DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 432 307 IR 019 677

AUTHOR Powers, Susan M.
TITLE Transmission of Teacher Dispositions: A New Use for Electronic Dialogue.
PUB DATE 1999-03-00
NOTE 7p.; In: SITE 99: Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference (10th, San Antonio, TX, February 28-March 4, 1999); see IR 019 584.
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Computer Uses in Education; *Educational Technology; Elementary Secondary Education; *Group Discussion; Higher Education; Internet; *Listservs; *Personality Traits; Pilot Projects; Preservice Teacher Education; Preservice Teachers; Role Models; *Teacher Characteristics; *Teacher Effectiveness; Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship
IDENTIFIERS *Technology Integration

ABSTRACT

This paper describes a pilot project in which three teachers served as virtual guest speakers to preservice teachers through an electronic discussion group in the form of a moderated listserv. One goal of the project was to integrate technology into the daily classroom activities of the students. The expected outcome was that teachers and teacher education students would grow in their appreciation and understanding of the instructional uses of technology, and teacher education students would grow in their knowledge about what practicing teachers do. However, an unexpected byproduct of the project was the modeling by the guest speakers of dispositions of effective teachers and their public reflection on teaching. The success of the project has led to a larger program, supported by grant funds, with 32 teachers and teacher education students from across Indiana. (Contains 27 references.) (Author/MES)

Transmission of Teacher Dispositions: A New Use for Electronic Dialogue

Susan M. Powers
Department of Curriculum, Instructional and Media Technology
Indiana State University
USA
powers@indstate.edu

Abstract. This paper describes a project where three teachers served as virtual guest speakers to preservice teachers through an email-based electronic discussion group. One goal of the project was to integrate technology into the daily classroom activities of the students. However, one unexpected byproduct of the project was the modeling by the guest speakers of dispositions of effective teachers and their public reflection on teaching. The success of the project has led to a larger program, supported by grant funds, with 32 teachers and teacher education students from across the state.

Introduction

Imagine a professional development school and teacher education program where the teachers play an integral part in the preparation of future teachers. Each teacher has the opportunity to impact the learning and preparation of hundreds of future teachers and each pre-service teacher has the opportunity to interact with multiple veteran teachers. During these interactions, teacher education students can ask the experienced teachers burning questions related to current issues and practices in education. The teachers in turn have the opportunity to reflect upon their professional practice and share their professional development with future teachers, teacher educators, and their peers.

Although this may be happening at some professional development schools (PDS) and within the associated teacher education program, it is difficult to achieve the level of involvement without the inclusion of multiple teacher education programs and multiple PDS systems. The logistics of that task would be enormous. Fortunately, with the use of simple information technologies such as electronic mail and the World Wide Web (WWW), that type of K-16 learning community can be developed.

Recent articles in the *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education* have described the power of placing the voices and experiences of teachers online. Bosworth, Haakenson, and McCracken (1997) describe the use of a web publication to distribute teacher viewpoints to pre-service teachers and how these students grew in their understanding and comfort in dealing with various issues. Denise Johnson (1997) details a project where preservice teachers developed a greater understanding of reading philosophy through electronic dialoguing with practicing teachers from around the country. The relay of information can be an important outcome of electronic communication, as well as the demonstration of practical, integrated uses of the technology. However, can more be obtained and gleaned from these electronic dialogues? Can these electronic dialogues serve to not only have teachers use more technology while learning about the teaching profession, but also become more reflective practitioners and understand more about the dispositions that are an integral part of being a teachers (INTASC 1998; IPSB 1998).

Background

In order to understand the project described in this paper, and to envision the possible future forms of the project, it is equally important to understand the purpose behind the use of a virtual guest speaker program. The research presented here examines the literature behind the premises of technology use, reflective practice and dispositions.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Educators (NCATE) issued a report recently entitled *Technology and the New Professional teacher: Preparing for the 21st Century Classroom* (1997). This report describes the need for teachers to be able to understand the impact of technology on society. It describes how teachers need to adopt new roles which allow them to use technology to become more reflective and critical consumers, and that teachers must participate in activities that are delivered via informational technologies. Building upon this last point, the literatures points to the potential of information technology to enhance learning productivity as larger numbers of students are able to be reached at a lower incremental cost, and how technology allows faculty to accommodate individual differences (Massy & Zemsky 1995). Kozma and Schank (1998) posit that information technologies will increase the use of effective project-based learning by allowing students to converse with experts from around the world. Vicki Hancock (1997) concurs with that position through her evaluation of six classrooms that are actively using information technology to create self-initiated learning projects. These types of programs, that bring the technology directly into the regular activities of teacher education students, create an atmosphere which moves students from knowledge consumers to knowledge producers while at the same time moving from technology that is an adjunct to instruction to technology that is central in the delivery of course content (Pellegrino & Altman 1997). In this manner, the teacher education program as a whole is better able to increase the instructional technology skills of its students, while transmitting important pedagogical information. This transformation to technology-rich teacher education classrooms is new and the efforts are still experimental, but the importance of using technology as a vehicle for delivery of information is apparent.

One of the questions that emerged with the project is whether or not the process of learning from and through technology can be translated to another level of learning and professional growth, such as the development of reflection? Thoughtful reflection is a difficult process that must be developed and nurtured (King & Kitchener 1994). Donald Schön (1983 & 1987) identifies the important role that reflection plays in professional development and growth. A number of researchers in addition to Schön have discussed how reflection takes place on a variety of levels (Zeichner & Liston 1987; Zimpher & Howes 1987; van Manen 1977). The lower levels of reflection concern the reporting of factual information or descriptions of what took place during a situation. The higher levels are where actions and behaviors and the impact those actions had on others are examined. King and Kitchener (1994) provide a number of ways that reflection, which leads to a critical analysis of performances, can be fostered. Examples include the creation of multiple opportunities for students to examine different points of view reflectively, development of a learning climate that promotes thoughtful analysis of issues, and opportunities for students to make judgements and explain what they believe. The process of reflection is also closely tied to dispositions in that teachers (in-service and pre-service alike) must want to act up on their reflections to change behavior (Kottkamp 1990) and that the teacher is ultimately in control as to whether or not they have the desire to reflect (Dewey 1933). Given that dispositions are an integral part of newly developed teacher standards and principles (INTASC 1998, IPSB 1998), if technology can enhance reflection, can technology also be used to model and perhaps enhance dispositions?

Dispositions of successful teachers are not as elusive and unapproachable as might be imagined. Dispositions and attitudes are not new to teacher education. Researchers and practitioners have been examining those characteristics in the literature (Robinson, Noyes & Chandler 1989; Brookhart & Freeman 1992; Pajares 1992). The difficult question for teacher education programs is how to make these dispositions real and demonstrable to preservice teachers. Davis-Blake and Pfeffer (1989) describe the dispositional approach as one that examines those stable traits that influence our affective and behavioral actions. Holland (1985) took this argument even further by saying that these stable traits or personality types impact vocational choices, satisfaction and success. Unfortunately, this position then assumes that a person cannot change their dispositions, or can't be taught a different dispositional stance. This research would indicate to teacher education programs that successful teachers and candidates could be detected by some pre-measures. Research supporting this assumption has been done as a predictor of success for urban teachers (Haberman 1993). A number of theories contrast this notion of stability and suggest that group climate, social influence and social networking can impact attitudes and behaviors, and in turn, possibly dispositions (Festinger 1954; Deustsch & Gerard 1955; Slancik & Pfeffer 1978; Pfeffer 1983). It is therefore a possibility that the dispositions outlined in the various standards are dispositions that could be "taught" to students. Alternatively, at least students might be able to become more aware of and able to adopt appropriate dispositions by being in situations which bring them into social contact with teachers exhibiting appropriate dispositions.

Project Description

This paper describes a pilot project that brought together three teachers from different parts of the country with sophomore teacher education students through an electronic discussion group in the form of a moderated listserv. A moderated listserv means that all messages are first sent through a moderator (in this case the course instructors) who determines the relevance of the message to the topic, or possible redundancy of the message. Therefore, the moderator may choose to not post a message that has little to do with the topic or is in questionable taste. The moderator may also choose to combine a number of messages that pertain to the same topic and thereby reduce email traffic flow. The role of the moderator is not to determine "worthiness" of the message except in those instances where a message is blatantly in poor taste or irrelevant to the topic.

Each teacher spent two weeks online, using email, answering the questions of teacher education students. The expected outcome was much like what has been discovered by the authors exemplified above: teachers and teacher education students alike would grow in their appreciation and understanding of the instructional uses of technology, and teacher education students would grow in their knowledge about what practicing teachers do. These outcomes did take place. However, what was more powerful and far more unexpected was the transmission from teacher to teacher education student of the dispositional stance of a successful teacher, and the display of open, honest, public reflection on teaching.

The Conversations

The electronic discussion group begun much as would be expected. Three teachers were used and each teacher was online with the students for three weeks. Teachers submitted an opening statement to the students about who they were, where they worked, how long they had been teaching, etc. Then the discussion group was opened for questions and answers. The first several days, the discussion was tentative and general. Questions and responses focussed largely on issues that students were also learning about in class. One such question focussed on interdisciplinary teaching and elicited the following response:

"I've not done a lot of integrated teaching because I haven't had my own classroom for awhile. But these are my observations: 1) Everyone has to be philosophically on board if a team is going to do it, I don't mean that everyone has to accept the concept without reservation, but they have to be willing to give time and energy. 2) The content teachers must know what the major concepts that the kids need to master are in their curriculum. You might be surprised how many teachers can't identify the BIG IDEAS in their curriculums because they rely on textbooks. Once the major concepts or big ideas are in mind, then the teachers have a framework to keep in mind when planning. 3) It's easy to forget when planning an interdisciplinary unit what skills and types of thinking the kids' needs to have in order to complete projects and assignments. For example, sometimes we ask kids to compare and contrast without making sure that they know what the words mean or whether they have strategies for comparing and contrasting." She continues:

"At my school, we are now asking ourselves three questions when we plan: 1. What's the content (e.g. concepts, big ideas, etc.--what do the kids need to understand) 2. What skills and processes do the kids need (what do the kids need to be able to do--narrow down a topic, use a variety of resources, etc.) 3. What types of thinking do kids need to be able to do--summarizing, analyzing, etc. Once these questions are answered, we have a better picture of how to structure the unit."

Then, a little over a week into the discussions, unexpected and tragic news hit the national media in the form of the Jonesboro, Arkansas school shootings. Suddenly the students were filled with questions about safety and student searches. The teacher online at that time began exposing her feelings and her attitudes to the students, and the students came to understand that these were important qualities in a successful teacher and that they were heretofore not consciously aware of these dispositions. Within 24 hours of the shootings, the following two questions were posted:

"I was wondering if teachers are nervous for their OWN safety due to the recent outbreak of violence in schools? Has anyone in your school talked about taking extreme steps to prevent student violence? Do you think anything can be done?"

"With all of the news about students bringing weapons such as guns and knives to school, do you feel threatened as a teacher, or do you just not think about it?"

The teacher responded in an honest and open manner without any pretense:

"I do not feel threatened at school and still would wade in and break-up a fight. We have had weapons at school, and we have unstable students. But then again, I have some unstable neighbors--so I do not allow

myself to get agitated. Violence is not a daily occurrence for me--if it was I don't think I would stay. We have peer mediation and civil rights groups operating in school. They're small steps--we have a long way to go in creating a situation where each student feels he/she has an advocate here, and I think that would help keeping an escalation of violence at bay. However, it is an issue that is not going to go away."

The conversations continued in this manner for the remainder of the six-week period that the three teachers were online with the students. Conversations focussed on topics emerging from class information (e.g., teaming, interdisciplinary curriculum), experiences students had in the field (e.g., classroom disciplines, faculty meetings), and items from the news (e.g., school violence, public grieving). Some of the topics were predictable; others came from out of the blue and demonstrated the level of student concern and consideration.

Teacher Educator and Student Reflection

As might be expected form this project, the discussion group elicited some reflection. One student who did not actually ask any questions, but was apparently absorbing the information offered the following:

"I have been very interested in both the questions asked and the answers given. I know that there are a lot of things I do not know [a lot] and this has been a way for me to learn about things that I didn't even think about before!"

The public reflection of both teachers and students opened doors for this student that had been previously unconsidered. At the same time the public reflection occurred, the dispositions of those individuals on the discussion group were being modeled; the teachers were being plain about how their attitudes toward various aspects of their jobs make them successful and satisfied.

The power of the electronic discussion group also surprised the teacher education faculty, as demonstrated by the following comment:

"Questions about Jonesville that Jill got; questions about national certification to Karen; and magnet school questions that Jane fielded--all three stick in my mind. I believe, from my vantage point, that your participation, as three active and involved professionals was the major cause of this level of quality. Indeed, you elevated the level of discourse for a number of reasons: students recognized that you were a committed professional; students have, and we in the department have come to understand this much better this semester, a need to talk their concerns and questions out; the security of a non-face-to-face interchange brought about a different level of conversation; and the length and tone of your responses was also a major part of this effort; the depth of detail that you went into--about everything--and the up-front honesty that framed all of the responses contributed to this."

This faculty member honestly felt that the level of student reflection he saw rose as a direct result of the discussions. Additionally, the technology became an "honest" classroom tool that achieved results beyond mere utilization, rather, the technology furthered the instructional goals of the class. Finally, his students grew to understand the importance and relevance of reflection and dispositions to the teaching profession.

Next Steps

This pilot project was a success from the standpoint of the teacher educators, the teachers, and the students. Funding obtained through internal, university grant sources allowed the teachers to receive a modest stipend for the time they spent online. The success of the pilot, the interest of faculty, teachers and students made the question arise as to whether or not a similar project could play a bigger role in teacher education. In other words, could more students participate, as well as more teachers?

During the Spring of 1998, a grant was written to obtain funding from the Educate Indiana Preservice Grant Program (Goals 2000) to develop a series of statewide electronic discussion groups. Starting in the Spring of 1999, 32 teachers from around the state, representing different grade levels and disciplines, will be online with teacher education students from all over Indiana. Three different listservs will be in operation, dealing with three different sets of teacher performance standards. As data is gathered from faculty, teachers and students, it will be interesting to discover if other elements emerge beyond the reflection and modeled dispositions. Through the experience gained with the project described here, it is fairly apparent that the results will extend beyond mere technology integration. Pellegrino and Altman

(1997) provided a challenge to teacher educators to find ways to allow the technology to be a tool that delivers unique and higher-levels of learning and teacher development. This project demonstrates that it is possible, and that such a situation might occur if it's allowed to develop.

References

Bosworth, K., Haakenson, P, & McCracken, K. (1997). Teacher Talk: Capturing innovative teacher voices on the World Wide Web. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 5*(4), 319-331.

Brookhart, S. M., & Freeman, D.J. (1992). Characteristics of entering teacher candidates. *Review of Educational Research, 62*(1), 37-60.

Davis-Blake, A. & Pfeffer, J (1989). Just a mirage: The search for dispositional effects in organizational research. *Academy of Management Reviews, 14*(3), 385-400.

Deutsch, M. & Gerard, H. (1955). A study of normative and informational social influences on individual judgement. *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 51,* 629-636.

Dewey, J. (1933). *How We Think: A Restatement of the Relation of reflective Thinking to the Educative Process.* Boston: D.C. heath and Company.

Festinger, L. (1954). A theory of social comparison processes. *Human Relations, 7*, 117-140.

Haberman, M. (1993). Predicting the success of urban teachers (the Milwaukee trials). *Action in Teacher Education, 15*(3), 1-7.

Hancock, V. (1997). Creating the information age school. *Educational Leadership, 55*(3), 60-63.

Holland, J.L. (1985). *Making Vocational Choices: A Theory of Vocational Personalities and Work Environments*(2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

IPSB (1998). Standards. [Online] Accessed at: http://www.state.in.us/psb/Standards/standards.htm

INTASC (1998). The INTASC Pilot Project. [Online] Accessed at: http://www.uindy.edu/~educ/intasc.html

Johnson, D. (1997). Extending the educational community: Using electronic dialoguing to connect theory and practice in preservice teacher education. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 5*(2/3), 163-170.

King, P.M. & Kitchener, K.S. (1994). *Developing Reflecting Judgement: Understanding and Promoting Intellectual Growth and Critical Thinking in Adolescents and Adults.* Sand Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kottkamp, R.J. (1990). Means for facilitating reflection. *Education and Urban Society, 2292*), 182-203.

Kozma, R. & Schank, P. (1998). Connecting with the 21st century: Technology in support of educational reform. In Chris Dede (Ed.). *Learning with Technology.* Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Massy, W.F. & Zemsky, R.(1995). *Using Information Technology to Enhance Academic Productivity.* EDUCOM.

NCATE (1997). *Technology and the New Professional Teacher: Preparing for the 21st Century Classroom..* Washington, D.C.: NCATE.

Pajares, M.F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research 62*(3), 307-332.

Pellegrino, J. & Altman, J.E. (1997). Information technology and teacher preparation: Some critical issues and illustrative solutions. *Peabody Journal of Education, 72*(1), 89-121.

Pfeffer, J. (1983). Organizational demography. In L.L. Cummings & B.M. Staw (Eds.). *Research in Organizational Behavior*(Vol. 5, pp. 299-357). Greenwich, CT: JAI Press.

Robinson, W.P., Noyes, P, & Chandler, P. (1989). Motivational and attitudinal predictors of judged quality of novice primary teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 5*(3), 179-187.

Salancik, G.R. & Pfeffer, J. (1977). An examination of need-satisfaction models of job attitudes. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 22*, 427-456.

Schön, D.A. (1987). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schön, D.A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner.* New York: Basic Books.

Van Manen, M. (1977). Linking ways of knowing with ways of being practical. *Curriculum Inquiry, 6*(3), 205-228.

Zeichner, K.M. & Liston, D.P. ((1987). Teaching student teachers to reflect. *Harvard Educational; Review, 57*(1), 23-48.

Zimpher, N.L. & Howes, K.R. (1987). Adapting supervisory practices to different orientations in teaching competence. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision, 2*(2), 101-127.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

REPRODUCTION BASIS

☒ This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket) form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

☐ This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").