DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 662   IR 020 257

AUTHOR   Gorelik, Kimberley
TITLE   "But What Do You Want Us To Do?": The Internet as
                Scaffolding.
PUB DATE   2000-07-28
NOTE   9p.
PUB TYPE   Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE   MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS   Assignments; *Computer Assisted Instruction; Computer
                Mediated Communication; *Computer Uses in Education;
                Homework; Independent Study; Junior High Schools; *Learner
                Controlled Instruction; Personal Narratives; Problems;
                Student Reaction; Teaching Methods; *World Wide Web
IDENTIFIERS   *Web Pages

ABSTRACT
                A middle school language arts teacher relates how she used
the Internet to "scaffold" students' learning. She notes teachers have begun
the shift from assigning rote homework to assigning independent work that
gives the student the opportunity to test the information on his or her own,
and that children need time to make the shift from years of standardized
testing to trusting that independent thinking is desirable. After
illustrating the problems that students were having in understanding her
homework assignments, she outlines her attempts to make them clearer, which,
though they didn't use it, included giving them her home phone number. She
then demonstrates how the Internet became her method for scaffolding students
who were not yet ready for total independence. A simple Web page was designed
by a high school student, a brother of one of her students. The first section
displayed homework assignments; the second allowed both the questions and
answers to be posted continuously; the third held examples of what the
teacher wanted the students to accomplish; and the fourth included Web sites
that would direct them to helpful resources. The page was finished in one
week and the teacher logged on each night at the same time to answer any
student questions that were emailed to her. Students expressed their
appreciation. (AEF)

Submission:
"But what do you want us to do?": The Internet as Scaffolding

Date:
July 28, 2000

Submitted by:
Kimberley Gorelik
4707 Pin Oak Park Drive, #1022
Houston, TX 77081
(713) 668-4869
kimberleyannegorelik@yahoo.com

Submitted to:
ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
Acquisitions Department
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, MD 20706

Kimberley Gorelik
4707 Pin Oak Park Drive, #1022
Houston, TX 77081
(713) 668-4869
kimberleyannegorelik@yahoo.com

"But what do you want us to do?": The Internet as Scaffolding

"Okay everyone," I announced to my eighth grade language arts class. "Let's sit in a circle so we can all see each other. I want to hear your version of last night's homework."

"Miss Gorelik, I didn't really do the homework," Caitlin muttered.

"Oh, you didn't *really* do the homework. Did you kind of do the homework? Isn't this a black and white issue?" I asked somewhat dejectedly. "Either you did the homework or you didn't."

Caitlin explained that after she had read and reread the assignment, she still wasn't sure what to do and she didn't want to do it wrong. Caitlin's heart-shaped face tilted when she talked to me, her bowed mouth held neither a smirk nor a frown, her sea glass green eyes focused directly into mine pleading for understanding.

I felt sorry for her, and for other students in her predicament. I also felt responsible because I had been using language arts in the classroom as a way for my students to learn about themselves. I pushed them to discover what they knew and how they related to the rest of the world and then I assumed that this discovery process would only occur during their forty-five minute language arts period each day. Who was there for them when they had an 'aha!' moment while doing their homework? My experience, both as a teacher and as a student, is filled with exciting 'connection' moments that happened as a result of my working things through independently, on my own time. Wasn't that exactly why I assigned homework? I needed to be there for my students as the scaffold that I believed I should be. I wanted to be the kind of teacher who knowledgeably, and temporarily, supports students until they are ready to accomplish a task independently.

3

Traditionally, learning in schools has been governed and directed by adults, students rarely make decisions about their own learning. This means that often students are unsure of themselves when faced with a homework assignment. They are left on their own with material recently learned and told to interpret and discuss the information. The assignments seem to be looking for individual interpretation, however past experience has taught them that many teachers are really looking for a specific interpretation, their own. This mirrors Russell's research in The Brain Book showing how " A child is born with a natural insatiable curiosity to explore and find out about the world...Yet too often in trying to help children we hinder them. We don't give them problems to solve so much as answers to remember, and if this intense curiosity is not exploited, it may be wasted forever"(10). As teachers, we have begun to make the shift from assigning rote homework assignments to assigning independent work that indeed gives the student a chance to test out the information on his/her own. Many of us have read the research and are now attempting to put into practice the importance of students connecting to material in their own way. We are seeing how different perspectives in the classroom encourage more complete learning. Kids, however, need time to make the shift from years of standardized testing towards trusting that independent thinking is, in fact, what we are looking for.

We were already five minutes into our forty-five minute Language Arts class when I turned to the rest of the seated chatting eighth grade kids and asked, "Did anyone else not do the homework?" The kids looked at me blankly and then began looking at each other; a few brave souls raised their hands. I rephrased the question "Did anyone not understand the homework?" The class looked like they were in the middle of a wave at Enron Field. I sighed and told them I'd go over the assignment during class. Kids do have lots of other reasons for showing up to the classroom without their homework: they are balancing homework with sports

obligations, family duties, and budding relationships. I believed, though, that many students were like Caitlin, they wanted to do their homework correctly, but didn't always know how to do that. Many adolescents stay up late to fit all of their responsibilities into one day, but by the time they get to their homework they are tired and any added burden oftentimes stops them in their well intentioned tracks.

Forty-five minute periods barely allow for enough learning time, but problems with homework sometimes reduced class time significantly. I wanted to solve this problem that Caitlin had intuitively explained. I wanted my students to know that they, as individuals, control what is learned by believing that they have the ability to apply effort and achieve goals. I began to review each homework assignment that I had designed for my students. I wanted to make sure that the homework assignments were clearly written; that they were not the reason the student was unsure of what to do. Writing new clearer homework assignments seemed tedious, but imperative. William Zinsser's work, On Writing Well, plaintively states, "Writing is hard work. A clear sentence is no accident. Very few sentences come out right the first time, or even the third time"(12). If I wanted clear writing and thinking from my students, my assignments needed to model clarity. I asked my colleagues to read some assignments and "say back" what they thought I was asking my students to do. I began to hand out these new clearly written homework assignments a week in advance explaining that students should review them looking for issues that could be resolved before the homework's due date. I even decided to give students my home phone number explaining again that I didn't want them spending time suffering at home when one answered question could help them get right to work.

My phone never rang, but that was not because they didn't need me. I found that my new assignments and home phone number had not increased the number of students who arrived to class with homework in hand. I began to think that I would not understand how to

solve this issue unless I went home with my students and watched them as they applied the day's work in their independent setting. I really wanted to see how they sat with a problem, what motivated them and whom they turned to for resources.

I described this problem to my fellow teachers at school and, after some jeering that I may just need more of a life, found that virtually every teacher agreed that this problem deserved attention. With this support in mind, I decided to research more closely by going directly to the source as Rief suggested in Seeking Diversity. "Until we realize that the student is the best evaluator of his or her own learning, we will never know what our students really know or are able to do"(131). I asked my students to monitor their time spent on homework: to bring their journals home and take ten minutes to write out what they were doing while they were in the midst of homework.

The students took this assignment seriously showing me how important the resolution was to all parties. Their responses were intriguingly similar. Rarely did they call each other for help. When they did call, it was just for exact wording of the assignment, not for interpretation. Never did they ask parents for help, figuring parents could not understand the requirements (or worse, might assume their child had not been listening in class). They did read the written assignment over and over, but never reviewed what we had done in class to see if that might trigger understanding. They also did not attempt to try an assignment to see if it would come clear mid-assignment. Finally, they never called me because they felt that I might react similarly to their parents. They added that they felt 'weird' calling me at home, after all: "Didn't I want my own life?" they inquired, deeming me as my colleagues had, as one who, if only interested in learning propositions, clearly had no life.

After reading my students' writings, I determined that I needed to locate a common thread regarding how people find and use resources for information needed. How did they

locate such basics as phone numbers, movie listings, restaurants, hotels, and concert listings? The people I watched, as a whole, used many different methods, but the common theme was their use of the Internet. The Internet had become the hassle-free method for locating information. I had known for a long time that the Internet was becoming a regular part of today's world. I also knew that administrators were pushing teachers to use the Internet more frequently in curricula. Up until this point the thought of using the Internet in my classroom felt something akin to taking the time to clean a house that is ablaze. My research was telling me to use the Internet, instead, to provide a fire extinguisher. After doing a quick survey of random students I determined that most students had a computer at home, had access to one, or had learned to call computer-owning friends to ask them to look up information. I decided that the Internet would become my method for scaffolding students not yet ready for total independence.

I presented my idea to my students. I would maintain a simple web page that they could access when they needed to communicate with me or with their classmates about homework assignments. Caitlin looked pleased at this new form of communication and raised her hand to speak to me, "My brother and his friend know how to make web pages. They do it all the time. They even designed my dad's office page." Several of her friends nodded their heads while she spoke.

"Do you think he'd do it for us?" I asked hopefully. "Maybe for free?" I added desperately.

"I'll ask him tonight...or you could just email him, he'd probably answer you faster," she answered. Her reply made me laugh because I, too, responded more quickly to email.

Her brother agreed to help me, especially when I told him that I wanted it to be very simple, something I could maintain easily. He listened carefully to my reasons for requiring his help and then told me that he thought it was a good idea. He also told me that he might tell his

teacher to do the same thing. His approval of the idea reaffirmed my excitement and hope that this solution would be successful. It takes a lot for a high school student to think that a middle school teacher's ideas about homework are innovative.

Our web page was written in Netscape 4.0 and had four parts and few graphics. The first section displayed homework assignments. The second section allowed both the questions and answers to be posted continuously. This second section of questions and answers would be saved in folders by date so that we could refer to them when similar questions were asked repeatedly. The third section held examples of what I wanted them to accomplish (more scaffolding). And the final fourth section would include helpful web sites that would direct them to resources such as a dictionary, thesaurus, or commonly misused words site.

The web page was finished in one week and then was put through some depressing test runs. I asked Caitlin and some of her friends to begin using it and realized quickly that they didn't know how or what to do with it. I almost trashed the idea a couple of times, but then realized that, like everything else, they just needed time to get used to the concept of active learning. I pushed the students a little by writing homework assignments with extra credit questions that could only be found on the web page. I also posted questions and answers that I knew kids generally asked me every year. For example: When and how do I use commas or what is the definition of a metaphor. It took two full months for the students to begin to realize that this web page might work for them. I continued to put extra credit questions on there and sometimes even asked students to look on the page for their homework assignment. I can do this because I have eight computers in my classroom with access to the Internet. I also know that my students are able to access the Internet from many other locations in the school, so not owning a computer could not be an excuse for not knowing the assignment.

As my students and I became more comfortable with the routine of checking the web page, I went back to refining its purpose. I had wanted to scaffold their learning at home, so I decided that each night I would log on to the web page at 8:00 to answer any questions. I would only log on once, so I told my students to at least review their homework before that time, even if only to get their questions out.

Kids stopped me in the halls and told me that they appreciated knowing their questions would be answered and, that they thought I was cool to have a web page for our class…high praise. The web page required additional work, but the homework that my students were producing on time was well worth it. I had to make decisions about such logistics as when the list of questions and answers would be placed into folders and how kids could ask questions that they didn't want everyone to see. I decided to leave all questions and answers on the page for an entire month. This would give students time to work on their long- and short-term assignments without wasting time looking in folders for information we were talking about regularly each month. I also decided to add a hyperlink for kids to click on when they just wanted to email a question directly to me instead of posting it.

I loved reading their questioning email. They were showing me a different side of themselves. I noticed that my students were finally taking responsibility for their learning. They had begun to 'think about their thinking' as they put into writing what problems stymied them from finishing their homework. I had begun to understand what an eighth grader does when faced with independent work that just doesn't make sense.
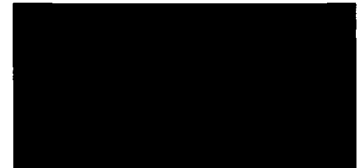
Works Cited
Reif, Linda. *Seeking Diversity Language Arts with Adolescents*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1992.
Russell, Peter. *The Brain Book*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1979.
Zinsser, William. *On Writing Well*. New York: Harper & Row, 1988.

REPRODUCTION RELEASE
(Specific Document)

I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: " But What do you want us to do?": The Internet as Scaffolding.

Author(s): Kimberley A. Gorelik

Corporate Source:	Publication Date:

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, *Resources in Education* (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce and disseminate the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following three options and sign at the bottom of the page.

The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 1 documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2A documents	The sample sticker shown below will be affixed to all Level 2B documents
PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Kimberley A Gorelik TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 1	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE, AND IN ELECTRONIC MEDIA FOR ERIC COLLECTION SUBSCRIBERS ONLY, HAS BEEN GRANTED BY TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2A	PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) 2B
Level 1 • [✓]	Level 2A • [ ]	Level 2B • [ ]
Check here for Level 1 release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche or other ERIC archival media (e.g., electronic) *and* paper copy.	Check here for Level 2A release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche and in electronic media for ERIC archival collection subscribers only	Check here for Level 2B release, permitting reproduction and dissemination in microfiche only

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits.
If permission to reproduce is granted, but no box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce and disseminate this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries.

Sign here, please

Signature: X C Gorelik	Printed Name/Position/Title: Kimberley A. Gorelik, Language Arts Teacher
Organization/Address: St. Francis Episcopal Day School 335 Piney Point Rd Houston TX 77024	Telephone: 713-782-0481 FAX: 713-782-4720

III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, *or*, if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of the document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents that cannot be made available through EDRS.)

Publisher/Distributor:

Address:

Price:

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant this reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name:

Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse:

However, if solicited by the ERIC Facility, or if making an unsolicited contribution to ERIC, return this form (and the document being contributed) to:

ERIC Processing and Reference Facility
4483-A Forbes Boulevard
Lanham, Maryland 20706

Telephone: 301-552-4200
Toll Free: 800-799-3742
FAX: 301-552-4700
e-mail: ericfac@inet.ed.gov
WWW: http://ericfac.piccard.csc.com