Effects of Wiki-based Professional Development on Technology towards Teachers’ Attitudes

and Knowledge

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*Background*

Across the country, schools are realizing the benefits of various technology tools that can be used in the classroom. Just in the last few years, teachers are being presented with a myriad of almost limitless technology options to use in the classroom, like Web 2.0 tools (Project Tomorrow, 2012). Web 2.0 tools are loosely defined as a set of technology tools that provides users with a way to collaborate and interact with each other, in order to share and discuss information and experiences (Rosen & Nelson, 2008; Drexler, Baralt & Dawson, 2008). Before Web 2.0, there was Web 1.0 which is often described as the “read-only” web (Rosen & Nelson, 2008). Now, Web 2.0 has emerged, and is considered the “read-write” web, enabling users to not only read information on the internet, but to write and share their knowledge with other users too (Rosen & Nelson, 2008). With Web 2.0 tools like, Wikispaces (a collaborative information-sharing website), Voicethread (a collaborative multimedia slideshow), and countless others, students and teachers can not only explore their content accommodating their own unique learning styles, but they can share information and learn from their peers locally or across the world. These tools open up the doors to a new kind of pedagogy that enables extensive collaboration, individual expression, inquiry learning, and important technology and literacy skills that are crucial for 21st century students to acquire for their future in this technology-driven society (Drexler, Baralt & Dawson, 2008).

Despite the fact that these technology tools are enhancing multiple facets of students’ achievement, teachers can be slow to implement them into their classrooms. Crook et al. (2008) conducted 100 interviews and 206 online surveys with teachers about why they were apprehensive to use these tools in their classrooms. Their findings showed that they were afraid the implementation would be time-consuming, they did not want to become reliant on using technology due to technical failures, and they thought students would become too distracted and get off-task from their learning. Another study, conducted by Pan and Franklin (2011), administered surveys to 461 in-service K-12 public school teachers from across the country asking about their use of web 2.0 tools in the classroom. Results showed that only about 12% of the teachers used these tools every day. They noted that one of the significant contributors to the teachers’ lack of technology usage is due to minimal or non-existent professional development (Pan & Franklin, 2011). Additionally, the researchers collected some voluntary open-ended questions from some of the teachers, and overall, the teachers themselves commented that they had a lack of support, knowledge, training, resources, and as a result, less confidence in their usage of technology in the classroom.

Teachers are feeling the pressure to integrate technology in their classrooms, and they need to learn more about the technology tools available so they can effectively use them with their students. One of the best ways to inform and train them on technology, is by providing accessible and effective technology-focused professional development. Professional development (PD) is defined as a process that is intended to enhance instructors’ knowledge, skills, and attitudes in order to improve their students’ knowledge (Talerico, 2006). Project Tomorrow, (2009; 2013) a non-profit organization, supports the fact that teachers need more PD on technology through surveys that they collect annually, from 35,000 to 50,000 plus teachers. From their most recent survey, in 2013, it showed that 33% of teachers thought that the biggest obstacle they faced using technology was that they needed more PD on how to use and implement specific technology tools in their classrooms. Findings also show that when teachers are given the opportunities for technology-focused PD they are more likely to integrate technology into their classrooms and they are more comfortable using it (Project Tomorrow, 2009). The results from Pan and Franklin’s (2011) study also support these findings and found that an increase in PD, correlated with an increase in the use of Web 2.0 tools.

The use of PD is important in order to properly train teachers, however the format of PD training sessions are changing. In the past six years or so, teachers are becoming eager to go online to get PD by taking online courses or joining professional learning communities, with blogs or wikis. Based on Project Tomorrow’s most recent report, 41% of teachers have taken online PD classes, whereas in 2008, only 33% had taken online classes (Project Tomorrow, 2013). Similarly the growth of maintaining professional social networking sites or participating in online professional learning communities has increased as well. Statistics show that a range of 22%-25% of the teachers participated in these online networking sites in 2008, and now 37%-39% of teachers regularly use them for professional growth (Project Tomorrow, 2013). One of the main reasons why teachers are using more online resources, to develop their professional growth, is because they are more flexible with their schedules, their learning is more customizable, and they can review previous materials if necessary. Face-to-face workshops often lack these advantages, therefore teachers want to use more online tools, like wikis, blogs, and podcasts to collaborate with other professionals to enhance their learning and best practices (Project Tomorrow, 2009). Teachers are turning to online communities for their PD more and more, and are showing interest in learning through online formats like Wikis to attain information about new technologies and to start discussions with their peers (Project Tomorrow, 2012; Project Tomorrow, 2009).

*Statement of Purpose*

Many teachers feel as though they have a lack of effective PD opportunities and believe that online learning communities are the most accessible way to obtain them (Pan & Franklin, 2011; Project Tomorrow, 2009; 2013) Using web 2.0 tools, like wikis, that allow users to contribute knowledge and interact with their professional peers, may enhance their PD on technology, more so than an online delivery method that does not allow for interaction and discussion. Therefore the purpose of this study is to determine if teachers’ attitude and knowledge about web 2.0 tools will improve as a result of an online wiki-based PD format, as compared to an online read-only webpage.

*Literature Review*

Effective PD is critical for teachers to receive in order to increase their knowledge and confidence in using certain tools. Exemplifying this conclusion was a longitudinal study conducted by Watson (2006) where 389 K-12 teachers from West Virginia participated in various types of PD training in 1996-1997 and were surveyed about their attitudes and confidence in the knowledge they obtained. His findings showed that, overall, teachers felt as though their knowledge and confidence improved as a result of the training, especially if they had supplemental online courses. Watson (2006) followed-up on their gains from the training six years later, and out of the 97 participants who responded to his survey, the majority reported that their confidence remained high when using technology in their classrooms as a result of this training.

Another study conducted by King (2011) found benefits of using an online learning community as a professional development resource, with a focus one participant, “Patty,” who was learning about mental health therapy. Based on a triangulation of qualitative data collection, it was found that, “Patty” was able to connect with other professionals from different cultures and backgrounds, from all across the country, and develop meaningful relationships and gain insights about her own professional identity (King, 2011). Also findings showed that Patty was not only able to learn *about* certain aspects of her profession, but she also learned about *how* to apply it to her practice, through discussions with people who had these mental health problems and practicing professionals who have dealt with it before (King 2011).

Due to the increased interest in online PD, studies have emerged that have focused on how to develop this kind of format effectively. One specific study, conducted by Drexler, Baralt, and Dawson (2008), consisted of creating a wiki, called the Teach Web 2.0 Consortium, for teachers to learn about and discuss various web 2.0 tools. They chose to use a wiki-based format because they felt it was able to effectively record and provide the teachers with a way to easily collaborate with other members and contribute to discussions, as well as an ideal tool that archives discussions, outcomes, and recommendations about various web 2.0 tools. The teachers were required to determine the strengths, weakness, opportunities, and threats for each web 2.0 tool that they discussed. After a year of using the Consortium, Drexler et al. (2008) analyzed survey results from 24 out of the 82 members of the Consortium, and found that over 50% either agreed or strongly agreed that usability of the wiki was effective, and they felt as though their educational value and implementation skills of web 2.0 tools increased. There were some limitations to this study, including a low response rate from teachers and their data was more transparent, because it was limited to teachers’ anonymous survey responses and brief interviews. However, Drexler et al. (2008) found success with their study and encourage others to either join in their wiki-based PD for web 2.0 tools or create their own, using a similar framework.

Further studies have focused on the benefits that users have obtained as a result of using a wiki-based format. One study, conducted by Pifarre and Staarman (2011), focused 25 primary school students in Spain, who used of a wiki environment, to develop a joint informative text. They found that through a wiki environment, students created a dialogic space where they were open to others’ ideas and perspectives, they built upon each other’s contributions, and problem-solved together to create a co-constructive learning experience (Pifarre & Staarman, 2011). Additionally, they found that through the asynchronous process of a wiki, students were able to take the time to read and reflect on other’s work and they developed critical thinking skills and reflective skills that enhanced their understanding and knowledge about their topic (Pifarre & Staarman, 2011). Wake and Modla (2012) had similar findings through their study with pre-service teachers. Based on candidates perceptions of their participation in a wiki environment, open-ended responses revealed that participants liked the ability to compare ideas and work with others, the ability to improve through progressive process, and the liked the level of feedback and interpersonal interaction with their peers (Wake & Modla, 2012).

Additionally, other studies have revealed added benefits of learning through a wiki-based environment. Hazari, North, and Moreland (2009) found that the 70 collegial business students they studied felt as though the wiki was user-friendly, and it gave them a chance to get comfortable with new generations of technology. Davidson’s (2012) study focused on 117 college students, and based on their reflective comments, noted that it provided ubiquitous access, enabled effective and efficient group work due to organization and version control, improved forms of collaboration that worked with a variety of personalities (e.g. shy and dominant students), and it highlighted high-achievers and non-performers which allowed for even and fair group work.

## Statement of Hypothesis

It is believed that a wiki-based format for PD on technology, that enables teachers to actively collaborate with one another about a certain Web 2.0 tool, will positively impact teachers’ attitudes and knowledge. This format will be compared to a read-only online webpage, that will not enable participants to communicate online with one another.

Method

*Participants*

The participants for this study will include all of the general education teachers, special education teachers, and special area teachers in all of the high schools, in one county. These schools, will offer a variety of teachers with different ethnicities, gender, age, and teaching experience. Half of the teachers will be given the wiki-based format for PD and the other half will be given the read-only webpage for PD.

*Measures/ Instruments*

Participants will be given a pre-survey asking them first about their experience with Voicethread (the web 2.0 tool that the PDs will be focused on) and goals that they hope to achieve as a result of their PD. If participants have extensive experience with Voicethread, their data will not be used due to the fact that the post-results, based on knowledge gained, may be less accurate as a result. I also want to determine their goals before the PD to see if they achieved them after their PD experience. Some basic demographic information will need to be included on the survey, (e.g. the school the teacher is from, identification number, position, age, teaching experience, etc.) in order compare the two groups and match-up participants' pre- and post-survey results. The post-survey, which is a modified version of Hazari et al.’s (2009) survey, will be based on a likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1), and questions will be focused on their attitudes/ feelings towards their experience with their format, knowledge they gained, usability, etc. In addition, some free response questions will be included to get more specific responses based on their likes, dislikes, suggestions they would make to the format they used, and if they achieved their goals (the ones they made in the pre-survey) as a result of the PD. These responses will be essential when determining details about the most effective delivery method for online PD and establishing improvements for future PD on technology. All participants will receive similar questions on their surveys, but they will be specific to the PD delivery format that received, in order to compare the two equally.

Months after their PD experience, they will be given an additional survey to determine if they have implemented Voicethread in their classrooms and if so, reflect on whether or not their experience was successful, and if the PD they received aided them in their implementation. This will help solidify data to determine if their experience with their PD delivery method was instrumental in their implementation of Voicethread. It is noted that validity and reliability threats may occur as a result of survey data due to the fact that participants may not be trustworthy with their responses. However to counteract certain threats, various forms of data will be collected and the sample size will large in order to be representative of the general population.

*Design*

The design of this study is experimental. Two different groups of teachers will receive two different online formats of technology-focused PD. One group of teachers will receive a Wiki-based format and the other group will receive a read-only webpage format. Both groups will focus on the web 2.0 tool, Voicethread which is a collaborative presentation tool that can be beneficial and easy to use in the classroom. A facilitator will provide the basic information about Voicethread, including what the tool is used for, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities to use it, threats, and specific examples of how it could be used. The participants in the wiki-format group will be required to create/ contribute to discussions with the other participants in the group about the information that was provided and provide a specific example of how they could use Voicethread in their classroom, as well as provide feedback to peers. The training will be evaluated by content experts to determine appropriateness and effectiveness.

*Procedures*

At the beginning of the school year, an entire population of high school teachers, from one county will be selected. These teachers will then be divided into two separate groups, one group will be given the read-only webpage format and the other group will be given the wiki-based format to participate in, using random assignment. Both groups will be given a pre-survey, via email, one week before the PD implementation will begin. The PD formats will be implemented and participants will be given the requirements for participating in their group. They will participate/ use these formats for two weeks. The following week, after implementation and usage of the formats have stopped, participants in both groups will be given a post-survey via email. They will have one week to complete their surveys, and to return them to the researcher, via email. Two months following the implementation, another survey will be administered to determine if teachers have implemented Voicethread in their classrooms and if so, reflect on their experience.

*Data analysis*

Data received from the likert scale in the surveys will be tabulated and presented on a table. The table will include the question and the average responses from the teachers, displayed as percentages. In order to compare between the two PD groups, a t-test for independent samples will also be used to determine if there was a significant difference between them. Data received from the free response questions will be analyzed for similar themes and patterns. The post-survey that will be given months after implementation will be analyzed to determine if PD was effective in meeting the implementation needs of teachers.

*Timeline*

In the beginning of August 2014, high schools in one county will be assigned to one of the two PD groups. The researcher will distribute information to the participants about the experiment and what they will be expected to do. The last week in August 2014, the pre-survey will be administered to participants. In the first two weeks of September 2014, the study will be executed and teachers will participate in their assigned PDs. The following week, teachers will complete and return their completed post-survey. The researcher will begin data analysis procedures. In December 2014, the second post-survey will be administered to teachers. By the end of December to the beginning of January 2015, data analysis will be completed and the researcher will report findings to the appropriate audience.

*Anticipated Outcomes*

Teachers that participated in the wiki-based PD will show increases in their attitude and knowledge towards Voicethread, as compared to the read-only webpage PD group. Most of the teachers that were in the wiki group, will have implemented this tool in their classroom successfully as a result. Based on the positive results from the wiki-based PD, administrators will explore using this delivery method as a effective and valuable option for PD on technology. Eventually, this will help pave the way for a permanent school-based or county-based wiki, providing teachers knowledge and strategies about other valuable Web 2.0 tools to use in their classrooms.

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Appendix A: Pre-survey

Identification #: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Teaching Experience: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please rate your experience with the web 2.0 tool **Voicethread**, based on a scale from (1) No experience to (3) A lot of Experience: (Please circle the number)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **No Experience** | **Some Experience** | **A lot of Experience** |
| 1 | 2 | 3 |

What are the goals that you hope to achieve as a result of this professional development experience?

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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Appendix B: Post-Survey (Read-Only Webpage Group)

Identification #: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Please rate your professional development experience based on the following scale (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree: (Please circle the number)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The webpage interface and features were overall easy to understand | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Using a webpage made it easy to collaborate with other teachers. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| The experience of using a webpage with helped me understand different aspects or ways of thinking about Voicethread. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use of the webpage aided me in achieving my professional development goals | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I stayed on the task more because of using the webpage | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I would like to see webpages used in other professional development experiences | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I participated in the professional development more because of using the webpage | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Benefits of using the webpage outweighed any technical challenges of its use | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Technical features in the webpage helped enhance my learning | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I will retain more material as a result of using the webpage | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I would recommend professional development experiences that use webpages to other teachers | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use of the webpage promoted collaborative learning | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I learned more because of information in the webpage | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use of the webpage enhanced my interest in the professional development | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I will continue to explore use of webpages for professional development | 1 2 3 4 5 |

*Please write brief responses about your professional development experience:*

Did you achieve your goal(s) as a result of your professional development experience?

What did you like LEAST/MOST about using the webpage?

What would you change about using the webpage?

Any additional comments about your experience?

Appendix C: Post-Survey (Wiki Group)

Identification #: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Please rate your professional development experience based on the following scale (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Undecided, (4) Agree, (5) Strongly Agree: (Please circle the number)*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| The Wiki interface and features were overall easy to understand | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Using a wiki made it easy to collaborate with other teachers. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| The experience of using a wiki with teachers in other locations helped me  understand different aspects or ways of thinking about Voicethread. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use of the Wiki aided me in achieving my professional development goals | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I stayed on the task more because of using the Wiki | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I would like to see Wikis used in other professional development experiences | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I participated in the professional development more because of using the Wiki | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Benefits of using the Wiki outweighed any technical challenges of its use | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Technical features in the Wiki helped enhance my learning | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I will retain more material as a result of using the Wiki | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I would recommend professional development experiences that use Wikis to other teachers | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use of the Wiki promoted collaborative learning | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I learned more because of information posted by other teachers’ in the Wiki | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| Use of the Wiki enhanced my interest in the professional development | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| I will continue to explore use of Wikis for professional development | 1 2 3 4 5 |

*Please write brief responses about your professional development experience:*

Did you achieve your goal(s) as a result of your professional development experience?

What did you like LEAST/MOST about using the Wiki?

What would you change about using the webpage?

Any additional comments about your experience?

Appendix D: 2nd Post-Survey

Identification #: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

School: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Please identify which professional development group you were in (Wiki or Webpage): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*Please circle “Yes” or “No” for the following question:*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Have you implemented Voicethread in your classroom since your professional development ended? | Yes No |

*If you circled “Yes,” please respond to the following questions:*

Was your experience using Voicethread successful? Explain how it was or was not successful.

Did your professional development experience aid you in implementing Voicethread in your classroom? Explain how it helped you.