Helpful Hints

Teacher as a Scholarly Practitioner

Notes from Wendy:

For the **on-campus** opening course weekend:

- At least two weeks before that weekend, assign students to read one of four chapters in their Classics in Mathematics Education books. It may be necessary to mail copies of chapters to those students who haven’t kept this book.
- More is planned than may be accomplished. Some things to possibly omit:
  - Systems of 10 video
  - Give Journal 0 for homework rather than giving class time
  - Shorten some discussions (such as for the Benny article)

For setting up the **online portion** of the course, here are some of the things we have done:

- Include a “general questions” forum on the class Discussion Board, then assign one instructor to be primarily responsible for monitoring this forum and answering questions.
- Use the Blackboard control panel to make sure a “Groups” tab appears in the left hand column of course options.
- Use the Journal 0 assignment to form students into groups so that people considering similar topics are grouped together as much as possible. Keep these groups until the Problem of Practice Assignment is due. At that point, regroup students so that they are grouped with others considering similar problems of practice. Each group should have one instructor be the person primarily responsible for feedback to those group members.
- Instructors should email students feedback each week by Thursday for assignments turned in the previous Sunday. For Journals, instructors should be sure to pose at least three questions back to the students.
- Have students turn in assignments by posting them to their Group Discussion Board (Journals 1, 2, 3, and Problem of Practice to the first group; Journal 4, 5, Research Questions, Inquiry Plan, Data Collection Instruments to second group); except:
- Have students turn in Literature Review using Safe Assignment feature of Blackboard (monitors plagiarism).
- Offer video-conferencing sessions at least weekly where students can ask an instructor questions. Set up AdobeConnect through the Course Tools (through the Control Panel). You can set this up to be always open to the class, and then students can also meet each other online without an instructor.
- Set up and use the Blackboard grade book, to facilitate recording grades (having multiple instructors monitor groups then re-organizing groups makes this necessary to keep grades organized)
- Make sure all students have the correct email address in Blackboard. If their email address is incorrect, they need to correct it first in WAM, then in Blackboard.
- Students seem to find it helpful to receive periodic reminders of what to do each week/month, via email and/or Blackboard announcement.
- Emphasize to students that they need to refrain from using non-alphanumeric characters in naming files to attach in Blackboard.
Research Questions and Plans:
Writing good research questions is hard. Steer students away from questions investigating “effects” since 12 weeks of collecting data from 10-30 students is not likely to yield statistically significant results pertaining to proving effects. Instead, have students investigate “What will happen to my teaching when I make [specific change]?” We have found that teachers need to be directed to focus on making changes to their teaching practices, and steered away from “fixing” students or other things outside their loci of control. We have decided it is better to be more directive in requiring students to accept our revisions of their research questions and data collection plans than to let them proceed to investigate questions which will not garner useful results. We now require each person to keep a personal teacher journal, to record observations and reflections each week (minimum 10 entries for the 12 week period of data collection); to collect student work weekly (classwork, homework, photos of board work, group work, etc.); interview students (5-7 students or 1-2 groups of 3-4 students). Many teachers opt to survey students and to administer pre/post tests related to the content under investigation.

IRB helpful hints:
Instructors should steer students away from forms of data collection that may be of little use to their projects (such as standardized achievement data), and also from data that may be difficult for them to use well (such as video tapes or audio recordings of their lessons). Exceptions have been made for students to record lessons, but few teachers have been able to use such recordings effectively. Try to steer all students in the direction of fitting into the broad IRB protocol and consent forms. The sooner you can submit IRB documents (November 1) the better, to set up students to conduct their action research projects second semester.

Beyond the cover letters included in the inquiry plan, each teacher needs to get a letter from his or her principal, giving permission for the teacher to conduct the action research in the school. Some school districts also require approval at the district level; find out from the districts. These letters need to be on school letterhead, and can be emailed as attachments or faxed/scanned. Electronic copies of the letters need to be submitted to IRB.

The IRB switched to online applications, via NUgrant. The individual information we needed was:
- Teacher Name, department
- School
- Project Title
- Paragraph summarizing the purpose of the projects in general, followed by 1 sentence purpose statement (particular to project), plus research questions
- Generic data collection instruments (interview questions, surveys, etc)
- Principal consent letter(s)
- Consent forms: parent & youth/child (needs teacher name, school phone number)
- Other information contained in the “broad protocol” document. We have created a file to step someone through how to answer the questions on the 10 pages of the NUgrant form.

Someone will need to go into the generic consent forms and type in the teachers’ names and phone numbers by hand. The course instructor (or other assistant) can create all the projects in the NUgrant system. The teachers and the professor then need to “approve” the projects before IRB considers them. This takes less than five minutes each.
Typically, we hear back from IRB with required revisions to the projects. We try to make all necessary revisions on campus and then inform the teachers of what they need to do.

Duties of assistant instructors:
Graduate students and master teachers have been responsible for setting up everything on Blackboard (setting up the groups, discussion boards, posting assignments, and posting course documents). They also took charge of sending out reminders to the group. They were each assigned one to three small groups for whom they were the primary instructor to give feedback on assignments. The lead instructor should oversee the feedback, having newer graduate assistants and master teachers send a draft of their feedback to the lead instructor before disseminating it to students. The lead instructor may want to give all feedback on research questions and data collection plans her/himself. Graduate students and master teachers primarily answer students’ questions on the general discussion board, and attend the scheduled Breeze sessions for students.

Prerequisite Skills/ Knowledge needed for participants:
Locating and reading research articles is very important (learned in the TEAC 801 Curriculum Inquiry class). Being able to navigate Blackboard to find and turn in assignments (previous online courses) is important. Being able to access AdobeConnect is important (previous online courses).