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Exploration of the Use of Computer-Mediated Communication to Support the Face-to-Face Collaborative Efforts of a Sixth-Grade Professional Learning Community

Abstract

Noting the lack of resources to meet face-to-face, most notably time, a significant body of research has investigated the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) to replace face-to-face interactions of teacher professional learning communities (PLCs). Equally noted is the research on social constructivist theory that supports social interaction as the foundation of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine how a successful sixth-grade PLC leveraged available technologies in support of their face-to-face collaborative efforts by answering the following research question: How do participants in an established PLC use CMC as a means of supporting and extending their face-to-face collaborative efforts? The case study investigated a sixth-grade PLC whose authenticity was solidified in 2016 as part of their earning the nation's first ever Learning Forward School designation. This required the sixth-grade team to undergo a rigorous, on-site external review of their professional learning practices by the school improvement-focused Advanc-ED® organization. Data for the case study was collected through a semi-structured group interview, participant-observations of face-to-face interactions, and the collection of artifacts from the online platforms utilized by the PLC. Findings suggest that CMC can be used as a viable means of communication and collaboration that supports well-structured face-to-face teacher learning environments.