CyberTools for Today's Schools: A Pilot Project for Teachers New to Learning Online

Rebecca L. Fiedler with Donna J. Baumbach, Mentor

Sponsored by SouthEast Initiatives Regional Technology in Education Consortium and Instructional Technology Resource Center at the University of Central Florida

BACKGROUND

The author and her mentor have been working on the development and delivery of a statewide online professional development project for Florida's teachers. Many of the teacher participants calling the help desk reported they had never taken an online class. They didn't know how to perform some of the basic tasks expected and often did not have realistic expectations regarding the work load associated with online learning. Too often, they quit in frustration. This course was created in response to the need indicated by those calls.

PURPOSE

CyberTools for Today's Schools was developed as a free, five-week online course for teachers. Twenty inservice points are available to most teachers.

Goals

To orient participants to the online experience;
To equip participants with Internet skills applicable to their dual roles of teacher and online learner; and
To enable participants to view multimedia content online.

Desired Outcomes

Attitude changes to accept technology use in classrooms.
Perceived relevance to daily responsibilities as a teacher.
Confidence in applying skills.
Satisfaction with this course and online learning.

LESSON COMPONENTS

Productivity Tools
See paper for a full description of this course component

Online Learning Tools
See paper for a full description of this course component

Utility Tools
See paper for a full description of this course component

Assessment
Weekly assignment
Rubric
Quiz
Checklist of tasks
Pre- and posttest

Brief paper is available at http://www.msfiedler.com/papers/2004ucf.pdf

METHODS

- Reflect on own experiences with online instruction to generate a list of skills to include in the course.
- Modify list as indicated by the literature and a variety of online learning readiness surveys.
- Meet with the technical staff of a statewide online professional development project to identify the specific technologies to include in the Internet utilities section of the course (i.e. media players and file compression software).
- Develop course objectives.
- Develop an outline for the course, deciding on the sequence to present the identified skills, and mapping the content for each lesson.
- Design an assessment task, a grading rubric, and a brief quiz for each lesson.
- Search the Internet to find resources for K-12 teachers to support the identified skills and concepts, making special efforts to identify multimedia content specifically for this audience.
- Write the course narrative and create web pages for course.
- Review of course by several experienced online instructors.
- Send to graphic artist.
- Advertise course through NEON newsletter and collect registration.
- Moved content into WebCT.
- First section of the course launched January 12, 2004 and ended February 14, 2004.
- Cursory data analysis completed.

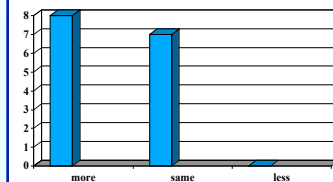**Which learning activities MOST influenced your learning in this course?**

(bar chart: Bookmarks, Discussions, Chat, Resources; axis 0 to 8)
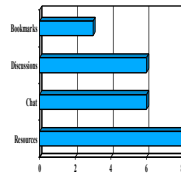
Completion rate

17 finished the course
7 didn't finish
71% completion rate

(pie chart: 71% completers, 29% non-finishers)

Learning in online class compared to f2f.

(bar chart: more, same, less; axis 0 to 8)

Comments from participants

"I can't wait to take another online course."

"I'd take another online class again."

"I would recommend it to all…"

"I will be working this summer to help develop an online ESOL course as a result of this class."

"I look forward to starting another one, just not right now. I even had to drop out of the [other] course I was taking. Hopefully I can sign up for it again at a later date."

"I have already started another online course and, thanks to your instruction, feel very confident about taking it."

"I designed my own course two years ago, and now I want to go back and model it after this one. I see now that I left out many things that would have improved it."

Time spent per week?

(bar chart: 8 or more, 5-7 hrs, 4-5 hrs, 2-3 hrs; axis 0 to 10)
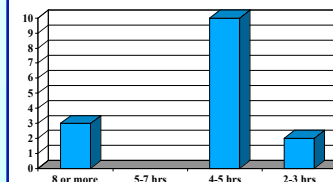
RESULTS

- Initial results rely on data from registration, course evaluations, discussion board postings, and emails to the course facilitator. Due to an error in setup, the pre- and post-test data is not usable for analysis, but this problem has been fixed for subsequent sections.
- Course participants from the pilot course indicate overall satisfaction with their experience.
- One of the most important results, in terms of the course objectives, is the level of confidence reported by course completers. This seems to be supported unprompted comments about taking online courses.
- Sixteen (80%) course participants reported having used the Internet for five or more years, yet 55% were taking their first online course.
- Seven (29%) participants did not complete the course, but two have re-enrolled. The most commonly cited reason for dropping the course is "not enough time."

Confidence

I am _____% confident that I can perform the skills learned in this course.

(bar chart: 70, 80, 90, 95, 100; axis 0 to 8)
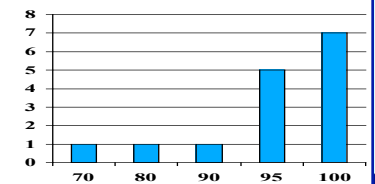
NEXT STEPS

- Fix "bugs" in course
  - pre- and posttest problem
  - Rework for easier navigation
  - Rewrite bookmarking assignment
- Launch revised course and add new facilitator
- Explore options to implement course in other contexts
- Qualitative analysis of themes that appeared in discussion postings and emails
  - Time
  - Support
  - Focus
  - Learning
  - Facilitator characteristics

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*See paper at http://www.msfiedler.com/papers/2004ucf.pdf for complete bibliography