

ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION: Assimilating Digital Immigrants into High-Access Learning Environments

STUDENT: Jason Roseberry

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COLLEGE: Department of Educational Leadership

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As schools have placed an increased emphasis on instructional technology, the amount of money spent on hardware and student devices in classrooms has increased significantly (Nagel, 2014). Because administrators are underestimating the instructional shift required for effective integration of these devices, they are not allocating enough time and resources for teacher professional development (Sawchuck, 2010). This has contributed to a digital divide between teachers in districts across the state, and, even, within grade levels at the same school. The result is an epidemic of classrooms with high access to technology, but low use among educators.

The purpose of this study was to explore how two highly-regarded Indiana school districts prepared their middle school teachers to integrate technology. Mixed methods were used to discover how teacher and administrators described their professional development, and how closely these descriptions reflected ten characteristics of effective professional development identified in the literature review. The study also attempted to operationalize the ISTE-T standards as a method for approximating practices. Data were collected using teacher surveys, classroom observations, and focus groups.

Both schools emphasized a standardized format (Gaible & Burns, 2005) for their trainings. While this worked well for introducing new content, this single session approach did not allow for other effective strategies identified in the literature review such as time for reflection (Tillema, 2000), increased teacher voice regarding content (Opfer & Pedder, 2011), and varied delivery methods (Schrum & Levin, 2013). The descriptions within the ISTE-T Standards were found useful for identifying instructional traits, but the results skewed towards identifying teacher-directed learning experiences. As far as the characteristics of effective professional development from the literature review, the study found that these two schools emphasized learning experiences that considered teacher beliefs (Desimone, 2009), were embedded within job responsibilities (Nuthall & Alton-Lee, 1993), measured teacher growth (Opfer & Pedder, 2011), and focused on student learning outcomes (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002).