

## **Chapter XII**

# **Web Communications and Interaction for Teaching and Learning**

*ISTE NETS\_T, II. Planning and designing learning environments and experiences  
Teachers plan and design effective learning environments and experiences supported by technology.*

*ISTE NETS\_T, IV. Assessment and evaluation  
Teachers apply technology to facilitate a variety of effective assessment and evaluation strategies.*

*ISTE NETS\_T, VI. Social, ethical, legal, and human issues  
Teachers understand the social, ethical, legal, and human issues surrounding the use of technology in PK-12 schools and apply those principles in practice.*

*Chapter objective: The teacher knows how to use Web pages to communicate and interact effectively with others.*

## Virtual Learning Communities (or VLC)

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Potentially, cyberspace offers students and educators a myriad of resources for educational use within the classroom. Boetcher, Duggan, and White (1999) describe online learning communities as a “gathering of people, in an online ‘space’ where they communicate, connect, and get to know each other better over time.” Students can participate in VLC in order to span distances and link with others with similar interests or expertise.

The Internet also has significance for professional communication among teachers. According to Becker, 16% of teachers communicated with peers outside their buildings on professional matters (1999). In late 2000, the rate rose to 33% for those who had Internet access at home and at school. Beginning educators may wish to participate in online discussion forums in order to receive support from more experienced teachers. Educators may also wish to participate in content related discussion groups to exchange teaching methods and ideas. Some teachers may also decide to participate in online distance education classes offered over the Internet or through videotape to meet the needs of special student populations: limited English, migrant worker’s children, special education, and so forth. There are also virtual discussion forums especially for teachers. Teachers.net (2006) is one of the Web sites that host listserv, chat rooms, and electronic bulletin boards.

Other educators may wish to link with various experts in specific fields to gain their input on student projects. For example, a teacher may wish to link with scientists at NASA to seek aid with student science projects. Teachers may also wish to support a classroom pen pal project, or key pal project, by setting up a VLC that would allow students to exchange language learning experiences.

Effective VLC tools that teachers may use to enhance their own or student learning are as follows (Mason & Hart, 1997):

- **Synchronous chat:** In a chat room, members communicate in real time, so they are typing and reading conversations simultaneously. These can be very exciting for students in remote locations or for students paired with older students or adults, but teachers should always remember to monitor conversations. Chat rooms allow for synchronous meetings that may later be posted for those unable to attend the chat. It is also easier for the instructor to keep up with the status of team interactions and provide intermediate feedback when there is a problem. Chat may be secure if desired because rooms may be locked.
- **E-mail lists:** Mailing lists, special interest group (or SIG), or listservs all provide ways to send a particular group the same information or the same e-mail message at the same time. Teachers and students can request to be put on mailing lists for information for special topics and/or can create their own.

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