DEVELOPING AND MANAGING DISTANCE LEARNING PROGRAMS
Assignment 1- Designing Distance Learning

Johanna Amaro
Matthew Farber
Charlene Mason
Jennifer Serviss

New Jersey City University
Educational Technology

The purpose of updating the Denville Township Technology Plan with a distance learning strategic plan is to provide students with an alternative platform of education from the traditional face-to-face method of delivery. The two additional approaches to education provided are "same-time, different-place education (ST-DP) and different-time, different-place education (DT-DP)" (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, p. 9).

Denville Township, a K-8 school district will be implementing models of distance learning to satisfy or exceed the recommendations detailed on its Technology Plan. Accordingly, student achievement must be part of the decision-making process. The tools must also be child-friendly, in accordance with law. Examples already in use include Discovery Streaming and Google Classroom. Both are private and offer a CIPA (Children's Internet Protection Act) compliant user experience. Edmodo can function as an asynchronous learning management system. There would be no live interaction between instructor and student; however, there will be face-to-face follow-up discussions. In this sense, the recommendations are distance--rather than online--learning (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015).

When researching a distance learning strategy for a K-8 district, one must be cognizant of learning outcomes, curriculum and standards, and available technologies. The syllabus becomes the road map for learning outcomes and drives the activities for students to be engaged in and to collaborate and communicate effectively in an online distance course. The standards need to align to the curriculum and the content that is being presented in the learning modules. Lastly, age appropriate and available technologies can then be matched with learning activities to make ready the delivery of the curriculum. Denville's existing technology, coupled with the applications that are already implemented in the district allows for a smooth transition into an upgraded distance learning program for the K-8 system.

Standards, authored by ISTE (International Society for Technology in Education), for students address crucial learning objectives in preparing students for college and career readiness in and beyond the 21st Century. In particular, Standard 2 detailing communication and collaboration states, "Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others" (ISTE, 2015). BrainPOP's educator portal contains lesson plans that are tied to the Common Core State Standards and Next Generation Science Standards while addressing the ISTE standards as well. Because of this, a teacher using the platform can be confident that the curriculum offered matches the district's adopted curriculum and state standards.

Denville already utilizes Google Apps; the Classroom feature makes it easier for teachers to share YouTube videos with students who could, in turn, answer assessment questions using Google Forms. Using video in this setting will also prepare students for the PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) Assessment, which utilizes instructional video as a medium in its testing. Furthermore, using Google Classroom enables teachers to create their own videos. This fits well with Holmberg's Theory of Interaction and Communication: "A friendly personal tone and easy access to the subject matter contribute to learning pleasure" (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, p. 46).

The updated Denville Technology Plan includes the following learning outcomes and objectives:

1. Distance learning will be used to meet Common Core Standards and to build 21st Century Skills to prepare learners for college and/or career readiness.

2. Distance learning will be used to build autonomy in self-directed learning.

3. Distance learning will be used to introduce and promote digital citizenship in a closed

safe environment.

The instructional technologies that will be used in the distance learning platform are

directly connected to the cone of experience balancing real experiences with more abstract

events as appropriate to learner readiness and knowledge base (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek,

2015, p. 80). They are outlined as follows:

1. Direct purposeful experiences utilizing the Edmodo LMS platform.

2. Demonstrations utilizing video media and recordings.

3. Exhibits.

4. Still pictures.

Learning will be facilitated through Edmodo.com platform. Edmodo is a "social learning

community where teachers, students, and parents can connect safely and securely" and it is a free

platform for educators (Edmodo, 2015). The Facebook-like navigation of Edmodo makes it

inviting and friendly for all users. Parents can join as "read only" participants to keep track of

the work assigned by teachers. Students can earn badges and join discussions initiated by both

teachers and students. Finally, teachers have a platform where they can assign work, grade

assignments, collect data and create an engaging learning environment for all students.

Distance learning courses will be aligned with the course goals and objectives. All

activities will be designed to meet the objectives stated on the syllabus. Teachers will be trained

through professional development in transforming or modifying their traditional classroom

strategies to meet the distance learning model. They will have to decide before the beginning of

the course how each module or session will begin and what instructional methods they will use

to deliver content. Teachers will also be trained on how to create a student-centered course by

utilizing tools and activities that spark student's higher-order thinking such as answering

questions on discussion board/wall, wikis and collaborative group projects through the use of

Google Documents and the learning management system of Edmodo. Traditional lectures will

be replaced by brief instructions or directions for assignments provided by teachers. The class

will be digitally organized to provide students with clear expectations and defined

responsibilities of all participants.

   Teachers and course designers will be encouraged to follow these guidelines:

1. Course format will be easy for students to navigate and obtain information. The method of delivery will be clear. Students will know how the instructor expects them to interact with each other and what their responsibilities are.

2. The syllabus contains all information about the structure of the course, expectations for teacher and student, assignments, how assessments will be graded and returned, and the district's plagiarism policy.

3. Course activities and assignments need to engage learners and encourage active learning and collaboration. "Essential to the success of the active learning paradigm is such things as clearly articulated goals, timelines, essential questions, and authentic assessment practices" (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, p. 173).

4. Instructional materials used in each course need to enhance the student's learning opportunities by actively engaging them in the learning process.

5. Feedback on student progress will be delivered in a timely manner with comments of praise and how it can be improved.

6. Students' comments and concerns about the course or assignments will be handled by the teacher on a case-by-case basis.

7. "Any accommodations must be handled discretely and with dignity for the student" (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, p. 177).

Because Denville is a K-8 district, blended learning would be more effective than completely Web-based or fully online teaching. The community will be in the virtual classroom space, mediated by the teacher both online and in the classroom. Pedagogy will be different time-different place (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015). One such example used by Denville is Discovery Streaming. While informative, the videos do not necessarily engage students, nor do they contain assessments that can be tracked by the facilitating teacher. Because of that, a blended environment is recommended.

A district BrainPOP account enables personalized just-in-time learning; a student can learn at his or her pace (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, p. 170). BrainPOP has a single sign-on (SSO) with Google Apps, lowering the barrier to student use, whether on a personal laptop or via mobile device ("BrainPOP Educators," 2015). The videos contain an element of humor and fun in its delivery.

In order to create a blended learning environment, the district will invest in a subscription to BrainPOP. The portal has hundreds of animated instructional videos in several disciplines for grades K-8. ("BrainPOP Educators," 2015). Each video is short in length (under 5-minutes) and includes a quiz. Furthermore, the platform has a mind map tool in which students can organize their own learning. The GameUp page, where educational games are organized, has an assessment module, as well ("BrainPOP Educators," 2015). During play, students can complete the SnapThought tool, a written note to the teacher reflecting on game-based decisions

("BrainPOP Educators," 2015). This helps meet the goal of having self-directed, independent learners in the district.

Using tools like BrainPOP and Discovery Streaming, videos are teacher-selected from a set of options, which is a neo-Fordist strategy. Edmodo is fully modifiable with the instructor retaining autonomous control over curriculum delivery exemplifying post-Fordism theoretical stance. Teacher-created videos are localized by instructor to classroom (Simonson, Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, pp. 52-55). This approach to distance learning capitalizes on the advantages an online course can offer students particularly self-paced, differentiated learning opportunities. Students still need to be made aware of the responsibility they have in making use of online learning and planners need to avoid creating distance learning programs that are technocentric.

A distance learning program created for elementary students assumes that direct supervision of students will be the responsibility of the parent or guardian. Direct supervision as defined in Security vs. Access (2010) is monitoring the student's activity on the Internet through observation by an adult (Robinson, Brown, & Green, 2010). This supervision could be different based on household situations so the architect of the distance learning curriculum must ensure that the content provided is as safe and appropriate as possible.

Unsupervised use of the Internet connection needed to access the distance learning course will occur. A precursor to distance learning courses is a digital citizenship course taught by teachers with parent participation when feasible. The ultimate learning objective is to create activities that will provide opportunities for students to attain digital literacy which would include responsible and acceptable use of available technologies. Acceptable use policies (AUP) need to be written and approved before initiation of the distance learning course. Procedures for violations should be enacted when needed. Relying on digital solutions to monitor student

online activities inevitably limits access, frustrates users, and they are never 100% effective

(Robinson, Brown, & Green, 2010).

Further considerations include the potential issues teachers may face when creating a

blended experience. Teachers may not want to (or even be contractually obligated to) teach

while not in the face-to-face classroom. It can seem burdensome to teach after the school day

ends. Therefore, it is recommended that Denville uses pre-recorded media (Simonson,

Smaldino, & Zvacek, 2015, p. 83). When in class, it would be the role of the teacher to facilitate

connections with students. This approach would be more appropriate in delivering a blended

learning environment to its K-8 student population. The instructor and student need a strong

support system to provide both technical and instructional support throughout course creation

and delivery.

References

BrainPOP educators. (2015). Retrieved July 13, 2015, from http://educators.brainpop.com
 Broady-Ortmann, C. (2002). Teachers' perceptions of a professional development
 distance learning course: A qualitative case study. Journal of Research on Technology in
 Education (International Society for Technology in Education), 35(1), 107.

Denville technology. (2013). Retrieved July 13, 2015, from
 http://www.denville.org/about.cfm?subpage=295939

Edmodo. (2015). Retrieved July 14, 2015, from https://www.edmodo.com/about

ISTE Standards: Students. (2015, July 16). Retrieved July 16, 2015, from
 http://www.iste.org/standards/ISTE-standards/standards-for-students

Lentell, H. (2012). Distance learning in British universities: Is it possible? Open Learning, 27(1),
 23-36. doi:10.1080/02680513.2012.640782

Pardasani, M., Goldkind, L., Heyman, J. C., & Cross-Denny, B. (2012). How much does the
 distance in distance education matter? our students speak. Social Work Education, 31(4),
 406-421. doi:10.1080/02615479.2011.573547

Ryan, M., Carlton, K. H., & Ali, N. S. (2004). Reflection on the role of faculty in distance
 learning and changing pedagogies. Nursing Education Perspectives, 25(2), 73-80.

Robinson, L. K., Brown, A. H. , & Green, T.D. (2010). Security vs. access: Balancing safety
 and productivity in the digital school. Washington, DC: ISTE.

Simonson, M. R., Smaldino, S. E., & Zvacek, S. (2015). Teaching and learning at a distance:
 Foundations of distance education (6th ed.). Charlotte, NC: Information Age.