

**COLLEGE INSTRUCTORS' GROUPWARE EXPERIENCES:
USING ACTION RESEARCH AS A TOOL FOR CURRICULUM AND
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

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Abstract

Technology has the potential to transform the college teacher's role in the classroom. Despite the evidence of the positive effects of the use of technology in education, relatively little is known about how teachers work with and can best use technology to develop richer curricula and enhanced pedagogies. This lack of understanding contributes to the ineffective application of technology, which in turn leads to under-utilization and waste of resources in the classroom.

This is a qualitative study about how three college teachers experience the application of technology in their professional practice. It is an action research study that investigates the application of a synchronous group support system (GSS)¹ technology from the perspective of the teacher. The college teacher enacts teaching and learning improvements. This study aims to address the college teacher's experience in the context of several integrally related components: the "push" for technological innovation and collaborative learning within the college system, professional development (technology specific) that teachers find inadequate in the sense that it is not teacher-driven, nor focused on effective curriculum development, and the potential "promise" of a GSS technology to bridge these gaps. In this participatory action research study, I am a facilitator, co-researcher, and resource person (technical and process) to three college teachers as they engage GSS technology in their teaching practice over a seven month period. I document the evolving nature of the teachers' experiences and actions as they

¹ Group support systems (GSS) is a generic set of software tools designed to help groups collaborate on ideas. The facilitator employs the tools and all participants contribute to: generating ideas, organizing ideas, evaluating ideas, and building consensus on the ideas. GSS does not replace discussion and conversation. In a synchronous 'same-time, same-place' (or face-to-face) environment (i.e., the classroom) all students have computers which are connected to a network that enables information sharing and knowledge building. The classroom usually contains a projector, a projector screen, and whiteboards to aid group discussion.

perceived the meaning of: (a) learning and teaching using an action research experience; (b) implementing and improving upon their curriculum by using GSS in their classrooms; and (c) applying GSS technology theory, tools and practices.

The qualitative analysis of interviews, field notes, and curriculum artifacts indicated that the action research framework and the sociotechnical environment enhanced the instructors' teaching practice and curriculum. It also increased their interest in and commitment to continuing to learn and teach using GSS and sharing knowledge with colleagues and administrators outside the action research group. The instructors' experiences further revealed the challenges related to the contextual environment of the college (i.e., time to develop awareness, understanding, and appropriate application of collaborative learning and technology; equipment, facilities, support staff, policies and procedures). Although this thesis was based on one college setting and involved three instructors across diverse disciplines, the findings generated may speak to other college instructors, faculty professional development consultants, administrators and policy makers who want to engage in collaborative learning and the use of technology in the classroom.