WEBCT, PDS, AND DEMOCRATIC SPACES IN TEACHER EDUCATION

MERRY M. MERRYFIELD

Can technology promote democratic discourse and civil society within a teacher education program? This study examined the use of a course management system, WebCT, within a social studies and global education learning community in which Masters in Education (M.Ed.) interns interact with practicing teachers in six school districts throughout an academic year. The technology created venues for sharing, mentoring, and questioning with an overall effect of democratizing some aspects of the teacher education program. Outcomes of the use of electronic pedagogy include redefining authority and voice, creating insights into authentic learning and assessment, developing new methods of accountability, and the questioning of standard practice. Perhaps the most significant finding is how the openness of electronic pedagogy has many consequences for equity and participation.

It all began with the listserv in methods in 1993. Although there was lag time between messages, a new kind of discourse began to change interaction patterns within our preservice teacher education program. Suddenly eight practicing teachers, one university professor, and twenty-four preservice interns could "talk'" freely anytime day or night across eight schools in six districts. Our Professional Development School (PDS) Network was online, and there was no more need to wait for a seminar to raise a question about a classroom management problem or share a reaction to a reading. And since anyone could reply to the list, interns as well as teachers and the university professor responded with suggestions, posted resources or shared their own experiences. Voice, participation, and leadership on the list differed considerably from what was happening face to face in the two weekly methods seminars and field experiences. As people became more comfortable with the technology and inhibitions lessened, email piled up and time became an issue. Yet despite our ups and downs, we all recognized the potential of electronic discourse for teacher education.[1]

This is the story of how electronic technology, especially the adoption of WebCT, has affected the interns, teachers, and professors in our

PDS community over the last thirteen years. Looking back, perhaps our program was able to adopt some electronic pedagogies in the 1990s because they meshed so well with our other innovation, a Professional Development School Network in Social Studies and Global Education.[2] This article begins with an overview of how we currently are using WebCT within our M.Ed. program in social studies and global education. Then I focus on outcomes from our use of these technologies, including the results of: (1) long-term online interaction of interns and practicing teachers; (2) interns' online reflections and self-study; and, 3) other democratizing characteristics of electronic spaces.

An Electronic Backdrop: Using WebCT within an MEd Program

WebCT is a class management system that allows instructors to choose from a variety of electronic technologies for a single course or integrate coursework across an entire academic program. In our program WebCT situates our interns within an online PDS Network of schools (half urban and half suburban) and practicing teachers as they take six field-based courses. We call the practicing teachers *field professors* as they coordinate our program's extensive (nine months) field experiences in their schools and team teach two methods courses with us. Here are some of the components of our use of WebCT:

Courses Integrated through WebCT

Our M.Ed. cohorts run from summer quarter through spring quarter each year (for example, from mid-June 2004 through the last week of May 2005). We use WebCT to foster the professional development of our preservice teacher interns from mid-August on as interns begin to work in the schools when each school district's academic year begins. WebCT is used for six courses which total thirty-two credit hours out of a fifty-hour M.Ed. program. These are all regular face to face courses enhanced with electronic pedagogy.

Autumn quarter includes Social Studies Methods I (four credit hours) and Social Studies Methods II (four hours). Winter quarter is Student Teaching (fifteen hours), and spring quarter includes Secondary Field Experience (two hours), the M.Ed. Capstone Seminar (three hours), and the M.Ed. exam (one hour). Reflective Inquiry (three hours) is taught across three quarters from September to May to coincide with their action research project, which serves as their M.Ed. examination. Integration is accomplished through a WebCT Web site that changes each quarter to blend the courses under study while continuing to provide spaces for ongoing work and discourse.

People Who Make up the WebCT Online Community

WebCT provides the tools to create a learning community made up of:

- twenty-one to thirty M.Ed. interns (who have already met NCATE content requirements and passed the content part of PRAXIS II);

- eight to nine field professors in six school districts (these are experienced middle and high school social studies teachers who team teach two methods courses with faculty, supervise several interns' action research projects and mentor our interns in their schools for an entire school year);

- one university professor;

- three to four university supervisors (Ph.D. students who provide support and mentoring to a sub-group of interns from September through April); and

- occasional "guest speakers" such an educator in another part of the country or cultural consultants from other countries.

Three full-time faculty share primary responsibility for the secondary social studies licensure program, and each has his/her own group of field professors and schools. We rotate responsibility for the M.Ed. cohort annually as we all are also teaching and advising in our M.A. and Ph.D. programs. For more information on our programs see http://www.coe.ohio-state.edu/mmerryfield/.

The WebCT Homepage

It is through the WebCT homepage that community discourse is made possible and the interns' work is showcased and responded to by others in the community. We use one WebCT course homepage each quarter for all M.Ed. courses noted above. So for autumn quarter, the WebCT homepage includes two methods courses and the course in reflective inquiry that supports the interns' action research projects. Then in December, I tell the tech people what to copy from autumn quarter's WebCT homepage into the new WebCT homepage we will use winter quarter. For example, we want to continue to build electronic databases of work demonstrating interns' thinking and planning and their development of an action research project. Spring quarter the WebCT homepage includes all work relevant for their final electronic portfolios. In May it is quite revealing to look back to their preliminary portfolios posted in September and see the progress. For spring quarter the WebCT home-

page is used to teach our capstone seminar, coordinate additional field-work in secondary sites and complete the reflective inquiry course.

WebCT includes many options. There are places to post the usual documents given out in college courses: descriptions of assignments, assessments, a calendar of due dates, and a glossary of terms important to the course. Unlike paper copies passed out in class, these online documents are updated from time to time to note changes in assignments or assessments. Grades for each assignment are posted electronically, and students do not have to wait for the next class meeting to get feedback on their work as it is emailed to them in a more timely fashion. Field professors grade some assignments; the OSU professor grades others.

In the page entitled *Resources,* we load documents, visuals (video and other images), and URLs of Web sites as the class progresses. A Web site's URL may be added after it was mentioned in a discussion or a handout posted so that students can read it before an upcoming seminar. During the fourth week of methods the following sites were among those listed on this page: *Choices for the Twenty-First Century, Rethinking Schools, Teaching Tolerance,* the *National Clearinghouse for US-Japan Studies,* a *Chronology of Russian History: The Soviet Period,* the *Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA),* and various online newspapers. Documents posted included "Directions to PDS Schools," some sample lesson plans, forms such as the observation form, Benchmark I and II, and articles such as "The Five Kid Grid" and "Issue-Centered Global Education."

In WebCT it is the electronic discussions and presentations that provide new opportunities not possible without technology. Online discussions taking place over three to four days help us all think more deeply about how knowledge gained in readings and seminars applies to work with students in the schools (and vice versa). The asynchronous nature of threaded discussions is especially suited to exploring complex ideas and strategies such as authentic learning, performance-based assessment, or how to teach skills in higher level thinking.

Our original goal in using threaded discussions was to ensure that our interns interact with and learn from a diverse group of practicing teachers. Eventually we discovered that the electronic presentation spaces could also provide a tangible place for each M.Ed. intern to develop and reflect upon his/her own body of work and receive feedback, suggestions, and resources from members of the online community over many months. Without WebCT (or another form of electronic communication) we would not have a way to hold interns accountable for their work within the view and response of experienced teachers in several urban and suburban school sites. Given past experiences, they would graduate with a much more narrow view of schools, students, and the teaching of social

studies.

WebCT is also valued for its clearinghouse capacity. The WebCT homepages store and provide continued access to articles, Web sites, forms, images, and other similar items that a group of social studies teachers may wish to collect over the course of the year. For example, after the 9/11 attacks, we developed a threaded discussion where anyone could post resources and teaching ideas related to terrorism, U.S. foreign policy, Afghanistan, Iraq, and related topics.

In the next three sections I discuss some of the outcomes of our use of WebCT and electronic pedagogy within the M.Ed. program. The outcomes are related to (1) long-term online interaction within the PDS community; (2) the interns' sustained reflection and self-study; and, (3) other democratizing characteristics of electronic spaces.

Long-term Interaction and Voice within a Diverse Online Community

Our university is located in a medium-sized city with a population just over a million where a large urban school district is surrounded by small urban districts and suburban districts that differ considerably in size, cultural/racial/linguistic diversity, and wealth. In the initial years of our PDS, it was a considerable improvement to have teachers from quite diverse schools working together to teach two methods courses. In every seminar, two or three teachers (and at times the professor) modeled team-teaching. Email and our first listserv made a world of difference as we could discuss, plan, and respond to student ideas and issues without phones and meetings. As online interactions increased across the PDS Network, our students began to learn from teachers in diverse school settings instead of only their primary placement.

When we adopted WebCT, the field professors began to sustain discussions and develop mentoring relationships across buildings and districts for the first time. We begin each school year by using WebCT to post interactive bios. At the beginning of September the interns, field professors, and university professor each post a two-page autobiography in a threaded discussion in which they describe their cultural background, beliefs about teaching and learning, and their experiences with prejudice and cultural diversity. These bios become interactive as each field professor and intern replies to three other people's bios to initiate one-on-one interaction with people in different buildings and school districts.

Although the interns meet all the field professors face to face in early seminars, we have found the bios discussion creates connections not possible face to face as there never could be enough time to share such information across so many people within a classroom setting. Since the bios remain online, the interns can review field professors' experiences and ideas before a seminar being taught by those teachers. Not surprisingly,

interns and field professors find all sorts of connections (interests, experiences, places) through the bios.[3]

Online interactions between interns and field professors across buildings and districts range from formal assignments to casual email. Here is a list of interactions one intern had with other interns, field professors, and the university professor through WebCT in one month:

- Discussion with five people on teaching thinking skills (three schools, three districts).

- Discussion with seven people on authentic assessment (four schools, two districts).

- Discussion of resources on teaching new immigrants (two schools, two districts).

- Email through WebCT from the professor (two messages, both giving feedback on written work), two other interns in the student lounge discussion area, and one teacher (a follow-up to a message posted by the student). Both the quantity and the personalization of these cross-building interactions would not have happened without WebCT.

Our M.Ed. students receive mentoring and constant feedback from their own field professor in the schools everyday from August through April and interact with several other social studies teachers in their building. During methods the interns are in their primary sites four hours everyday and teach one day a week. From mid-January through April they teach all day (a full load of classes) for ten-and-a-half weeks. WebCT adds to the intense interaction within each school by allowing each field professor to bring his/her own special experiences and expertise to our PDS Network's online work. Interns can receive encouragement and ideas from Steve Shapiro, whose school is heavily into the reforms of the Coalition of Essential Schools, or Jim Norris, who has published books on teaching history. They can discuss middle school philosophy with Tim Dove, who teaches in a suburban middle school, and Jim Reinker, who teaches in an urban middle school. Bob Rayburn brings in ideas and illustrations from his work in a vocational school and reminds us that not all students go on to college.

Some teachers contribute through their disciplinary expertise. Betsy Sidor mentors all our students who are teaching economics, and Sue Chase and Barbara Wainer take a special interest in those teaching U.S. government. There is a richness of ideas, experiences, and resources in our discourse that challenges our interns to improve their teaching every week. And the online support and encouragement continue over nine months as our M.Ed. students move from methods to student teaching to

their secondary field experiences and eventually to mock interviews with teachers and principals across the PDS sites.

Here is an illustration from an online discussion that demonstrates some of the characteristics of cross-building interaction and how the online discussions soften borders between intern and experienced teacher. Note the university professor is absent in this thread and at times it is difficult to tell who are interns and who are experienced teachers. Threaded discussion allows us to focus more on substance and less on a person's title. In all excerpts of actual discussions the names have been changed to protect confidentiality. In the excerpts below Jerry and Martha are interns; the others are field professors in different school districts.

Subject Socratic/Lecture Method Hybrid

Message no. 328 Posted by JERRY October 22 11:36pm
"Socratic Lecture"
The method I used just this morning (October 22nd) yielded some very positive results with the students. I was required to teach content on the three monotheistic religions of the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam); the students needed to learn similarities and differences between the three, as well as discover how current conflicts are related to religious origins and points of view. The explicit content didn't need to be extensive but the issues they had to grasp (such as "God" by any other name may be exactly the same) were tough for many, especially the more devoutly faithful of any religion. This is the class with so many Somalis in it.
Therefore, I wanted them to have plenty of time for grappling with vocabulary, comparisons, and finding similarities rather than pointing out differences. Furthermore, due to ESL students and students of widely varying abilities, I needed to use a method that could be manipulated as necessary; I didn't want time to be a factor (although, due to inexperience, it was in the first block—but not afterwards). My students also needed practice with multiple viewpoints and acknowledging the perspectives of others. I settled on a worksheet with three columns and about 15 rows that simplified each of the three religions along such categories as "Holy Scripture" and "Sacred City". I asked them to fill in as much prior knowledge as they had; then we went over the answers on an overhead transparency.
I would call this instructional method "Socratic lecture" because I would solicit answers to each of the categories, then I would delve into deeper questions, asking them to connect bits of information. Furthermore, I was able to "lecture" for very small periods of time (maybe a minute or less) drawing their attention to something or giving them a bit of background information. The students remained very attentive, and I could sense that some of my educational goals were being accomplished: that is, they were being forced to think on their own without my input (or, very little input), while I had to force myself to allow them to do so without being the "lecturer."
We had some excellent moments throughout the day; there were times when everything "clicked". They were often extremely engaged and self-policing and we had many interesting discussions. Students of diverse backgrounds and religions felt comfortable enough to volunteer information and personal reflections. The Somali students were no exception.

I believe the downside to this method was that there was no time for visuals, which I feel is absolutely critical to making a concrete connection. Next time I teach this lesson, I will incorporate visuals. Furthermore, the discussion took up most of the time (as I thought it would) and there was little time to probe deeply into real historical connections or touch on many current-event outcomes. I believe that these are very important to cross-contextual understandings. Lastly, as expected, a small few of the discussions turned personal, and although I warned students about etiquette regarding religious discussions, I still had to flex my management "muscle" today. However, for an exploratory discussion about religious differences involving middle school students, I believe my kids were "under par for the course"; most behaved very well and respected their classmates.
Jer

Message no. 331 Posted by SAM October 23, 10:33am
Can you tell us more about how you would use visuals? What purpose would they serve? What did you have in mind?
Don't worry, time concerns are ALWAYS present when designing a lesson.

Message no. 338 Posted by Martha October 23, 12:46pm
How does this method fit the cross-cultural context of your classroom? I find it hard to do any graded discussion with so many ESL students. Our school has quite a number of Asians and some new immigrants from West Africa.
Thanks, Martha

Message no. 359 Posted by JERRY October 23, 11:44pm
Okay, Martha and Sam, thanks for helping me to sharpen my focus a little bit. You raise some points I had not thought about. I believe that this lesson is good for incorporating a variety of desired outcomes: a little content when they have low prior knowledge; inter-student discussion to get students responding and respecting each other; Socratic inquiry to probe for higher-level thinking.
There are other instructional methods that empower students more completely. However, when starting out a unit (like we were) and the students have little knowledge of the subject, this was a great way to challenge them and give them the content they needed at the same time.
In terms of student levels and ESL, I have noticed through trial and error that many students respond best to working on meaningful tasks and discussing them, but in a situation that retains a goodly amount of structure (many students have not yet acquired the fine art of self-control). That is why this method worked well with them, I believe: they felt able to take risks during the discussion, but they could not freely respond and cause disruption; it was orderly and quietly thought-provoking. There was structure yet a degree of freedom involved. Feel free to pick my brain; this looks right to me.
JER

Message no. 380 Posted by Tyrone October 27, 9:16am
Hi Jer,
I've use a chart like yours before and I also found it useful. Question, did you have room for the students to put down the information they learned in your "minute lectures?" Perhaps a note section for each religion—entitled "Additional knowledge learned" would allow them to write down the info. and keep track of it— especially since yours are younger students. It would also

show them that what you say when they aren't just filling in the blanks/squares is important too. It would keep them responsible for all material presented in whatever format presented in your room.

I have quite a few Asian students and I try to be aware of how biased they feel our textbook is about Hindus and Muslims when world religions enter into the discussion. It is important to know your students' religious backgrounds. I have an activity I use. Let me know if you want to see it.

Ty

Message no. 382 Posted by JERRY October 27, 9:48am
Yes, Ty, they have an "interactive notebook" as prescribed in History Alive! they use every day. How much of what I said went into that notebook? I have little idea. I really like your "additional knowledge learned" bit. I think I'm going to incorporate that. We need to talk more about teaching about religions. I could use your advice for sure. Do send me the activity. Thanks!

JER

There are several outcomes of these kinds of interactions. First the interns learn to teach in an atmosphere that showcases diversity of student populations, social studies departments, educational reforms, and teachers' philosophies. They quickly learn to borrow and adapt ideas and resources across buildings and districts. They find that sometimes ideas that work well in the contexts of one school may not be appropriate or feasible in another school.

They see that good teachers can disagree. One of the most stimulating outcomes of so much online discourse is the debates on methods, on student rights, on classroom management, or professionalism. Most importantly, our interns have opportunities to explore the whys and hows of real issues facing teachers. For example, Is ability grouping fair? How can I motivate my students in learning about Ancient Rome? How should I help students who are failing the state proficiency tests? Why does my school have such serious conflicts between Muslim and Christian students? What should I do about absentees?

When these discussions happen across school districts, interns not only have access to more information and alternatives, they also learn to see teaching and learning in a broader context than they would if they only interacted with teachers in one building. They quickly learn not to assume that all schools are the same, and they come to appreciate how important it is to learn about the local community. Interns who interact regularly with teachers who have different backgrounds and areas of expertise also appear to develop the habit of going beyond their school to get help and grow professionally. Our M.Ed. students would not think of isolating themselves in one school, no matter how good the resources may be or how helpful the teachers are.

A PDS/WebCT "bonus" comes when students begin the search for a job. Although our mock interviews are face to face, available jobs are dis-

cussed online, often before they are officially posted. Students discover how much it helps to know teachers and social studies departments in several districts. Discussions of their electronic portfolios and action research projects with teachers from different districts sharpen their abilities to articulate their ideas, beliefs, and knowledge of how students learn. Since they have listened to experienced teachers talk about issues and innovations across six school districts for nine months, they are cognizant of many topics that can arise during an interview, and they are comfortable sharing their own experiences and ideas. By the end of the year they know they are teachers.

Reflection That Is Visible and Interactive

A perennial question in teacher education is how to develop reflective practitioners. We have found that WebCT provides spaces that enhance our interns' abilities to examine their own progress and articulate what they are learning and what they need to learn. And, as noted above, these spaces can be interactive, dynamic and provide both formative and summative evaluation. Since the interns control their individual work space, they have new opportunities to raise their concerns and focus on issues that they value. Electronic pedagogy tends to make courses more student-centered. [4]

From September to May, our interns post work in online spaces set aside for each student. Early on they post what they are learning about their students, the school that serves as their primary site, and the contexts of social studies there. Over time they come back to those early postings and add to and improve their descriptions with additional insights and knowledge. Although all are required to post examples of their work (i.e., the usual lesson plans, unit plans, assessments) they can also focus on issues that are unique to their school setting or other contextual factors.

Here is an example of how writing about one's students allows an intern to center a discussion on his own concerns and get feedback on his reflections. Note how the intern has come to think about his students and how others who respond to his message add to the reflection. He has been in the school for about four weeks.

See resources at the end of the article for instructional materials referenced in the discussion. James, Andy, and Mary are interns; while the others are field professors.

Subject: James' Amazing Adventures in Education

Message no. 77 Posted by James September 28 5:16pm
Let me tell you about my children. They are wonderfully diverse, but many do not yet realize how unique and powerful they are. They are perhaps 97% non-white: African-American, Somali, Hispanic and Pacific Islander; they are

Muslim, Christian and Jewish; aware and oblivious. Some are awakening, others insist on dormancy. They hate or love things without knowing why. They are beautiful and eager, or else beautiful because they have such reserves of untapped potential. It's really great. Somehow I have slipped into this new world, like a negative print of my high school experience. Maybe it's because I'm the teacher now, but I like it a whole lot better.

Some speak no English, some speak "heritage English." others speak but are abysmal readers and writers, some are fluent in all areas, but most are somewhere in between. They take behavior correction personally. Some will scrap at the smallest affront (implications from last week's seminar here!).

If there are cliques, I haven't seen them yet; they all wear a school uniform. I am thankful for that.

Many are artists. One is a magician and will play tricks on you. One is a geographer but she doesn't believe it yet. Another is a military historian to-be. One girl wants to learn about slavery so she can know who her great-grandparents were. One boy knows he is named after a Persian king who plotted against the Greeks. Many, however, "know nothing" and don't think they need to change that. One boy likes to challenge our immigrants because, well, it's so easy. Can I defeat primitive urges like the latter and build on those positive desires? I feel as though I am getting to know my children quite well, and that this knowledge will undoubtedly assist me in shaping lessons to seize their interest and have meaning to them (our seminars on the Five Kid Grid come to mind).

Most are poor. 80% receive free or reduced lunches. These children are so tired in the morning but by God they give it a good run during the day. These children are sleepy in the morning and anxious by afternoon. Oy. Planning around the schedule may be a big priority. Shades of Kozel.

They are a good group and that makes my responsibility seem all the weightier: is it not my job to shake kids by the figurative scruff of the neck and see what they got in there? I know they can shine like the kids in Mr. D's room. I want to figure out how. This actually worries me and I am upset right now thinking about how I'm going to put together these future lessons. Schlosser claims that certain subconscious attitudes by teachers towards students lessen chances to reach them. I happen to agree; I wonder if I hold any myself, and if so, how am I going to eradicate those attitudes?

My field professor creates a global reality in his classroom with posters, images and photographs that portray cultures, societies, but most importantly, people from around the world and throughout time. These images sometimes pop up in daily lessons unexpectedly: a discussion about how cultures measure time allowed me a "teachable moment". He also draws psychological connections between peoples' actions—no matter how long ago they lived—with his students' lives and interests. He often explains a society's difference or similarity by highlighting comparable behaviors today. I can literally sit and watch consternation melt off their faces. This destroys the myth that today's students have nothing in common with the past—our human connection is very real!

The perspective awareness exercises in particular have grabbed my attention. I need to work on that in the classroom; the sooner, the better. I have always felt that lack of proper perspective diminishes our enjoyment of humans, our history and our world: these exercises outlined in the book are just waiting to be implemented. I'd love to start off with the "That Was No Brother" exploration. These kids can do it, I know. I'm looking forward to awakening the "dormant". There is so much possible here.

Message no. 108 Posted by Barb September 29, 8:30pm
Wow James, What a great experience for you to have! Your school seems like the prime example of the "American Salad Bowl" analogy. Do you ever think that the diversity ever works against the school?
Whatever the answer, I think the kids of the school are a step ahead in global education. When they grow older, the students will have been taught in an environment that they will be able to draw upon throughout all their life.

Message no. 226 Posted by JAMES October 7, 2002 7:50pm
Thank you, Barb: Good question. I think that you may have answered the question in your second paragraph. There is a huge potential for these kids to come away with a wider view of the world and of themselves in it. There ARE problems, however: humans are comfortable with likeness, not difference, and we have seen some...impatience? Intolerance? among the "American" students (Teaching Tolerance is so helpful here as is Milton Bennett's stages of intercultural development). The huge diversity does make it difficult sometimes, but "teachable moments" abound in a classroom with these kids.

Message no. 125 Posted by Mary September 30, 12:34pm
Can you use culturally relevant teaching to improve the learning of the Somalis?
Mary

Message no. 161 Posted by James October 2, 2:55pm
Hi Mary, For starters, I've read the materials we have. Those help my understanding a lot. Their English is improving and more importantly, they've come to trust me enough so that they speak more freely to me. I am constantly surprised by their trust. This allows me to engage them more completely in the daily lesson. Today, we were exploring city planning and the parts of a city. I had drawn up a map myself and I had included (with this class in mind) mosques as well as churches. We were talking about the similarities between East African cities and cities here. Although they needed help, the smiles on their faces told me that they were at least enjoying themselves. They did well today. When we talked about primary sources, we agreed that the Qu'ran was a primary source. Little things like that.

Message no. 166 Posted by Jay October 3, 2:28pm
Is there an ESL teacher in your school? I can give you the name of some Somalis in my district who can help. J

Message no. 227 Posted by James October 7 8:05pm
There IS an ESL teacher that I have been working with.
His name is Mohammed, and he is going to come and work with me during my planning session on Tuesday. We have talked about which of the students need the most help, and some precursory ways to stimulate and improve their learning. On Friday, I made sure, for example, that the girls that needed the most help were able to work with other Somali students that had a better "handle" on English and the lessons. So far, I think it's going well. The ESL students and I have established a good rapport, and they are speaking to me now much, much more than they were even a week ago. It's been a real help in planning in-class modifications. Wong's work has given me some ideas too.
James

Message no. 235 Posted by Rosanne October 8, 3:20pm
I gave Khadar Mohammed your name yesterday and if you email her she will come out to meet with you and your Somali students. She's wonderful, really helped me and some other teachers. She is expecting to hear from you. She is an ESL Coordinator for my school district. Her number is xxx.
Rosanne

Message no. 132 Posted by Andy September 30, 3:28pm
James, You're becoming one of my favorite authors. You really brought the classroom alive. I think you hit on something when you stated that the impromptu experiences are ones that really affect students. The 'teachable moments' are the moments we need to learn to take advantage of.
Andy

Even in typical assignments, such as the posting of a unit plan, the interactive nature of WebCT leads to reflection and new insights. Here is an excerpt of an intern's posting of his unit overview and the discussion that unfolded over the next few days. Note the effects of interacting online with several people. Also, please note that Marc is an intern; the others are field professors.

Message no. 391 Posted by MARC on October 27 8:30pm
Here is my unit overview. I look forward to hearing suggestions.
Title: The European Middle Ages (500-1500 CE)—"When Might Made Right"
Essential Questions:
1) What was the importance of religion to Medieval societies?
2) Compare conditions for women and men during the Middle Ages?
3) How was Europe linked to the rest of the world?
4) The Middle Ages: truly a Romantic Era?
5) How could a society as disunited (and backward) as Medieval Europe come to challenge the world by 1500?
Essential Knowledge:
1) Feudalism and Its Political, Economic and Social Structure
2) The Crusades and Medieval Globalization
3) The Appearance of the Nation
4) The Role of the Roman Catholic Church
Essential Skills:
1) Comparing different peoples' experiences and perspectives.
2) Using charts, graphs, illustrations, narratives and primary source documents to find, interpret and analyze information.
3) Using inference to extract information.
4) Evaluating credibility of sources.

Message no. 413 Posted by Murray on October 28 12:10pm
Hi Marc,
I like your overview. Have you thought about connections between the Middle Ages and the world today? What evidence can you find to support the statement: "The Middle Ages was truly a Romantic Era"? Questions: How does the plague fit into your unit? You have A LOT of content for 3 weeks! What a challenge.
Murray

Message no. 454 Posted by George on November 1, 8:30am
Marc, Your unit sounds like it could be a wonderful challenge for your students. History Alive has some lessons on this topic that you might want to look at. You could also have students look art work about this period of time. You might want to include Abu Bakkar from Africa and explain about his wearing of armor and looking just like his European counterparts.
George

Message no. 460 Posted by Murray on November 1, 8:53pm
I have a bunch of History Alive materials if you want to see them.
Murray

Message no. 490 Posted by MARC on November 5, 12:33am
George, Yes, I agree: almost PROHIBITIVELY challenging if I don't do this right. Right now I am trying to refine my ideas. History Alive! will be well-worth looking into, my field professor, RJ, has the Middle Ages sourcebook. I'm going to look into that for some really engaging activities. Art is a "big thing" with me...I'm going to enjoy incorporating that aspect of the era with my students. Music too!!!
Marc
Thank you so very much for your thoughts! I'm looking forward to working with you at seminar this week!

Message no. 436 Posted by Libby on October 30 2:03pm
Hi Marc. It might be useful to sift through your EQ and EK and see how they are matching up— in other words, is the EK used to grapple with an EQ and do EQ written have EK listed to help address them, and so on.
Are you still thinking of teaching with plays, etc.? I had a thought.... Have you heard of Readers Theatre? Your students could construct a script which responds to an essential question in Readers Theatre format. It involves manipulating primary source documents into a script with a student's own creative writing and more. I used to use this once a year when doing a slavery unit and kids would vote on the top 4 or 5 and share them in an exhibition at the end of the unit. Guests read RT with the kids and some of the reading can be staged for dramatic effect. If you want to know more, let me know and I'll share what I have. Libby

Message no. 443 Posted by MARC October 30, 2002 11:13pm
Libby, Excellent, excellent, thank you. Tonight in seminar I saw that my EQ, my EK and my assessment were still not quite matching up. I have to rectify that.
Here is my change in assessment: Medieval Fair, with representatives from the major Guilds, farmers, aristocrats, etc. They would be presenting info that would answer the EQ's. Just a thought; please tell me any thoughts.
Thanks!! Marc

Message no. 456 Posted by Libby November 1 10:45am
Great! Contact a group called SCA to see if anyone is available to be part of your authentic outside audience. The group performs at festivals, tournaments, etc. They know A LOT of stuff about your topic! It should be fairly easy to find on the net, there is a Columbus chapter.

Message no. 489 Posted by MARC on November 5 2:28am
Libby, That is an EXCELLENT idea! Thank you so much! They could be the
ultimate lenders of authenticity, or at least provide some ideas of how authentic
assessment could truly be achieved.
Thanks, Marc

The M.Ed. students develop an action research project in conjunction with their course in Reflective Inquiry, which is taught over three quarters. In the projects they select some facet of their teaching to collect and analyze data about and then present to their principal, several social studies teachers, and their advisor. Research questions usually vary from a focus on a particular group, such as "what are the most effective ways of improving the academic performance of Somali girls?" or use of resources and materials, "how can I use technology to help students become independent learners?" to grand tour questions facing all educators: "how can I reduce prejudice in my classroom?"

The presentation of their research serves as their M.Ed. Examination. WebCT creates a convenient online record of not only their work, but comments and suggestions posted by field professors, the university professor, and other interns. It is much easier to keep track of suggested changes and possible resources when they are available in one's own work space in WebCT. These individual work sections grow to contain a record of the development of their action research project from the initial proposal though data collection, analysis, and the preparation for their presentation to the principal and teachers in their school.[5]

WebCT provides a format for organization of their action projects and feedback from the PDS community that was not possible a decade ago. In the past our students developed their action research projects with the help of one teacher and one professor. Today our interns develop their action research projects through visible and continuous interaction with eight experienced teachers across six districts, twenty-one to thirty other interns, and a professor.

Other Democratizing Spaces

What is democracy in a teacher education program? In our PDS it includes the development of a civil society, the voice and participation of stakeholders, and shared power and responsibility. Electronic technologies and our PDS Network have helped move our preservice teacher education program from one where university professors controlled the discourse and decision-making (as benevolent dictators?) to one characterized by collaborative decision-making, shared responsibility, and actions taken to address goals of equity in representation and voice. Today the professor's voice is still heard, but it is one among many within our PDS community.

These changes have come about through the synergy of PDS and WebCT. Before school/university collaboration and the new technologies, faculty made all the decisions on methods courses, field experiences, assessments, and the overall structure and sequence of the program. Now the control of the courses, field experiences, and assessments is shared across the field professors and the university professor, and it is increasingly influenced by the interns themselves. Why has control shifted? How do electronic technologies foster democratization? Here are some examples.

Freedom to Talk and Share

In many ways WebCT and our listserv create spaces for spontaneous discussions among the interns that would never be "heard" by practicing teachers or a university professor without the technology. The results may be humorous or serious; short-lived or long-lasting. Undoubtedly these online conversations change the dynamics of our program. First they allow the interns to speak up, share their thoughts, have some fun or ask for help. Second, the discussions among interns allow the teachers and professor to see the interns in a new light—away from the school day, away from seminars. Below is an excerpt from a discussion initiated by the interns that demonstrates freedom of expression that is new to our PDS. Please note that Sam is a field professor. The rest of those posting are interns.

Subject I Like Cheese

Message no. 252 Posted by BILL October 9, 11:32pm
It is almost midnight and Dr. Merryfield has not posted the grades that she promised. It's good to see that procrastination is used at all levels of academics, and not just mine! Have a great day! I like cheese.

Message no. 255 Posted by SAM October 10, 6:39pm
I like cheese too.

Message no. 260 Posted by ELLIOTT October 13, 4:06pm
Good afternoon, comrades:
I would like to widen the intellectual and moral debate that rages through our times by stating without reservation my position on these issues: I do NOT like cheese. Indeed, cheese has threatened mankind and its
animal partners for generations. When will we learn as a society, as a community, that we cannot *take cheese lying down*???? Comrades, CAST DOWN YOUR CHEESE! Do not be a SLAVE to those CHEESE-WIELDING FRENCHMEN who insist that cheese goes well with such things as BREAD AND WINE!!! The very fermentation process of cheese is, itself, revolting. Mold must corrupt otherwise perfectly good milk and cream. So, too, does it corrupt our hearts and our children. Some cheese smells bad. This one time? I was in France about to cross the Channel, and I bought this cheese and bread 'cause I was really, really hungry, right? So Sue and I sat down to eat it but we

88

immediately noticed a distinct odor of B.O. in the area!!! After tasting our supposed delight and pre-crossing hunger-reducer, we realized... IT WAS OUR PURCHASE!! Friends, words alone cannot describe the horror, the absolute disgust that pervaded our wretched bodies. We were trapped in a land that ate gym socks, apparently. And snails. So if that happened, we should not eat cheese. AT ALL. Thank you, that was MY position.

Feel free to respond, but ONLY if you agree 100% that cheese is thoroughly dangerous to a democracy. Anyone who does not agree with this statement is obviously under the influence of the American Dairy Farming Association, and therefore their statements are to be dismissed.

Also? Foreigner TOTALLY rocks.

Message no. 267 Posted by SAM October 14, 2002 6:36pm
El,
You like Foreigner, and most foreigners like cheese. I am surprised that you overlooked this obvious inconsistency in your argument.
Sam

Message no. 262 Posted by ELLIOTT October 13, 4:57pm
Friends and Colleagues,
I have learned to appreciate and respect cheese it for its nutritional values and the contributions it has made to our multicultural society. Where would we be without the cheeseburger? Or the cheesy Chee-tos that have brought nourishment to so many students?

Truly, cheese and America are two great tastes that go great together. However, we must always be on guard against those who would seek to turn our cheese against us, for it is only in constant vigilance that our leader Bush keeps the tide of cheese from overwhelming our democratic society! In his speeches, he has focused on our OVERDEPENDENCE UPON CHEESE AND ITS FOREIGN ALLIES! When will we learn that we must drill for our OWN cheese? We have huge natural deposits of CHEESE right in our own backyards!!! The Mexicans supply us with their "nacho cheese" pipeline, but is it truly enough??? LO! ALL THOSE WHO SEEK TO POISON AND DESTROY OUR CHEESE! THE MIGHT AND WRATH OF GODLY DEMOCRACY WILL TURN AGAINST THEE!!! ...

Yours, Ted Nugent.

Message no. 268 Posted by Aleks October 14, 6:55pm
Interns Unite! Although Sam might be one of our more entertaining field professors, I would like to point out that he is still invading OUR student discussion. Perhaps Sam would like to join us four nights a week to bring back his student status? :-)
Aleks

Message no. 271 Posted by ELLIOTT October 14, 7:40pm
Sam, only a frenchman would suggest such a vile thing. Where is your american-ness, sir? or are you a wicked cheese-flinging lackey of the Europeans?
Yours Respectfully,
Jefthro Tul

Message no. 279 Posted by JD, October 16, 11:33pm
El, that was so funny, I laughed the entire time while
I read it!

The Power of Questions

When the interns, field professors, or university professors post resources, make suggestions or share ideas, the online environment makes it quite convenient for anyone to reply with a question asking for more information or wondering why such and such is a good idea. The interns can follow up on a seminar with a question to one person or ask forty-five people for help on a resource or upcoming lesson. When I am grading an assignment and post a question about it, the interns are much more likely to provide a complete and thoughtful answer because it is online. And I am not the only one who will see their messages. The field professors and other interns can read them as well. The openness of discourse creates an authentic learning community. We practice behaviors for building a civil society every time we choose to participate.

There is another change that is an unexpected outcome of these new technologies. Before WebCT, it was the experienced teachers who were questioning the ideas and assumptions of the interns, usually during seminars or fieldwork. With WebCT, the field professors and I find *our* conventional wisdom being questioned. In a threaded discussion our interns find it very easy to hit reply and question whatever we are advocating. One asked "and how do you know that students really are learning in those role-plays?" after a reading on that topic. Another questioned "Why don't the assessments you shared in seminar address the art component of the lesson?" a point we had overlooked in seminar. The questioning within the PDS has become more equitable, and in reading many of our discussions it would be impossible to guess who are the interns and who are the practicing teachers or the university professors as in much of the online discourse we sound and act as equals, sharing, questioning and learning.

Spaces to Organize for Change

Several years ago I had one of those kinds of experiences that make one exclaim a la Dorothy, "I am not in Kansas any more." The methods courses had just begun, and the interns had discovered the "student lounge" in WebCT within two hours of the homepage being opened to them. Now a student lounge in our online courses is simply a threaded discussion that is labeled "Student Lounge." It has a message posted in it telling the interns that they can use this space to post messages to each other and discuss their experiences in a professional manner. They are to remember that the field professors and I can read the messages, but we will stay out of the discussion. They are not to mention their seventh to twelfth graders' names, and they should not write anything that would not be appropriate in a real teacher's lounge.

Within the first two days, the interns had posted over thirty messages and many were in a thread where they were discussing their schools and the differences in the teaching loads and class sizes across schools and districts. It was intriguing to watch consensus grow over the next few days as more and more students contributed to a discussion of the inequities of a state where some teachers were required to teach six classes, even five preps, and others had only four classes with one preparation, or even in one school, two classes, with one prep. They learned that some of the teachers they were working with taught over 200 kids a day, while others had a maximum of sixty or ninety. Because of electronic technology, the interns were learning about educational inequities very quickly. And they had an electronic space to organize to try to create equitable conditions for themselves. The interns eventually made the field professors and me so aware of the differences across buildings and districts that we did respond by making all student teaching loads meet similar criteria.

There have been less dramatic ways that a listserv, threaded discussions, or email within WebCT have been tools of change. One year a group of interns who were parents lobbied successfully to reschedule a methods seminar so they could be home to take their children trick or treating. Another year one intern got several others excited about tutoring some local ninth graders who needed help so they could pass the state proficiency test. A field professor who has a daughter with diabetes has used our technology to make all of us aware of how the disease affects the lives of young people and organize a group to walk to raise money for diabetes research. And there are many instances when an impromptu party or dinner is arranged. The issues and decisions range from mundane to significant. But without electronic technologies there would be no vehicle for these discussions or ways to organize people within the PDS community to consider the status quo, effect changes in courses, or create awareness and participation in the community.

There is another characteristic of online discourse that goes hand in hand with the power of voice and community discourse. In general people are more willing to engage in discussions of prickly topics online than they are face to face. Whether the topic is controversial (are some schools promoting racism?) or personal (was that girl in fifth period making sexual advances?) or simply embarrassing (an intern realizes he taught incorrect information about the U.S. Constitution), people are much more likely to bring up uncomfortable issues and experiences and discuss them in some depth online. There is a psychological distance in online asynchronous environments that allow people to overcome some inhibitions they would have in a face to face classroom and speak frankly about difficult topics. This dimension of online communication may also act as a democratizing factor as it certainly leads to more freedom of

speech and the willingness of people to jump in and join others who are trying to draw attention to felt needs, effect change or create awareness. Of course institutional and state structures (university rules, NCATE, state mandates and standards) continue to influence options and inhibit some changes that members of the community would like to make.[6]

Conclusion

Electronic technologies have made a tremendous difference in making practice and learning visible within our preservice teacher education program and allowing all members of the PDS community to raise their voices, their issues, and concerns. And we have just begun to explore possibilities. Every year we rethink and expand the use of electronic technologies to improve communication, representation, problem-solving, and other opportunities for growth.

But there are also limitations that need to be noted. WebCT creates considerable more work for the university professor or whoever coordinates the homepages, creates the discussions and student work spaces, and posts new documents and changes over many months. If a university does not value the use of technology or provide adequate tech support, such work may be overwhelming as one has to continually learn new skills and procedures. Right now I am gearing up to learn "Desire2Learn," a course management system that goes into effect this fall. And of course, technologies fail occasionally and everyone panics (or uses WebCT being down as a very good excuse for not "turning in" an assignment). At my university, electronic pedagogy does not help junior professors in the tenure and promotion process. Nor does this work count for merit pay, the only way we can gain salary increases. Our program is the only licensure program at our university relying heavily on a PDS Network and WebCT due in part to the lack of incentives and the extra work it entails.

More importantly, the use of WebCT across schools and districts depends heavily upon the teachers, their willingness to get online, learn some basics about WebCT, and take the time to read student work and post messages. I happen to work with quite an exceptional group of social studies teachers who enjoy team teaching methods and working with our interns. When they see the difference it makes, they find the time. The secret to using technology across interns and practicing teachers is finding ways for it to meet everyone's needs and interests. If the technology is creating authentic learning, many of the participants will go beyond assignments or other requirements. The challenge is participation, and the enemy is time.

NOTES

1. There is emerging a research base on how electronic technology affects people working together across physical spaces and how it differs from face to face interaction. Eugene Borgida et al., "Civic Culture Meets the Digital Divide: The Role of Community Electronic Networks," *Journal of Social Issues* 58, no. 1 (2002): 125-41; Kyong-Jee Kim and Curtis J. Bonk, "Cross-Cultural Comparisons of Online Collaboration," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 8, no. 1 (2002); Rose M. Pringle, "Developing a Community of Learners: Potential and Possibilities in Web Mediated Discourse," *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 2, no. 2 (2002), http://www.cite-journal.org/vol2/iss2/currentpractice/ article2.cfm; Guichin Zong, "Can Computer Mediated Communication Help to Prepare Global Teachers? An Analysis of Preservice Social Studies Teachers' Experiences," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 20, no. 4 (2002): 589-616.

2. Literature on school/university collaboration is rarely linked to uses of electronic technology, yet they share many goals. Sue Chase and Merry Merryfield, "After the Honeymoon Is Over: Reflections on What Seven Years of PDS Have Taught Us about School/University Collaboration in Social Studies and Global Education," in *Collaborative Reform and Other Improbable Dreams: The Challenges of Professional Development Schools*, ed. Marilyn Johnston et al. (New York: State University of New York Press, 2000), 123-40; Marilyn Johnston, Mary Christensen, and Jim Norris, eds., *Teaching Together: School/University Collaboration to Improve Social Studies Education* (Washington, D.C.: The National Council for the Social Studies, 2001); Merry Merryfield, "Institutionalizing Cross-Cultural Experiences and International Expertise in Teacher Education: The Development and Potential of A Global Education Network," *The Journal of Teacher Education* 46, no. 1 (1995): 19-27; Dilys Schoorman, "Increasing Critical Multicultural Understanding Via Technology: Teachable Moments in a University School Partnership Project," *Journal of Teacher Education* 53, no. 4 (2002): 356-69.

3. Several scholars have found similar results from co-teaching and online discussions. Diane Belcher, "Authentic Interaction in a Virtual Classroom: Leveling the Playing Field in Graduate Seminar," *Computers and Composition* 16 (1999): 253-67; Charles J. Eick, Frank N. Ware, and Penelope G. Williams, "Coteaching in Science Methods Course: A Situated Learning Model of Becoming a Teacher," *Journal of Teacher Education* 54, no. 1 (2003): 74-85; Yeon Im and Okhwa Lee, "Pedagogical Implications of Online Discussion for Preservice Teacher Training," *Journal of Research on Technology in Education* 36, no. 2 (2003): 155-70.

4. There is developing a research base on how electronic discussions can affect reflection and understanding. Todd Dinkelman, "Self-Study in Teacher Education: A Means and Ends Tool for Promoting Reflective Teaching," *Journal of Teacher Education* 54, no. 1 (2003): 6-18; Bruce E. Larson and Timothy A. Keiper, "Classroom Discussion and Threaded Electronic Discussion Learning in Two Arenas," *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 2, no. 1 (2002); Judith C Lapadat, "Teachers in an Online Seminar Talking About Talk: Classroom Discourse and School Changes," *Language and Education* 17, no. 1

(2003): 21-41; Judith C Lapadat, "Written Interaction: A Key Component in Online Learning," *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 7, no. 4 (2002); Robert M. Bernard et al., "How Does Distance Education Compare with Classroom Instruction? A Meta-Analysis of the Empirical Literature," *Review of Educational Research* 74, no. 3 (2004): 379-439.

5. Electronic portfolios and databases of student work are becoming familiar tools in many teacher education programs, yet we know very little about how they interact with online communities and online discussions. Michael J Berson, "Rethinking Research and Pedagogy in the Social Studies: The Creation of Caring Connections through Technology Advocacy," *Theory & Research in Social Education* 28, no. 1 (2000): 121-31; Ginette Delandshere and Sheila A. Arens, "Examining the Quality of the Evidence in Preservice Teacher Portfolios," *Journal of Teacher Education* 54, no. 1 (2003): 57-73; Raven McCrory Wallace, "A Framework for Understanding Teaching With the Internet," *American Educational Research Journal* 41, no. 2 (2004): 447-88.

6. Online technologies appear to create different patterns of interaction and make some people much more comfortable in full-class discussions, but evaluation of such discourse remains difficult. Merry Merryfield, "Like a Veil: Cross-Cultural Experiential Learning Online," *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* 3, no. 2 (2003), http//www.citejournal.org/vol3/iss2/social-studies/article1.cfm; Merry Merryfield, "How Can Electronic Technologies Promote Equity and Cultural Diversity? Using Threaded Discussion in Graduate Courses in Social Studies and Global Education," *Theory and Research in Social Education* 28, no. 4 (2000): 502-26; Cynthia Szymanski Sunal and Lois M. Christensen, "Culture and Citizenship: Teachers from Two Continent Shares Perspectives Via a Website," *International Social Studies Forum* 2, no. 2 (2002): 121-40; Gregory R Mackinnon, "The Dilemma of Evaluating Electronic Discussion Groups," *Journal of Research on Computing in Education* 33, no. 2 (2000): 125-31.