



## **Case Study in a Rural Environment**

Dan is the principal of Prairie Middle School, a small middle school in a rural area. Since he began the job 3 years ago, his teachers have made great strides toward implementing projects and student-centered instruction, due largely to his leadership. He has made a point of participating fully in a range of professional development activities along with his teachers as well as supporting teachers who implement innovative teaching methods.

Recognizing that assessment practices are an important component of instruction, Dan found Assessment in 21st Century classrooms in an Internet search for resources for his teachers. After previewing the course, he spoke with principals of other middle schools in the area and found that each school had one or two teachers who would be interested in taking the course. Dan arranged with the local Education Service Center to offer Continuing Education Units to participants and ordered the materials.

The distance between schools in the area would have been a hardship for teachers to meet for face-to-face sessions, but Dan still wanted to have some kind of a face-to-face component to encourage interaction and develop teacher leaders. He used his district's web conferencing software to hold a preliminary meeting with interested teachers. He showed them how to use the software and a preview of the course and then discussed possible formats for how the course could be organized.

The group decided to complete one module a week and to meet through web conferencing every Wednesday after school for an hour for five weeks. They also decided to share facilitation responsibilities. Participants signed up for a week to facilitate the web conference and agreed to use the Facilitation Guide, along with their own ideas, to plan discussions, sharing, and other activities to support each other as they worked through the course. Dan agreed to set up a course wiki on his district's server for notices and any other information the participants wanted to share. To end the first meeting, Dan showed the Orientation module and answered questions. He also pointed out that he would be participating in the course and would be working in the classrooms of some of his teachers to try out strategies with students.

For the first session, Andrea and Claire, two middle school language arts teachers, took over the facilitation. They began with a general discussion about how the course was going and then had discussions about 21st century classrooms, teachers, and students. They noted that discussions through web conferencing was a bit challenging, so they discussed some strategies for getting as much

participation as possible. They also encouraged everyone to get feedback on their action plans using the course Action Plan Rubric.

In preparation for the second discussion, the week's facilitators posted a note on the wiki for participants to upload any rubrics that they used with their students and would like to share. They also listed the questions that would be discussed and asked everyone to think about their possible responses ahead of time. Since Module 3 focuses on specific assessment methods, the facilitators for that week asked participants to try out a few of the methods described in the course and be prepared to discuss their experiences. They also reminded teachers to share their Action Plans and get some feedback. During the discussion, some teachers shared the challenges they had with self- and peer assessment. As a group, the participants brainstormed some solutions to those challenges and also shared ideas about different ways to assess student learning.

Module 4 gave participants an opportunity to get feedback on the specific unit they were developing assessments for. During the web conferencing session, they explored some Assessment Timelines from *Designing Effective Projects* in the subject areas and grade levels of the participants. They also shared how they adapted assessments to meet the specific needs of their units.

For the final meeting of the course, the facilitators led a discussion about the challenges that teachers had experienced or expected to experience when moving to more formative, 21st century assessment practices. Many of the teachers had the same apprehensions, particularly regarding the changing student roles. They felt that many students and their parents would feel they weren't doing their jobs if they adopted new assessment practices. Some even felt that their school principals would not understand what they were doing. Dan spoke up at that point and explained that their success did depend on the support they got from the school leadership. He pledged to back up the teachers in his school if they had questions from parents and also promised to do a presentation on the concepts in the course at the next principals' meeting.

When participants reflected on the course, they said they had learned a lot, and much of what they learned had to do with the technology in the course—using the wiki and the web conferencing. It had taken a couple weeks for them to become comfortable with that kind of communication, but they now felt that they got just as much out of this kind of interaction as they would have with a face-to-face meeting, even if there weren't doughnuts!