Back on the Road to Success: Refueling stalled out 1:1 Initiatives

Madeline Brandi Collins

Lamar University

Abstract

This paper explores multiple articles related to the factors needed to implement and sustain district wide 1:1 blended learning initiatives. The focus is on schools who have implemented 1:1 technologies consecutively for two or more years. Often, these initiatives begin strong, but quickly find the efforts to maintain driving forces stalling out. The articles address the roles of campus stakeholders throughout the implementation process, along with common barriers and notable successes in blended learning initiatives and how these factors are connected to continuously improving learning for all.

Keywords: blended learning, digital native, 1:1 initiative, flipped learning

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For campus faculty, the beginning of a new school year brings with it a range of emotions. Feelings of eagerness mixed with anxiousness often surround a campus as everyone awaits the announcement of the schoolwide initiatives the campus will undertake. This undertaking is not always welcomed with open arms as faculty and staff navigate their way through the "voluntary/mandatory" aspects of the initiatives. Getting faculty and staff to understand the differences in a program versus a system can be somewhat challenging. Perhaps the easiest way campuses can prepare the mindset for implementing a new initiative is to define a program as something that tends to go away after time and a system is something that is here to stay. This understanding paves a smooth way for implementing most campus wide initiatives, especially those involving 1:1 technologies.

Stakeholders with a "program" mentality were often the first ones to spread 1:1 negativity by doing just enough to get by until the time passes before it is off to the next initiative. While those invested in the 1:1 "system" are doing everything in their power to sustain its drive. No matter the mentality of the stakeholders, 1:1 initiatives seem to be stalling out at an alarming rate. This review of related literature will explore the roles of campus stakeholders in 1:1 initiatives as well as the successful components needed to continuously improve 1:1 implementation that is firmly connected to lifelong learning.

Literature Review

In recent years, the proliferation of mobile technology in society has found its way into classrooms worldwide. With more students immersed in all forms of technology use, campus administrators are seeing the need to incorporate more opportunities for blended learning into school wide curriculums. Blended learning can be defined as the mixing of traditional face-to-face teaching with that of online platforms designed to enhance the overall learning experience.

Principals as Stakeholders

Corn, Tagsold and Patel (2011) state 1:1 technology initiatives seek to better a teacher's execution of strategies and expand levels of student achievement while providing all stakeholders with the 21st century skills necessary to be successful in a global society.

In order for an initiative to be successful, it must begin with the right vision. Top-down administrating is often the safest bet for campus principals to make when it comes to running a school, but finding a balance between what central office requires and what an innovative forward thinking faculty is proposing can be quite difficult. Kinsey (2014) noted that teachers just want administrators to trust them to do what they do best...teach. Corn et al.'s (2011) emphasized the need for an administrator's 1:1 vision to be clearly focused on providing a high standard of professional development that leads to enhanced instructional practices. According to Kinsey (2014), administrators must be able to "walk the talk" when it comes to implementing 1:1 initiatives. Teachers feel comfortable to move forward when they have the support of an administrator that is learning and doing right along their side. Kinsey (2014) goes on to state that two of the biggest success factors of a 1:1 initiative is the belief that we are all in this together

and that failure is a necessary part of growth and learning. Principals who embrace these two

important components are well on their way to a successful implementation. In addition to

forming a team of togetherness and relieving fears of failure, administrators must give 1:1

initiatives their own sense of autonomy. Christensen, Horn and Staker (2013) proposed that

principals must not let other campus or district initiatives take precedence over the 1:1 initiative.

This notion goes back to the earlier claim that a successful 1:1 initiative must be seen as a

"system" that is here to stay and not a "program" that tends to go away.

Teachers as Stakeholders

Today's students are more digital literate than ever before. Growing up surrounded by

technology has allowed them to easily adapt to using technology in the classroom. While

students enjoy the luxuries of being tech savvy, today's teachers are experiencing the hardships

of not being considered digital natives. Tang and Chaw (2016) discovered that the people who

are more capable of effectively managing information and adapting to the fast pace of electronic

learning methods are the same ones who consider themselves to be highly digital literate. To be

digitally literate, is to understand how to use the advantages of technology to become a critical

thinker and problem solver. O'Dwyer, Russell and Bebell (2005) indicate that teachers who

heavily use technology to deliver content are likely to be more personally confident in their own

use of technology. O'Dwyer et al.'s (2005) also found teachers who are technologically self-

assured were more likely to use technology in a professional manner when sending and receiving

e-mails and preparing for meaningful class instruction. O'Dwyer et al.'s (2005) conclude that

the most impactful ways in which teachers are using technology to support their teaching is

through participation in meaningful professional development opportunities, having a voice

when it comes to funding and policies related to sustaining the initiative and ensuring that

classroom technologies remain readily available for all. Logan (2015) suggests that teachers

move beyond the lecture method of instruction delivery and take a more active approach to

learning by flipping their classrooms.

At first, flipping your classroom might sound like a dangerous task, but Logan (2015) defines

flipping a classroom as simply exchanging classwork for homework. Traditional homework is

done in class with the teacher having more time to address the needs of individual students.

Classwork has been redefined with the help of short videos designed to be viewed and worked

through at home at a student's own pace. Logan (2015) insists that flipping the classroom allows

for the teacher to become more of a facilitator and experiencer of student ah-ha moments. While

flipping the classroom is not for every teacher, it does hold tremendous potential to create more

student-centered active learning environments.

Students as Stakeholders

Out of all the stakeholders, students are the biggest beneficiaries of 1:1 blended learning

initiatives. As found in Corn et al. (2015) blended learning initiatives prompt students to begin

thinking about their thinking. This student use of metacognition is appreciated by administrators

and teachers alike as it helps to shift students towards more self-directed learning practices.

Tang and Chaw (2016) conducted a study, which found that student academic performance

exceeded expectations when blended learning strategies were practiced as compared to those in

face-to-face classroom settings. Christensen et al. (2013) supports this claim by proposing the need for students to incorporate the facilitation factor of face-to-face learning into their online learning resulting in a more personalized education experience.

Barriers and Successes in Blended Learning Initiatives

Bebell and O'Dwyer (2010) report a lack of teacher buy-in as one of the main barriers to a successful 1:1 implementation. Bebell and O'Dwyer (2010) go on to state that student use of technology is mostly prescribed according to how well their teachers model their own use of technology. Corn et al. (2011) lists unreliable devices as an obstacle preventing teachers' lessons to flow smoothly. Often, teachers were faced with doing double work by always having to prepare a paper back-up lesson in the event of student device malfunctions.

Although many barriers had to be navigated with the implementation of 1:1 initiatives, most schools surveyed reported great successes. Bebell and O'Dwyer (2010) stress the importance of using technology to increase student achievement. Their study concluded that compared to non-1:1 students, students in year two of implementation, aided by test prep technology scored significantly higher on state English and Language Arts assessments. Bebell and O'Dwyer (2010) add to their findings by reporting student access to technology platforms increased their overall engagement leading to an increase in achievement.

A student engaged in their learning through the use of technology is a student who owns their learning. Downes and Bishop's (2012) study confirms the notion that technology use increases engagement by reporting the claims of parents who see their child's class participation soar in

technology rich environments. Students in Downes and Bishop's (2012) study also highlighted the benefits technology afforded them by extending their learning beyond the classroom walls. The benefits of using technology to connect the real-world to the classroom are tremendous.

Connections to Learning

With all of the reported successes, why do 1:1 initiatives still stall out? Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, Rodriguez-Ariza and Argente-Linares (2013) believe the answer lies in teachers and students using technology to comprehend content rather than just commit it to memory. Lopez-Perez et al.'s (2013) most valuable finding related to connecting technology to learning is that student achievement is positively affected by the prevalence of online activities. Weston and Bain (2010) also support students connecting technology to learning by honing their thinking, reasoning and remembering skills. Weston and Bain (2010) see these cognitive technology skills as intertwined and indivisible. When schools permanently fix their vision on infusing the culture with the best teaching and learning practices, schools evolve into a self-organizing enterprise. (Weston and Bain, 2010). According to Bain, a self-organizing school is one that uses feedback to drive its initiatives and connect exemplary teaching to exceptional learning.

In a similar study, Corn, Tingen, Argueta, Patel and Stanhope (2010), examined 1:1 initiatives in eighteen high schools across North Carolina and found that after three years of implementation, all stakeholders developed a deep, identifiable understanding of what it means to be a digital learner and how their new perspective on education helps to shape and mold their school culture. Corn et al,'s (2010) further addressed the idea of shifting teacher's attitudes towards technology, implying that a tech savvy teacher directly influences and impacts a

student's technology beliefs and buy-in for the better.

The studies on connecting 1:1 initiatives to quality learning all seem to parallel each other quite nicely. Tseng and Walsh, Jr. (2016) compared blended versus traditional style course delivery in higher education and found that students in the blended learning curriculum were processing content better through the use of higher order thinking and collaboration skills meshed with technology skills. Students reported positive experiences in blended learning based courses preferring to continue with that option rather than traditional course design (Tseng and Walsh, Jr. (2016).

Cargile (2016) gives a more tangible approach to connecting technology to learning by introducing stakeholders to the online tutorial sensation Khan Academy. Founded in 2011 by Salman Khan, Khan Academy is website data base of over 5,500 tutorial videos covering a variety of subjects. Practice modules are available for students to work through at their own pace receiving real time feedback on their progress and collecting point and badges for their academic accomplishments. Cargile (2016) concludes that Khan Academy is an innovative, effective and fun way to connect blended technologies to learning thereby increasing achievement.

Conclusions and Future Study

The reviews of literature presented in this paper concentrated largely on implementing 1:1 initiatives that connect technology use to learning with fervor and fidelity. It is clear from the research reviewed that blended learning strategies do in fact increase student achievement. Along with this, it is also evident that the success of a 1:1 initiative is only as strong as the vision of its leaders. For a 1:1 initiative to grow and thrive, administrators must provide teachers with continuous support and opportunities for quality professional development. Initiatives that start strong and eventually stall out are often viewed by teachers as administrators adding more to their already full plate. Changing this perception of 1:1 initiatives by getting teachers to realize that the supplement of technology simply takes what they are already doing and makes it more intentional. Understanding this component is the key to driving any initiative forward.

Blended learning initiatives that take on the "system" mentality during implementation have the best chance to become an integral part of a school's culture and climate. Future studies on blended learning should continue to promote blended learning as the best way to achieve student-centered, personalized significant learning environments. Promoting this belief, keeps any initiative traveling in the right direction on the road to success.

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