Schoology for Teacher Talk

by Susan Martin

Description: In January 2014, I attended a school-wide professional development session on how to implement close readings in our classrooms, no matter what subject or grade level. The grade 9 teachers and I decided to continue our discussion and collaboration beyond this two-day event. We decided that we wanted to focus on the same Common Core Anchor Standards:

Reading #1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Speaking #3: Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.

We also decided to define and practice academic vocabulary that may be used on the PARCC Assessment in February 2015. Since we do not have department meetings, we needed a way to communicate, but we did not want to use email. I created a Schoology group for us because two of the six teachers felt comfortable in that platform from their experiences with their own children’s school. After I created the group and posed a discussion question, I sent invitations with the access code to my colleagues. Five teachers joined; one math teacher did not because she had just returned from maternity leave. We used this site for our conversation and collaboration for a short time.

Impact: I like Schoology as an enhanced discussion board for teachers because I easily provided instructions for accessing and posting. The members of my group also liked the platform. When I posted two discussions, I had full participation in one about close reading activities. I did not have many replies in the other discussion. If I were to set up the discussion group now, I would only have one place within Schoology to post and reply. I definitely replied to my colleagues’ posts, but perhaps because I replied so often, they felt that I was “in charge” and did not perpetuate the discussion without my encouragement. I thought that this would be a good forum for us to keep in contact with one another and provide support, but in general, we teach in solitude. Perhaps we are too accustomed to that “Lone Ranger mentality.” Although we did not continue to use this Schoology group, I did form a closer working relationship with two of my colleagues; we have now collaborated on four cross-curricular projects with our ninth grade students. In addition, I used Schoology for my Integrating and Implementing project for professional development on rubrics.

Intent: Schoology has potential for my use even though my colleagues cannot easily access the site at school. I intend to continue to use the open groups that teachers around the world create because I believe that discussing educational topics with other professionals is highly beneficial to my teaching practices. I hope to implement an online discussion group in my school that offers more support to my colleagues.