

Chapter 2

Perceptions of Middle School Teachers on Technology Integration

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ABSTRACT

Using an interpretative phenomenological analysis, this research explored how technology affects the teacher-student relationship in the middle school classroom, and in addition, investigated the middle school teachers' perceptions of the teacher-student relationship when the technology was integrated. This chapter reports on data collected from 16 middle school teachers in Grades 6, 7, and 8 within one school district in northern New Jersey. The data sources included one-to-one semi-structured interviews and a focus group consisting of 10 out of the 16 middle school teachers from the various core subjects (English language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science). The data were analyzed by coding and generating themes in a qualitative approach as recommended in an interpretative phenomenological analysis.

INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH STUDY

Technology has revolutionized accessibility of information and social connection, even with others synchronously on another continent. Furthermore, technology has been evident in the middle school classroom for the last 20 years. With initiatives to put 21st-century skills at the center of learning, teachers are integrating technology into their classrooms to prepare students to be effective citizens and workers who are able to “create, evaluate, and effectively utilize information, media, and technology” (Partner-

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ship for 21st Century Learning, n.d., para. 3). Because continued technology integration is inevitable in classroom instruction and learning, experts in the field of education must help bridge the transition of integrating technology in the middle school classroom in a way that allows the critical relationship of the teacher and student to continue to be at the center of academic success.

Ferlazzo (2015) noted that teachers need to build strong relationships with students in order to make their instruction relevant for learners to connect to it. However, the literature on technology integration in the middle school level, currently fails to show how these critical relationships that develop in the classroom at this stage of a student's academic journey may be affected with the integration of technology. Therefore, a study that explored teachers' perceptions of how technology may be affecting their ability to build a relationship with their students is essential given what already exists in the literature.

In modern culture, technology has taken over how people interact and communicate on a day-to-day basis (Blau et al. 2016; Bryant & Bates, 2015; Reiser & Dempsey, 2012). Furthermore, the emphasis of integrating technology into classrooms to prepare students for 21st-century learning has shown a positive impact on motivation and student engagement in the literature, but lacks showing a potential to have an effect on the vital teacher-student relationship (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). According to Santrock (1997), students who enter middle school have already developed a level of competency for life-long learning or have developed a sense of inferiority and thus feel incompetent and unproductive. Students in middle school start to open their eyes to the world and the journey of self-discovery in order to form a positive identity (Armstrong, 2017; Santrock, 1997). At this developmental phase, students need the support of their teachers in the learning environment to continue to nurture the developed competence or to gauge students' level of frustration if they are feeling incompetent and unproductive (Armstrong, 2017).

The role of the teacher at this critical stage must be one that understands this psychosocial developmental phase, but also understands that brains grow best with supportive relationships (Armstrong, 2017; Cozolino, 2013). Cozolino (2013) emphasized that "facial expressions, physical contact, and eye gaze connect us in constant communication exchanges with those around us, and in these interpersonal relationships is where our brains are built, rebuilt, and regulated" (p. 18). Furthermore, Reeve (2015) described that during instruction, teachers "take their students' perspective, listen empathetically to what students say, and utilize instructional strategies such as nurturing inner motivational resources, providing explanatory rationales, using informational language, displaying patience, and acknowledging and accepting students' expressions of negative affect" (p. 501).

The shift in the way people communicate and collaborate using technology today has certainly revolutionized the way middle schoolers are learning (Reiser & Dempsey, 2012). Teachers are asking students to conduct research, watch videos, collaborate with peers, solve problems, and communicate using technology, which can often leave teachers uncertain of their role in the learning process when technology is integrated (Kim et al., 2013). Bryant and Bates (2015) believed that learners make sense of the world around them, as well as new information, and construct knowledge by interacting with others, texting, using social media, listening to podcasts, and utilizing Google Applications. However, there is a need to study how such technology is affecting the interactions that occur between the teacher and the student in the middle school classroom.

Foundations of the Study

The purpose of this interpretative phenomenological analysis was to understand the impact technology has on the teacher-student relationship with the perceptions of 16 middle school teachers (grades 6 through

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