Teaching and learning, professional development and computer technology: an action research case study of five classroom environments

Glen Patterson

University of Wollongong

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TEACHING AND LEARNING, PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
AND COMPUTER TECHNOLOGY: AN ACTION RESEARCH
CASE STUDY OF FIVE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENTS.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
award of the degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

From

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

By

Glen Patterson
Dip Teach, BEd, MEd

Department of Education
2001
Abstract:

This study documents the evolving form of the collaboratively designed professional development programs and the changes that took place in five classrooms when computers and related technologies were available and integrated into the teaching and learning environment. It also investigates the impact that this had on the teacher's view of how students "learn best" and what implication this has for future learning.

Furthermore, the study investigates changes in student learning outcomes and tracked changes in classroom climate and student/student and student/teacher interactions within the classroom. It was anticipated that this data would assist as a further indicator of changes in teaching practice and how these changes impact on classroom practices.

This study encouraged teachers to look at how students learn best and what their role was as an educator in this process.

The introduction of computer technology into the learning environment provided rich data across each of the classrooms involved in the study. Some of the issues that affected this process included such things as:

* Years of teaching experience (reflected in developed teaching strategies in the classroom and an understanding of student learning);
* An individual's pedagogy and a commitment to evaluation and continued improvement of teaching practice;

* Issues within the learning environment (including school culture and class climate);

* A classroom and school climate that promoted and supported learning for staff and students;

* A teacher's involvement in a negotiated development program that met specific identified needs;

* Engagement in a training and development program that was situated in the participants' own classrooms (with components of computer skill sessions and sessions that directly related to teaching practice);

* The teacher's initial level of personal computing skills.

Yocam & Wilmore (1995), found professional development approaches that had the most impact did the following:

* involved small-group collaborations between teachers;
* took place in working classrooms;
* built on teachers' existing knowledge about curriculum and practice;
* provided opportunities to experiment and reflect on new experiences;
* provided ongoing support to help implement change and innovation.

Literature reviewed and data collected from this study enhanced Yocam and Wilmore's findings. Programs also need to:

* be twofold, with discrete in-class and individual training sessions for teachers;
* be collaboratively designed;
* be part of a whole school program that focuses on constant improvement and evaluation;
* take place in a school that has a climate and culture conducive and supportive of change and innovation;
* be longitudinal with a minimum of one school year;
6. place participants in close proximity to each other to maximise the possibility of the exchange of ideas and the development of support structures.

If the integration of computers into classrooms is to be successful, current practices in professional development in some schools must change. This change must be supported from the highest level with schools being equipped to carry out meaningful change monitored over substantial time periods.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author wishes to acknowledge the support of my wife Leanne and two children Matthew and Caitlin through the "life" of this study. Thanks also extended to the two supervisors, Professor Barry Harper and Dr. Ted Booth.

CERTIFICATION

I, Glen P. Patterson, declare that this thesis, submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Education, in the Department of Education, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

Glen P. Patterson

20 April 2001
Table of Contents

Glossary ix
List of Figures x
List of Tables xi

1 Introduction
1.1 The Background of the Study 1
1.2 Significance of The Study 3
1.3 Research Questions 4
1.4 Methodology Issues 5

2 Literature Review
2.1 Characteristics of Effective Professional 7
2.2 Development School-Based Professional Development 11
2.3 The Role of Professional Development in Introducing Computers into the Classroom 12
2.4 Classroom Computer Usage and its Relationship to Curriculum 19
2.5 Action Research 21
2.6 Summary 22

3 Professional Development Context of School
3.1 Context of The School 25
3.2 Context of The Study 26
3.3 Individuals Involved 29

4 Methodology
4.1 Theoretical Framework for the Investigation 32
4.2 Data Gathering 33
4.3 Data Organisation and Analysis 41
4.4 Summary 42
5 Findings - Teacher Case Studies

Overview of Findings

5.1 Galletea

5.1.1 Background Information
5.1.2 Teaching Philosophy in Practice
5.1.3 First Observations
5.1.4 Initial Computer Usage
5.1.5 Galletea Case Analysis
5.1.6 Summary

5.2 Maree

5.2.1 Background Information
5.2.2 Teaching Philosophy in Practice
5.2.3 First Observations
5.2.4 Initial Computer Usage
5.2.5 Maree Case Analysis
5.2.6 Summary

5.3 Debbie

5.3.1 Background Information
5.3.2 Teaching Philosophy in Practice
5.3.3 First Observations
5.3.4 Initial Computer Usage
5.3.5 Debbie Case Analysis
5.3.6 Summary

5.4 Josephine

5.4.1 Background Information
5.4.2 Teaching Philosophy in Practice
5.4.3 First Observations
5.4.4 Initial Computer Usage
5.4.5 Josephine Case Analysis
5.4.6 Summary

5.5 Amber

5.5.1 Background Information
5.5.2 Teaching Philosophy in Practice
5.5.3 First Observations
5.5.4 Initial Computer Usage
5.5.5 Amber Case Analysis
5.5.6 Summary

vi
### 5.6 Overview of Case Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6 Finding - Themes</td>
<td>6.1 How do Students Learn Best?</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.2 Changes in the Learning Environment</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.3 Changes in teaching practice when computers were integrated into the teaching/learning environment</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.4 Teacher Attitudes towards Computers and Related Technologies</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.5 Student-teacher and student-student interaction in classroom activities</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.6 The Use of Computer Technology to Achieve Curriculum Outcomes</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.7 Changes in Teacher Programming of Lessons and Units Throughout the Study</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.8 Professional Development</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.9 Personal Skills</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.10 Stress and Pressures in Teaching</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.11 Changes in Organisation</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.12 Skills Required by Students</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.13 Wiggleworks Usage</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.14 Summary</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 7 Discussion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1 Introduction</td>
<td>203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.2 The Nature of Student Learning</td>
<td>203</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3 The Role of the Teacher</td>
<td>205</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.4 The Learning Environment</td>
<td>207</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.5 The Role of Professional Development in Initiating and Supporting Change</td>
<td>209</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.6 The Relevance of In-school Training and Development</td>
<td>214</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.7 Conclusions</td>
<td>216</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 8 Recommendations and Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8.1 Introduction</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.2 Training and Development Issues</td>
<td>217</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.3 Implications for Teaching and Learning</td>
<td>219</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.4 Special Education</td>
<td>220</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.5 Further Study</td>
<td>221</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendixes

Appendix 1 - Training and Develop Sessions Advertised for All Staff 222
Appendix 2 - School Layout 223
Appendix 3 - Sample of Teacher's Journal 224
Appendix 4 - Sample Teacher Interview Transcript 231
Appendix 5 - Sample of Student Work Samples 233
Appendix 6 List of Nodes from NUD*IST
   - 6.1 May 1998 242
   - 6.2 June 2000 243
Appendix 7 Diagram of Classroom Layout - Gallettea 247
Appendix 8 Debbie’s Work-booklet on Wiggleworks 248

References 256
GLOSSARY

ESL - English as a Second Language
STLD - Support Teacher Learning Difficulties
LBOTE - Language Background Other Than English
NESB - Non English Speaking Background
ADHD - Attention Deficit Hypoactivity Deficit
SSP - School for Special Purposes
RFF - Release From Face To Face
KLA - Key Learning Area
Sci Tech - Science and Technology Key Learning Area
HSIE - Human Society and Its Environment Key Learning Area
IM - Intellectually Moderate
IO - Special Education Class for Intellectually Disabled Children
CD-ROM - Computer Device Read Only Memory
QSR - Quality Solutions and Research (makers of NUD*IST)
NUD*IST - Non-Numerical and Unstructured Data Indexing Searching and Theorising (Computer Software)
ACOT - Apple Classroom of Tomorrow
TILT - Technology in Learning and Teaching
Living Books - Interactive Computer Reading Software
Wiggleworks - Interactive Computer Based Reading Resource including on computer and off computer resources. Distributed by Scholastic Inc. (1994)
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1  Shifts in Teachers' Views of Teaching and Learning 20

Figure 1.2.  The Action Research Spiral 22

Figure 4.1.  Model for Case Study of Five Classroom Environments 32

Figure 4.2.  Data Collection Matrix 34

Figure 5.1.1  Photographic Evidence of Student Work on the Walls of Galletea’s Classroom 53

Figure 5.2.1  Photograph of Maree’s Classroom 81

Figure 5.4.1  Photographic Evidence of Increased Student/Student Interaction During One Of Josephine’s Lessons 123

Figure 5.5.1  Amber’s Classroom During a Whole Class Demonstration 138

Figure 6.1  Photograph of Galletea’s Blackboard December 5th 167

Figure 6.2  Classroom Layout Debbie’s Room 169

Figure 6.3  Classroom Layout Maree’s Room 30/6/97 171
# LIST OF TABLES

Table 5.1
Overview of Case Studies 156 - 164

Table 6.1
Matrix of Coded Text Units Intersecting at Change and Teaching Practice 174

Table 6.2
Matrix of Coded Text Units Intersecting at Change and Personal Skills 188