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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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The Impact of Laptop Computers on Preservice teachers' Practicum Experience

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In the wake of increased efforts by teacher preparation programs to train perservice teachers in the integration of technology in the curriculum, there is need for deeper understanding of different ways to execute this mission. This qualitative study investigates the impact of having personal portable computers on the practicum experience of a cohort group of preservice teachers. The preservice teachers were provided with laptop computers to use in the course of a yearlong fieldwork experience. The preservice teachers spent several hours each week in a local elementary school. Part of the time in the elementary school was spent taking methods classes and the rest was spent in the elementary classrooms where the preservice teachers worked as teacher assistants. The classroom teachers played the role of mentors to the preservice teachers during the practicum. Participant observations and in-depth interviews were conducted to investigate how the preservice teachers used the laptops and the impact of this use on the practicum experience. The sample included 15 preservice teachers and 2 mentor teachers. As part of the practicum, each preservice teacher worked together with an elementary pupil to develop an electronic portfolio for the pupil. Findings indicate that providing preservice teachers with access to technology, and accompanying suggestions for its use, during their practicum is a powerful way of enabling them to reinforce the knowledge and skills covered in their computer class, practice use of technology in a non-threatening environment, practice use of technology in a real life setting, understanding the need and place for technology in teaching, and learn to be co-learners with the students. These benefits in turn help prservice teachers to overcome major corresponding barriers that have been associated with lack of technology use among teachers. The study recommends the use of a project-based approach, such as electronic portfolios, when preservice teachers are provided with access to technology. The findings suggest that providing an opportunity to practice using technology with elementary pupils in a non-threatening classroom setting is one solution to the search of "what works" in preparing teachers who are willing and able to integrate technology in their own classrooms.