

Dissertation Review: O'Hara (2018) – Program Evaluation of a Laptop Initiative for Student Learning

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Abstract

This review analyzes O'Hara's (2018) mixed-methods program evaluation of a district-wide one-to-one laptop initiative. The study examined the impact of laptop access on student engagement, instructional practices, and academic performance. This review highlights the methodological strengths of the dissertation, its alignment with utilization-focused evaluation principles, and its relevance to technology-driven organizational change in educational settings.

1. Introduction

O'Hara's (2018) dissertation, *Program Evaluation of a Laptop Initiative for Student Learning*, provides a comprehensive evaluation of a district's implementation of a one-to-one laptop program. The study sought to determine whether providing each student with a laptop improved engagement, instructional flexibility, and academic performance. Grounded in program evaluation theory, the dissertation demonstrates how mixed-methods approaches can inform decision-making in technology-rich educational environments.

2. Summary and Analysis of the Dissertation

O'Hara found that laptop access significantly increased student engagement and expanded opportunities for personalized learning. Teachers reported greater instructional flexibility, while students described feeling more ownership over their learning. However, improvements in academic performance were inconsistent across subject areas, underscoring the complexity of measuring the impact of technology initiatives.

A key insight from the study was the importance of teacher readiness and professional development. Schools with stronger instructional support systems integrated laptops more effectively, reinforcing the role of organizational capacity in program success.

The dissertation exemplifies Patton's (2012) emphasis on methodological appropriateness and utility. O'Hara's mixed-methods design allowed quantitative achievement data to be contextualized with qualitative insights from teachers and students. The study also demonstrated strong alignment between the research questions, methodology, and findings — a model of clarity and coherence for dissertation writing.

O'Hara also acknowledged limitations such as uneven implementation across schools and variability in teacher training. These contextual factors complicated interpretation of results and highlighted the importance of assessing organizational readiness, as emphasized by both Patton (2012) and Ewy (2009).

3. Reflection and Application to My Dissertation Topic

O'Hara's work directly informs my own dissertation focus on leadership and technology implementation in higher-education IT environments. The study illustrates that technology initiatives succeed or fail not because of the tools themselves, but because of leadership alignment, stakeholder readiness, and implementation fidelity. The emphasis on professional development, communication, and organizational capacity mirrors the challenges faced in higher-ed IT when deploying new systems.

This reinforces the need for evaluation approaches that consider both outcomes and the organizational conditions that shape them — a perspective that will guide the design of my own dissertation.

4. Conclusion

O'Hara's dissertation provides a strong example of how mixed-methods evaluation can illuminate both the outcomes and contextual factors influencing technology initiatives. The study's methodological rigor, alignment with utilization-focused evaluation principles, and practical relevance make it a valuable model for designing and presenting evaluation research.

References

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