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Dissertation Abstract

In the United States, social studies education plays a critical role in preparing students to be active citizens in a democracy.  Student-centered, inquiry-based instruction helps foster learner agency, but it occurs infrequently in social studies classrooms.  One-to-one (1:1) technology, in which every learner uses a personal computing device, has been suggested as a tool to facilitate shifts in social studies pedagogy.  Despite this potential, little research exists which examines one-to-one technology in social studies.  The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of two social studies teachers who initiated and integrated one-to-one technology over a two-year period in a racially diverse, high-poverty middle school. Using a phenomenological methodology, data were collected through interviews, observations, and artifacts and were interpreted using transcendental phenomenological reduction. The theory of Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) (Koehler & Mishra, 2005) framed discussion of findings.

Findings reveal themes of teachers’ positive beliefs about technology, teachers’ belief in themselves as professionals with agency, teachers’ relationship with the larger school district, and the ways in which teacher empowerment, technological knowledge, and pedagogical shifts led to greater student autonomy in learning.  The study contributes to the foundation for one-to-one research in social studies by concluding: meaningful integration of one-to-one in social studies occurs at a confluence of complex factors; positive teacher beliefs about technology and teacher beliefs about professional agency impact integration; teacher voice is critical to research; and a modified version of TPACK is necessary in order to more fully capture the complex relationship between teacher beliefs and the teacher’s interaction with administration and district goals.  The study recommends that policymakers and practitioners should empower teachers by: building teacher capacity and supporting development of positive teacher beliefs well in advance of technology initiatives; designing and providing professional development that honors teacher voice, existing beliefs, and offers opportunities to take risks with technology; limiting the levels of bureaucracy in districts; and facilitating greater trust between the school leaders and teachers within the school community.