looking for and wanted to assess. In my project last year, the students were not graded. They either had a book trailer that met my requirements or they did not (and didn't get the credit).

Since I never created any handouts for students, I went back to some professional development materials I made for colleagues about how to teach book trailers. I made a short PowerPoint for sharing at an in-service meeting and also created a wiki for a conference session I lead on book trailers (<http://engagingreadersdigitally.wikispaces.com/>). I pulled out the main guidelines from those documents and tried to center my rubric around those areas. They were primarily:

- Presentation (persuasiveness & interest)
- Plot (storyline or content)
- Image choice

- Music/voice narration choice (actually, I discouraged voice narrations last year, so I added that onto my rubric to give more choice)
- Creative commons and copyright

After identifying those items, I used some rubrics I had bookmarked online to help create my Google form. I think my form looks a little long, but I'm not sure how I could shorten it and still include the parts I want to access. I might edit the wording though to make the descriptions shorter. I'm not terribly pleased by the distinction between "excellent" and "very good" under Copyright. I plan to make that more clear.

In thinking about the rubric, I realized that a big part of what I wanted students to do was learn how to evaluate their resources for how it fit into their plan (storyboard) and how to use only freely available media. The later made me realize that somewhere in the project, I needed to explain Creative Commons, since it is not something that is part of the regular course lessons.

I decided to add sub-pages to the project description explaining copyright and also list resources for various media. I worry a little that the amount of information might be overwhelming. What I might do is scaffold these online instructions with a mini-lesson during our face-to-face time. I also think I could add a screencast when I have time on how to check if a picture is free to "remix" and how to search on Flickr and other sites for Creative Commons licensed works. It's something I showed my students as they came to me individually last year to complete the trailers. I only had one person who didn't follow those directions and was asked to redo their project.

I will share the rubric with students on the project page so they can use it for self-assessment as they work on their projects.

In looking at the rubrics that were provided to us, I think making sure the assessments focus on the learning objectives is one of my main goals.

General Standard 3

Assessment strategies use established ways to measure effective learning, evaluate student progress by reference to stated learning objectives, and are designed to be integral to the learning process.

The purpose of my course is to help students improve their reading skills and I want to make sure that my assessments are aligned with that goal and also helps work on that goal. In other words, all the projects are opportunities for students to demonstrate comprehension, fluency, and other skills, but the act of creating the project will give them additional practice in those areas.

I think the other area of assessment in my course that I would like to focus on is that the course is easy to understand and navigate. I have a lot of information in many places, but want to work to make it clear to the students how to progress and what they are supposed to do at each step.

General Standard 6

Course navigation features and the technology employed in the course foster student engagement and ensure access to instructional materials and resources.

This is still an area that I need to work on. I have a lot of content I still need to generate, but even if I don't have the final lessons finished when I begin my course, I want to make sure I give myself time to set up the beginning portions very clearly. I do plan to create an introductory screencast for students on how to navigate the site and progress through the lessons. I also plan to lock the later lesson folders and unlock them one at a time. Even though the class will be self-paced, I think adding this extra level of direction will keep kids from clicking through everything randomly and make them focus on the first few chapters.

I also need to get the skills section up and running as this will be a place that students can go in between lessons for extra practice. Hopefully the content I put there will be engaging and something that will draw them back intrinsically and not just when they are directed by a lesson to go to a certain area.

Another thing I need to articulate clearly is the link between activities that will be shared between their English class and my class. I will be meeting with my colleagues this week to show them my course and explain how it will work. My hope is that I can get some specifics about how we can dovetail the reading and perhaps some journaling, so I can then explain it to the Reading Lab students. I will probably create a topic or sub-page (maybe off the introduction) on the English/Reading Lab collaboration.

Lastly, I need to add more information about BYOD in the course. I mentioned in the introduction that students may bring their devices, but I need to add a page or sub-page about what devices (or functions on devices) will be used and my expectations related to this. One thing I realized that students will need to have are ear buds for using with their (or my) iPods or for listening to video/audio on the computers. I might want to create a recommended "supply" list that can be sent home so parents can be aware of this need as well.

Developer's Notebook Entry 5 - 8/12/11

I feel that I have begun to incorporate some Universal Design elements in to my course already, but there are still other things I could do. The design of my course is meant to differentiate the learning experience for students in that the lessons are self-paced and allow some choice for students in terms of the practice activities and projects they choose. This is in support of the second principle of UDL, which is "differentiate the ways that students can express what they know."

One of the things I could do to make my course more supportive of UDL is to find ways to differentiate the lesson follow-up. Unfortunately, Schoology doesn't let me assign particular assignments to individual students, but I might be able to find other ways to do that. For instance, if a student's base-line assessment shows they already possess good fluency

skills, I might have them do fewer practice activities in that area than another student who still struggles. The only way I see to do that would be to communicate with students via the internal messaging system about practice they may choose to skip or additional activities I want them to do.

Another change I could make is to differentiate even more with the project choices. For the end-of-trimester projects, I currently have four choices of projects. I might add more projects and look to make sure they are balanced to appeal to different types of learners (using a theory like Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences) so a student can choose a project that demonstrates the skills I want but also allows them to work in an area of strength for him or her.

In looking over my list, I think I would like to add an option that uses music and rhythm. There are some interesting journal articles about a correlation between reading skills and music background (<http://www.jstor.org/pss/3333642>) and I'm looking for other projects related to this idea. One of my fluency activities will allow students to record themselves reading the lyrics of a favorite song along to the music. I think that would create good background knowledge to a follow-up project.

To follow up on our lessons on expression, I think I will also add a poetry reading project. This will let students focus on reading with expression and again will capitalize on background knowledge I will already have established.

Lastly, I can work to incorporate the principle of "presenting information and content in different ways." Each lesson gives me the opportunity to share the information in different formats. There is value in consistency in the lesson presentation so that student know what to expect, but I also think I can do more. As I continue to build more lessons, I can utilize video, audio, hands-ons activities, and more in helping students make the connections I want about reading skills.

Here is a screenshot of my Lab Projects page with a few new choices added. I still need to write the project directions.

The screenshot shows the Schoology interface for a course titled "6th Grade Reading Lab: Section 1". The top navigation bar includes "Home", "Profile", "Inbox", "Resources", and "Account". The course page features a sidebar with options like "Send Message", "Edit Course", "Edit Settings", "Edit Members", "Materials", "Updates", "Gradebook", "Attendance", and "Analytics". The main content area is titled "Lab Projects" and contains a list of projects with settings icons. The "Poetry Reading" project is highlighted in green. A "Save Changes" button is located at the bottom of the project list.

Developer's Notebook Entry 6 - 8/16/11

6th Grade Reading Lab is the online course I developed for students at my school. 6th grade seemed like a good place to try a reading skills course like this. In our program, 6th grade is the second year of middle school, but because the local public schools begin middle school at that point, we often have many new students at this grade level. In addition, our 5th grade program has a heavy focus on independent reading, so this is a great place to continue that emphasis without taking time away from the current English course. The course will be hybrid in that students will rotate through for 12 weeks with one face to face meeting each week. They will also return for three weeks at the end of the school year to complete a culminating project. The course is self-paced to allow for students to move through the lessons at a pace that works for them.

The course is currently structured around 10 lessons which focus on various reading skills. Each lesson will contain a lecture, some multimedia objects, and an assignment. In addition, students may have a quiz or practice activity to complete.

Many of the elements of a good reading program include the need for repetition to build automaticity and confidence. Although the lessons are completed once, each lesson also links to activities in the skills section which can be repeated many times. I tried to make the activities high-interest and fun so students would enjoy them and want to repeat them. Students will also have opportunities to discuss the lessons, as well as their independent reading, in the discussion forums.

Assessments of reading skills will be given at the beginning, mid-year, and end of the year

to track student progress. I am using a leveled 3-minute assessment that can be given to all students and plan to share the information with classroom teachers and administrators. The beginning of the year assessment will allow me to focus on students that might need additional interventions and perhaps tailor some of the activities to their needs. Students that score low in certain areas may be given extra practice or may meet with me during our face-to-face time. Students that score well may have practice reduced in areas of strength to allow them more time for independent reading and work on the course projects.

At the end of the course all students will choose a project to complete that will allow them to demonstrate their learning. The projects will also be high interest, but will align to the skills that were taught in the lessons. Some of the project include creating a book trailer, creating an audiobook, and making a comic strip. All of the projects will be completed using various web tools.

I have also worked to dovetail this class with what students are doing in their regular English course. I met with my colleagues and made a plan to have students use an online site to record their independent reading. This will allow me and their teachers to see their reading and has the added benefit of creating a visual library of books that students have read. Students in the class can see what others are reading and view comments about books that their classmates have left. The reading projects that are completed will also be counted as a part of their work for English class.

I have enjoyed designing this course and look forward to seeing its effect with students once the school year begins. In designing the course, I think my biggest mistake was underestimating how much time it would take me to complete it. I chose a topic that I as an educator have not taught before, so not only was I learning the tools and theory of how to build an online course, I was also studying content. If I were to choose a topic for a first course again, I might choose something that I have already taught and transformed that into an online course rather than make myself work twice as hard on structure and format AND content.

There were also a lot of choices to make about which LMS to use and I chose Schoology. I really like the layout and look and think it will also integrate well into the other face-to-face classes I am teaching. I will have to see how easy it is for students to navigate based on my structure.

One suggestion I would make for those considering developing an online course is to include screencasts for students so they are clear about expectations, goals, and procedures for your class. I have plans for completing these, but did not allow myself enough time to finish my content and felt that needed to be done first so the screencasts could show all aspects of the course.

I'm excited by the possibilities of this course and look forward to seeing how it might develop once school begins and I am able to see how it is helping students improve their reading skills.

Link to new document:

Reflections on Developing an Online Course

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dW1Ncs8TiKZEgVdHWXx_nHa2XA3gYSrP4jT5nqdpDY/edit?hl=en_US)

[1dW1Ncs8TiKZEgVdHWXx_nHa2XA3gYSrP4jT5nqdpDY/edit?hl=en_US](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1dW1Ncs8TiKZEgVdHWXx_nHa2XA3gYSrP4jT5nqdpDY/edit?hl=en_US)