Going from Zero to Google: Implementing an Individual Technology Plan for One Teacher

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**Abstract**

The primary focus of this Capstone Project was to provide individual technology coaching to one teacher who lacks the skill, and confidence to implement digital tools into her daily instructional practices. Ideally, the goal was to introduce, model, and monitor one teacher’s transformation from sporadically using zero to few Google tools to independently using multiple Google tools daily to communicate and collaborate with students, parents, and colleagues. The researcher speculated that the teacher in question would rise to the challenge and master the implementation of consistently using multiple Google tools daily after ten weeks of coaching.

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 Research indicates that using digital tools is not the complete solution for increasing student achievement. Teachers need effective professional development and ongoing support. Martin et at. (2010) state, “However PD that makes an explicit connection between technology and specific types of instruction that have been shown to be effective can establish a viable chain of reasoning in which technology use can be linked to changes in student learning (Penuel, 2006; Ravitz, 2009; Ringstaff & Kelley, 2002)” (p.54). Coaching one teacher who sporadically use digital tools to independently use several Google tools in his or her daily instructional practices can positively impact achievement for the students in his or her class.

**Description of the Capstone Experience**

While the ultimate goal was to increase student achievement, the main goal was to transition one teacher from zero to limited technology use to independently using Google tools in her/his daily instructional practices. The Clayton County Public School (CCPS) district is in its second year of a district-wide Google implementation plan. While making this switch presented a challenge for many teachers, it presented an even greater challenge for special education teachers who often have additional duties related to their job and may have limited access to technology and digital resources as well. Never-the-less, James (2014) states “In essence, whether we like it or not, the Internet is here to stay -we are in the Google age…” (p. 21). Whether or not teachers are familiar with Google tools, or comfortable with using Google tools, there is a universal expectation that educators will use Google tools at some point and the teachers at Huie Elementary School were not the exception. The researcher coach set out to coach one special education teacher through learning to use a few Google tools independently over the course of ten weeks.

**Limitations and Findings**

The results of this research were somewhat skewed due to the limited amount of time and due to the minimum criteria threshold of the teacher in question- having to learn, master, and use two Google tools independently each day. The teacher in question met the expectation by default. The CCPS district instituted a change that the researcher did not anticipate. Towards end of the study in week eight, CCPS changed its email platform from Outlook to G-Mail. In essence, the teacher was now only required to use one additional Google tool independently to meet the research goal. Time was a limitation from the onset. Anyone who has ever set out to make a significant change knows that it takes time to make a lasting change in behavior. Creighton (2003) advises, “…when technology implementation is more gradual and purposeful, teachers can grow more comfortable with the change and are allowed time and opportunity to have more choice and input” (p.26). This researcher agrees, but time was a factor non-the-less. Finally, scheduling limited the researcher coach and teacher from meeting on a consistent basis. They often met after school after other scheduled meeting. Meeting at the end of a long day is not advisable because it is counterproductive to effective coaching. Despite the limitations, the teacher was successful at implementing two digital tools independently each day. The teacher used Gmail to communicate with parents and teachers, and she accessed the Google Drive to retrieve documents used to maintain student compliance records. The compliance documents were also necessary for the teacher to collaborate with students on her caseload regarding their individual Education Plans (IEP), progress reports, and student data for examples. The teacher did not exhibit any significant change in use of digital tools. While the researcher coach can vouch for the fact that the teacher in question did learn about and implemented other digital tools related to instruction she did not significantly enhance her Google skills.

**Recommendations and Implications**

This study looks at one approach to providing individual technology coaching to one teacher through the process of implementing digital tools into her daily instructional practices for the purposes of communicating and collaborating with students, parents, and other teachers. This researcher realized a major pitfall to this study was the limited amount of time. Time was a barrier for the length of the study and time was also a barrier that made it challenging for the researcher coach and the teacher to meet consistently for modeling and coaching sessions. Having adequate time to model is an essential element for the successful implementation of coaching an individual on how to implement using digital tools. Knight (2007), illustrates this with a quote from instructional coach, Tricia McKale, “Modeling is where the rubber meets the road. I mean, it’s really easy for us to stand back as instructional coaches and say, You should be doing this. You should interact with kids like this. You should follow the strategy like this. But until they see you do it, it’s just words” (p. 109). The teacher that was coached during the study said that she wanted to increase her use of using digital tools like Google for example. At the beginning of the study, the teacher was eager to learn, but as time passed, meetings cancelled due to other unscheduled meetings, and as other duties took priority over this voluntary study, the teacher became less eager- still interested, but perhaps less motivated to take the initiative to take on the extra work of learning to use and implement digital tools. There were only so many hours in the day where the teacher could practice using her Google skills, but other pressing duties took priority over her independent practice time. When the administrators instituted building-wide changes in schedules including meeting times during and after school- opportunities for individual coaching sessions were significantly reduced as well. Finally, this study was originally designed to take place over the course of one ten-month academic year, not the first ten weeks of the first semester of a new school term. The recommendation is that a second attempt at this study should take place over a ten-month school year. Ten weeks is not adequate time for lasting change to take place for a teacher to transition from using zero Google tools to using multiple tools daily and independently.

**Reflection**

The capstone was designed to coach one teacher through the transformation of limited technology use to independently using Google or other digital tools for the purpose of communicating and collaborating with students, parents, and other teachers. The first part of the study involved creating and completing a needs assessment for the teacher in question. This part was straight forward because the needs of the teacher were very clear- increase her technology use through modeling, coaching, and providing feedback. Originally, the teacher was going to have an option to blog, but it was apparent that blogging was over reaching, so the blog was eliminated altogether. The researcher and teacher spent a significant amount of time working together. Although the initial purpose for their meeting was for the purpose of providing technology coaching to the teacher. As the teacher asked for help with mandatory tasks related to her job duties and responsibilities, the coach put aside her capstone agenda and provided the teacher the coaching that she requested. When possible, the researcher coach tried to merge the capstone coaching with general coaching in response to the teacher’s needs. By the end of the capstone, the coach had become the teacher’s mentor and less of a technology coach. The researcher realized that as a technology coach, it helps when there is designated or protected time to coach. It is more effective than trying to find time here and there to model, practice, and reflect. Although this capstone did not go as designed, the coaching and mentoring were authentic. Knight (2007) tells us that “Instructional coaching is certainly one of the most unpredictable professions in education; each day brings surprises, new challenges, and successes” (p.19). This researcher experienced this so often, that she and the teacher gave up all expectations of trying to adhere to a set agenda. Usually, the sessions started with either the coach providing feedback from the previous session, a question, or an observation. Then it progressed to new questions or concerns from the teacher. The researcher coach had to use her collaborative skills both in person and via digital tools (Google platform, email, text, and telephone). The coach remained reflective of her experiences often. Some she shared with the teacher, some she kept private. Every interaction, even those that were happenstance almost always referenced the needs assessment of the teacher in the study. The coach remained in a constant of state of assessing the needs of the teacher in question. Coaching was challenging to turn on and off. The coach often found herself saying to the teacher, “now this is not the coach speaking, but this is coming from personal experience.” Knight (2007) states, “The message that matters is the one in the teacher’s mind, not the one in the coach’s mind” (p. 65). This was always the coach’s way to get the teacher to share or to provide more information without coming across as an authority figure- the one with all the answers. Sometimes the teacher just needed to share without the coach trying to offer a fix. Offering a solution can indicate that something is wrong. Sometimes things just are. Period. The coach needed the teacher to know that the coach was available to the teacher as a person, not only there for the teacher as the subject of a study where the teacher was expected to increase her interaction with using Google tools. As the researcher coach, I demonstrated my ability to provide support and manage the Digital Learning Environment (PSC 3.7/ ISTE 3g) by using creative ways to collaborate and communicate with the teacher when the preferred face-to-face option was limited or unavailable. I used my knowledge of Google tools, and my technology skills to select the most appropriate and the most effective forms of communication to move this capstone forward. In the area of Professional Growth and Development (PSC 6.2/ ISTE 6c), I constantly reflected upon the capstone experience. Throughout this capstone, I had to evaluate what was working and what was not working for the teacher. I learned the value of ongoing reflection. As a coach, it allowed me to coach from the vantage point of taking proactive measures and adjust planned activities and my preset agenda to ensure that the teacher, not the capstone, was the focus. This required me to think about the learner first, and not so much the capstone. Finally, this capstone was all about Professional Learning and Program Evaluation (PSC 5.1/ ISTE 4a). I practiced the art of conducting an individual needs assessment to implement a plan of action for one faculty in need of a technology-based professional learning opportunity to increase her use of Google tools.

**Conclusion**

Teachers need adequate training to do their jobs efficiently. No amount of training will compensate for inadequate time to implement changes associated with said training. Research supports the idea that professional development should take place over time ideally with built in supports or ongoing follow up. Coaching even one teacher to implement technology where the teacher was not already implementing technology before also takes time. Garet et al. (2001) indicates that “…a number of recent studies suggest that the duration of professional development is related to the depth of teacher change (Shields, Marsh, & Adelman, 1998; Weiss, Montgomery, Ridgway, & Bond, 1998)” (p.917). One might argue that replacing one form of technology with another form of technology is less challenging that implementing a behavior where a compatible behavior was not there before. On the surface, the project was about increasing technology use, but actually, the study was about change. To borrow from Prochaska et al.’s Stages of Change (1994) there are six stages, and the teacher in this study started out in the Contemplation Stage, where she realized that she needed to change, but she was stuck in her old routine (Knight, 2007, p. 85). Yes, the teacher implemented Google tools, but not until she absolutely had to change. By the end of the study, the teacher moved on to stage four- Action, but there are two additional stages before the teacher ends her struggle and change becomes permanent. The teacher did not make a permanent change in this researcher’s opinion. Although the study has concluded, the researcher feels a need to follow up with the teacher from time-to-time, to help facilitate a permanent change in the teacher’s transformation of going from zero to Google.

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