8th Grade Preview MOOC

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**Setting/Context:**

Cobb County School District is the 23rd largest school district in the country, and is also privileged to have great diversity represented among the district. In recent years, leadership changes that have challenged teachers to engage students and ignite their passions. In this digital age, it is safe to say that this generation is captivated by technology and connecting with others online. With the school districts incorporation of a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) policy, it has made reaching and engaging the students with technology much easier. The course that will be rolled out for the seventh grade students will be a preview of the first unit of study in 8th grade Social Studies, Georgia Geography. In this Massive Online Open Course (MOOC), students will be presented with the material in the unit, interact with students throughout their school district on safe, secure media, and making a culminating project called "My Georgia." There will be a great need for technology resources and collaboration time in order for this unit to be executed successfully.

While this project will be pushed out county wide my school, McCleskey Middle School, will be heading up the project. For the trial year, we are going to try to push it out with schools that have similar demographics to our school. McCleskey is the smallest school in Cobb County and typically has around 750 students enrolled. Currently, McCleskey has a fairly diverse population that is composed of Caucasian (52%), African American (16%), Hispanic (15%), Multi-racial (5%), and Asian (4%) students. Among these students, 39% are considered economically disadvantaged, 20% is served special education, and 24% is gifted. Even with the recent change to the Ga Milestones test, McCleskey has maintained its reputation for excellence by consistently scoring higher than the state of Georgia and other Cobb County schools in every tested category. These students have had exposure to technology in the classroom, but will need extensive teaching on how to use computers to locate and review scholarly research.

Our team's target schools for the first year of this project include J.J. Daniell Middle School and Palmer Middle School. These schools are located nearby and contain similar demographics. These schools also combine with McCleskey's two feeder schools, Kell High School and Sprayberry High School. With this project, students should be able to develop relationships with people they will attend high school with. The social studies team at McCleskey also has pre-existing relationships with several teachers at Daniell Middle School who would easily implement the project.

**Capstone Problem and Rationale**

The state of Georgia uses the Georgia Performance Standards for Social Studies courses. Each year, the standards have slight changes, which makes it very difficult for teachers to use textbooks effectively. Teachers are often left scrounging the internet for materials or spending hours creating material that will engage and educate their students. County developed MOOCs allow collaboration among teachers, and relieve the burden teachers daily face to provide quality instruction that is tailored to each students' specific learning needs.

In a time where higher-order thinking skills are crucial to a students' academic development, students must be able to learn material, respond to it, and create meaningful projects from the information. The MOOC will allow students to do all these things, while connecting students throughout the school district. Barber and his research team studied students who made the transition from traditional learning to online problem based learning and saw that while students initially struggled with the shift in presentation, eventually they thrived with the autonomy that they were given (Barber, 2015). Since students will be forced to do this later on in their schooling career, this course gives them a chance to begin to change the way they conduct research, think about academic content, and present a project to a large, online audience.

The consistent problem with the implementation of this project will be finding and regularly accessing technology for each student to use while completing this online course. While the eventual goal for this course is for it to be entirely online, the course will begin as blended and transition as it continues. The course already puts students out of their comfort zone. Allowing time for blended learning gives teachers and students time to ease out of their comfort zone. Research shows that when courses are blended and teachers spend face-to-face time focusing on higher order concepts during traditional class time, students will typically experience greater success within the course (Chan, 2014).

Another strength of this course is the amount of student interest involved in the creation of the project. Although the main focus of the project is the research that prepares the students for their eighth grade Georgia studies course, they also get a chance to interact with other students their age, research something they are interested in, and use the computer to make a creative project. These things make this project suitable for the developmental phase of the seventh grade participants (Edwards, 2015).

**Objectives/Deliverables:**

* Website/Collaboration Space: Create a secure, user-friendly access point for both teachers, students, administrators, and county officials to access to monitor the course, as well as, house course materials.
* Videos: This MOOC aims to bring Georgia geography to life. Videos could be from Flocabulary, made by collaborating teachers, or educational videos and documentaries.
* My Georgia Project: Details are still developing on this. The main objective of this is for students to create a project that displays their perception of Georgia, and integrates geography from the unit.
* Provide support to teachers and students using the technology.
* Collect feedback from administrators, students, and teachers who have used the technology.
* Review implementation and modify for the next school year.

**PSC Standards:**

**1. Visionary Leadership**

Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to inspire and lead the development and implementation of a shared vision for the effective use of technology to promote excellence and support transformational change throughout the organization.

**1.1 Shared Vision**  
Candidates facilitate the development and implementation of a shared vision for the use of technology in teaching, learning, and leadership.   
(PSC 1.1/ISTE 1a)

**1.2 Strategic Planning**

Candidates facilitate the design, development, implementation, communication, and evaluation of technology-infused strategic plans. (PSC 1.2/ISTE 1b)

**1.3 Policies, Procedures, Programs & Funding**

Candidates research, recommend, and implement policies, procedures, programs, and funding strategies to support implementation of the shared vision represented in the school, district, state, and federal technology plans and guidelines. Funding strategies may include the development, submission, and evaluation of formal grant proposals. (PSC 1.3/ISTE 1c)

**1.4 Diffusion of Innovations & Change**

Candidates research, recommend, and implement strategies for initiating and sustaining technology innovations and for managing the change process in schools. (PSC 1.4/ISTE 1d)

**2. Teaching, Learning, & Assessment**  
 Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to effectively integrate technology into their own teaching practice and to collaboratively plan with and assist other educators in utilizing technology to improve teaching, learning, and assessment.

**2.1 Content Standards & Student Technology Standards**  
Candidates model and facilitate the design and implementation of technology-enhanced learning experiences aligned with student content standards and student technology standards. (PSC 2.1/ISTE 2a)

**2.2 Research-Based Learner-Centered Strategies**  
Candidates model and facilitate the use of research-based, learner-centered strategies addressing the diversity of all students. (PSC 2.2/ISTE 2b)

**2.3 Authentic Learning**  
Candidates model and facilitate the use of digital tools and resources to engage students in authentic learning experiences. (PSC 2.3/ISTE 2c)

**2.5 Differentiation**  
Candidates model and facilitate the design and implementation of technology-enhanced learning experiences making appropriate use of differentiation, including adjusting content, process, product, and learning environment based upon an analysis of learner characteristics, including readiness levels, interests, and personal goals. (PSC 2.5/ISTE 2e)

**2.6 Instructional Design**  
Candidates model and facilitate the effective use of research-based best practices in instructional design when designing and developing digital tools, resources, and technology-enhanced learning experiences.  
 (PSC 2.6/ISTE 2f)

**2.7 Assessment**

Candidates model and facilitate the effective use of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessments to measure student learning and technology literacy, including the use of digital assessment tools and resources. (PSC 2.7/ISTE 2g)

**2.8 Data Analysis**

Candidates model and facilitate the effective use of digital tools and resources to systematically collect and analyze student achievement data, interpret results, communicate findings, and implement appropriate interventions to improve instructional practice and maximize student learning. (PSC 2.8/ISTE 2h)

**3. Digital Learning Environments**  
Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to create, support, and manage effective digital learning environments.

**3.1 Classroom Management & Collaborative Learning**

Candidates model and facilitate effective classroom management and collaborative learning strategies to maximize teacher and student use of digital tools and resources. (PSC 3.1/ISTE 3a)

**3.2 Managing Digital Tools and Resources**

Candidates effectively manage digital tools and resources within the context of student learning experiences. (PSC 3.2/ISTE 3b)

**3.3 Online & Blended Learning**

Candidates develop, model, and facilitate the use of online and blended learning, digital content, and learning networks to support and extend student learning and expand opportunities and choices for professional learning for teachers and administrators.  
 (PSC 3.3/ISTE 3c)

**3.4 Adaptive and Assistive Technology**

Candidates facilitate the use of adaptive and assistive technologies to support individual student learning needs. (PSC 3.4/ISTE 3d)

**3.5 Basic Troubleshooting**

Candidates troubleshoot basic software and hardware problems common in digital learning environments. (PSC 3.5/ISTE 3e)

**3.6 Selecting and Evaluating Digital Tools & Resources**

Candidates collaborate with teachers and administrators to select and evaluate digital tools and resources for accuracy, suitability, and compatibility with the school technology infrastructure. (PSC 3.6/ISTE 3f)

**3.7 Communication & Collaboration**

Candidates utilize digital communication and collaboration tools to communicate locally and globally with students, parents, peers, and the larger community. (PSC 3.7/ISTE 3g)

**4. Digital Citizenship & Responsibility**

Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to model and promote digital citizenship and responsibility.

**4.1 Digital Equity**

Candidates model and promote strategies for achieving equitable access to digital tools and resources and technology-related best practices for all students and teachers. (PSC 4.1/ISTE 5a)

**4.2 Safe, Healthy, Legal & Ethical Use**

Candidates model and facilitate the safe, healthy, legal, and ethical uses of digital information and technologies. (PSC 4.2/ISTE 5b)

**4.3 Diversity, Cultural Understanding & Global Awareness**

Candidates model and facilitate the use of digital tools and resources to support diverse student needs, enhance cultural understanding, and increase global awareness. (PSC 4.3/ISTE 5c)

**5. Professional Learning & Program Evaluation**  
Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to conduct needs assessments, develop technology-based professional learning programs, and design and implement regular and rigorous program evaluations to assess effectiveness and impact on student learning.

**5.1 Needs Assessment**

Candidates conduct needs assessments to determine school-wide, faculty, grade-level, and subject area strengths and weaknesses to inform the content and delivery of technology-based professional learning programs. (PSC 5.1/ISTE 4a)  
 5.2 Professional Learning

Candidates develop and implement technology-based professional learning that aligns to state and national professional learning standards, integrates technology to support face-to-face and online components, models principles of adult learning, and promotes best practices in teaching, learning, and assessment. (PSC 5.2/ISTE 4b)

**5.3 Program Evaluation**

Candidates design and implement program evaluations to determine the overall effectiveness of professional learning on deepening teacher content knowledge, improving teacher pedagogical skills and/or increasing student learning. (PSC 5.3/ISTE 4c)

**6. Candidate Professional Growth & Development**

Candidates demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to engage in continuous learning, reflect on professional practice, and engage in appropriate field experiences.

**6.1 Continuous Learning**

Candidates demonstrate continual growth in knowledge and skills of current and emerging technologies and apply them to improve personal productivity and professional practice. (PSC 6.1/ISTE 6a, 6b)

**6.2 Reflection**

Candidates regularly evaluate and reflect on their professional practice and dispositions to improve and strengthen their ability to effectively model and facilitate technology-enhanced learning experiences.   
(PSC 6.2/ISTE 6c)

**6.3 Field Experiences**

Candidates engage in appropriate field experiences to synthesize and apply the content and professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions identified in these standards. (PSC 6.3)

**Project Description:**

This project will begin development in late August 2015, and will be implemented at the beginning of May 2016; specific date is to be determined. A website will be created for parents, students, teachers, county personnel, and administrators to access. In order to create a quality course, this project will take collaboration from all of these parties. This course is piloting doing future of MOOCs in the county, and will only contain one four week unit. There will be a separate page for each aspect of the unit. This will be run as similar as possible as the online courses that students are required to complete before they graduate high school. The MOOC homepage will serve as a one-stop location for students to access materials, videos, discussions, and graphic organizers from the course.

**Evaluation Plan:**

Students will reflect the knowledge they have acquired during the research product (such as a commercial, brochure, etc.) that they will share with their peers on a course Thinglink. We will use peer discussions as well as formal rubrics to grade students throughout the My Georgia MOOC to ensure success on the final presentation. This class will be predominately online, but will also include face-to-face components due to technology limitations. Students will dedicate four weeks to researching and creating their project. Each week will be chunked into a module for students to complete during class time.

(Please see attached rubric for grading guidelines.)

Resources:

* Voice Thread
* Thing Link
* Touch Cast
* Google Maps- zoom in on geographic features, how they tie into each other
* Progress of area- how it has changed over time
* Vanishing Georgia
* Google Lit. Trip- Historical Georgia Authors, Literature About Georgia- Extend for AC Classes
* True 8th grade year preview instead of just 1st unit of 8th grade
* Howard Gardener Track- Differentiation
* Georgia Businesses
* Start collecting data for student growth now and look at how much they usually grow and then measure this with their progress in the MOOC
* Send all data and resources to Claire.

Modules

1. Project Introduction- All Resources Provided Here (Project Exemplars, Checklists, Research- Preview this before the end of testing)

* Backwards research: read a variety of articles then they look at the background to identify a research topic.

1. Research Procedures, Process, Begin Working
2. Finishing Touches, Presentation Skills, Publishing
3. Presentations, Data Collection, Reflection
4. Teachers Only: Follow Up, Revise

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| August 11, 2015 | Nadia Williams, Anna Luther, Claire Lyons | Meeting to identify content area standards and create vision. |
| Digital Collaboration:  Monthly Check-ins with district personnel until unit implementation |  | * Decide on a platform * Compile a list of resources and evaluate   (Nadia)   * Go through standards and identify most relevant for students (Anna) * Create bones of a website/ logical flow (Anna) |
| Introduce Unit to Students:  Week of GA Milestones |  | Backwards research with students |
| Module 1 |  | Project introduction, broad topic selection, begin navigating databases |
| Module 2 |  | Topic selection, research |
| Module 3 |  | Finalize research, begin creative project |
| Module 4 |  | Finalize project, submit, peer review, and survey project. |

References

Barber, W., King, S., & Buchanan, S. (2015). Problem based learning and authentic assessment in digital pedagogy: Embracing the role of collaborative communities. *Electronic Journal of E-Learning*, *13*(2), 59-67.

Chan, D., & Jia, W. (2014). The effect of human interactions on student performance and satisfaction of blended learning. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal*, *18*(3), 11-21.

Edwards, S. (2015). Active learning in the middle grades. *Middle School Journal*, *46*(5), 26-32.