



## **Case Study with Neil Manzenberger**

Neil Manzenberger, an IT Integration Specialist that works for Yavapai Education Service Agency in rural Arizona, has facilitated Assessment in 21st Century Classrooms multiple times and will facilitate other Elements courses in the future. He brings his history as a face-to-face Teach Essentials trainer to this experience.

Neil's courses are supported by the Arizona Department of Education which provides a menu of courses from different providers to help teachers acquire professional development hours they need for recertification. Although Neil facilitates the assessment course, all Elements courses are offered, and by completing a course, teachers can receive 30 hours toward the requirement of 180 hours every six years.

Teachers learn about the course through an e-mail blast from the Department of Education. Neil also promotes the course during his other training activities. His most recent course initially had 35 teachers sign up with 23 participants completing the course satisfactorily. Neil's Elements courses include teachers from all grade levels and subject areas.

### **Course Structure**

The Assessment in 21st Century Course is conducted completely online. Neil confesses that because of his experience with face-to-face facilitation of the Essentials course, he was apprehensive about the online course, and it has been quite a learning curve for him to become comfortable with that method. Participants have varying degrees of expertise with technology. Some have trouble learning how to navigate the Moodle environment that houses his course, but they, and he, are becoming more and more comfortable in it.

With some experience, however, Neil feels online learning is a good format for this professional development, and, in fact, for rural areas like the one he is responsible for, the most viable method for successful training. By spending one week of three to five hours per week on a module, Neil feels that participants can study the topics in more depth and their learning is more comprehensive.

### **Neil's Expectations for the Course**

Neil is enthusiastic about the topic of assessment and admits to being on a soapbox on the topic of formative assessment. He is aware that there are a lot of classrooms where teachers teach a topic on Monday through Thursday and give a test on Friday. He sees the summative part of assessment as easy

and believes it comes naturally to teachers. He wants to open their eyes to other ways of assessing learning, such as using the informal conversations teachers have with individual and groups of students to collect information about how and what they are learning.

Neil also wants to emphasize the importance of metacognition. He notes that teachers know the dictionary definition of the term but may not be aware of the power that assessing students' understanding of their thinking can have on student learning. Seeing that understanding grow in his participants is one of the pleasures of facilitating the course.

### **Facilitator Challenges**

According to Neil, some of the teachers have never taken an online course and don't realize the level of time and effort the course will take. They don't anticipate the amount of preparation and reading necessary to complete the work. In addition, he feels that some teachers are not as proficient as they need to be at reading material online, and this keeps them from being as successful as they might be.

Neil has also noticed that some teachers approach the course with an expectation that they may pick up a few good assessments or a simple template for assessments they can use in their classrooms. Many do not realize that the course is built around a teaching approach that may call for them to make substantive changes in how they teach and how their students learn. As participants work through their Action Plans, he sees "aha moments" as they start to understand the benefits of formative assessment practices.

The biggest challenge that Neil faces while facilitating the Assessment in 21st Century Classrooms course is the discussion board, which he feels is a critical component for teacher learning. Early in the course, he assesses many teachers as needing improvement in that area. Possibly because of their lack of experience with online learning, he feels that discussions were not as productive as they could have been, especially during the first two modules. Conversations are often reduced to superficial "chitchat" as teachers sometimes do not know what they do not know.

Neil's role in the discussion boards is guided by the unique needs of the individual courses.. In some courses, participants would like him to respond regularly while others prefer that he leave them alone and are somewhat insulted when he participates. Neil adjusts his feedback to the needs of participants and provides modeling and feedback as needed. He feels that by the third week, the level of discourse improves considerably. He sees a positive link between the discussion boards and the Action Plans and notices a distinct improvement by Module 3 when teachers begin picking up ideas for their plans from the discussions.

### **Neil's Tips for Elements Facilitators**

Neil's experience as a trainer, specifically with the Elements courses, has given him some insights into successful facilitation. He recommends the following strategies:

- Do whatever you can to support teachers' interactions in the discussion boards. These conversations have a big impact on their learning.
- Make an effort at the very beginning to get participants to interact on a personal level to set up a family type feeling within the course, instead of a group of people across the state sitting alone at computers.
- Spend the time necessary to thoroughly understand the Assessing Projects application.
- Even if you have facilitated the course before, go through the course and Action Plan before each course begins.
- Make sure that participants can contact you by e-mail or phone if they have questions or problems.

Neil's enthusiasm for facilitating *Assessment in 21st Century Classrooms* comes partly from his personal enthusiasm for the topic of assessment. But his real joy comes from the progress he sees the participants make, the phone calls and messages he receives long after the course is over sharing the ideas they are using successfully with their students.