Chapter 32

ABCs and PCs:
Effective Professional Development in Early Childhood Education

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective professional development holds the power to transform teaching practices that invigorate teachers and increase student engagement. Arizona Classrooms of Tomorrow Today (AZCOTT) was one such experience. Eighteen elementary teachers completed a yearlong, rigorous, sixty-hour workshop experience that focused on integrating technology in content area instruction. Participants integrated technology effectively, began to develop leadership skills, and experienced changes in attitude, beliefs, knowledge, and skills as technology influenced existing curricula.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Two successful models emerged in a review of the literature that build on the possibilities of transformation: Intel Teach to the Future and the Apple Classroom of Tomorrow (ACOT) project. The goal of the Intel program is to help teachers already familiar with technology to integrate those skills more effectively in the curriculum to enhance student learning (Kanaya, Light, & Culp, 2005). The ACOT project is a ten-year study of the impact of an infusion of technological resources and sustained

professional development on teaching and learning (Sandholtz, Ringstaff & Dwyer, 1997). ACOT is student centered, driven by an essential question, encompasses the use of technology by teachers and students, and culminates in a student-created project. Key elements of effective programs structure both: format, duration, collective participation, inclusiveness, incentives, active learning opportunities, content focus, and coherence (SRI International, 2002). AZCOTT grew from those past successes and elements of the work of Wetzel, Zambo and Padgett (2001).

Setting the Stage

Poole (1995) helps us understand that transition from traditional teaching to teaching with technology involves a shift in teaching paradigms. It involves a cultural shift in the way we think about teaching that can be developed through effective professional development. Traditional models of professional development proliferate in the research literature, but many are what Watson (2001) consider retooling; integrating technology into the existing curriculum by providing specific skills and competencies. Watson espouses that a different model of professional development is required; re-forming. A re-forming model carries teachers through different stages during professional development with re-forming intentions. McKenzie (2001) agrees, noting that traditional programs lack a "generative" method during which behavior and daily practice change because of the training experience. Central to both ideas is rethinking traditional professional development into a model that takes teachers beyond skill acquisition to possibilities of transformation of teaching practice (Triggs & John, 2004). The purpose of this case study is to engage technology-leaders in planning professional development experiences for inservice teachers with promises to transform teaching practice.

A team of professionals collaborated to design a workshop experience based on input from content experts (English and Mathematics professors), technology users (inservice teachers currently in the field renowned for their technology rich classrooms), technology experts (professionals whose careers focused on technology), and teaching experts (professors from the local teacher preparation program).

THE CASE

Miss DeAndra. has been teaching second grade for 25 years and has seen approaches to teaching touted as innovative and effective come and go over–and sometimes come back again–during that time. The students she teaches in a poverty-stricken neighborhood have limited English speaking skills and let's not even go to where they are as writers! Regardless, Miss DeAndra is highly respected in the community

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