

Chapter 4

Peer to Peer: Using the Electronic Discussion Board During Student Teaching

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ABSTRACT

Ten elementary education student teachers communicated with each other on an electronic discussion board for thirteen weeks. Despite being overwhelmed at times with the demands of student teaching, participants posted 283 messages offering each other ideas and support. Students were grouped into two different discussion boards based on the grade level they were assigned to student teach, resulting in very specific help and feedback from peers who were experiencing the same or similar teaching topics or situations. Results indicate that 70% of the participants used an idea that had been posted on the discussion board by a peer and 100% of the participants stated that the discussion board was a means of support during student teaching. Although an electronic discussion board is not a new technology, it is underutilized, especially as a means to connect geographically distant student teachers so they can offer each other support and ideas for teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Student teaching is the culminating activity in teacher education preparation programs (Anderson, 2007; Spooner, Flowers, Lambert, & Algozine, 2008). Student teachers are used to spending many semesters taking courses together, often collaborating with peers on many group projects and assignments. Then, during student teaching,

a student teacher may find himself or herself as the sole college student in an elementary school building. In order to stay connected daily to peers, especially those student teaching at the same time and at the same grade level, student teachers can use an electronic discussion board (EDB). This kind of technology can be a valuable tool for students to take advantage of as they work through the many issues and emotions that accompany student teaching. Peers who are set-up on the same discussion board and who are student teaching in the same

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-61520-897-5.ch004

grade level can provide a constant connection for each other that can be a means of support that often cannot be found in the student-supervisor or student-cooperating teacher relationship. This chapter will focus on why student teaching supervisors should provide this electronic tool to their student teachers, how this author has already utilized it with two different groups of students teachers, and issues for supervisors to consider when setting up an electronic discussion board for their student teachers. This chapter can also be applicable to the coordinator of field experiences since the coordinator may choose to set up multiple discussion boards for all of the different grade level or subject placements within his/her department or college of education.

BACKGROUND

Hey everyone, I was just wondering... Is anyone else incapable of relaxing and thinking about other things (other than school)? Lately I cannot think about anything but what lessons I have to make, how I can reach my students better, how I can incorporate different ideas and methods into lessons, etc! My social life has officially flown out the window, as a result. I feel constantly stressed about students and the amount of work I have. Is anyone else in the same boat?? I guess I just want to know I'm not alone...! Best of luck! (Posted on 10/26/08)

The above quotation from a student teacher in the middle of her elementary education student teaching placement is a reminder that students often feel isolated from their peers and without a social or emotional group to connect with during this very stressful time in their lives. After studying and preparing for many semesters, teacher education majors who are now student teaching are asked to take everything that they learned and apply it to an actual classroom. Thankfully they are not alone. They are placed in a classroom with

an experienced teacher who will hopefully model good teaching practices and provide advice, ideas, and helpful feedback. In addition, student teachers often have a university supervisor observing several lessons each semester, and are available for questions and support. Having the support and advice of peers, however, can be a much-needed and often lacking part of the student teaching equation (Assaf, 2005; Nicholson & Bond, 2003). Although many universities do require their student teachers to attend a seminar on-campus during student teaching, there are often too many things for the group to discuss and individual questions and advice between peers may not fit the time frame. Student teaching supervisors at several colleges of education (Assaf, 2005; Pena & Almaguer, 2007) are beginning to use computer-mediated communication to overcome this obstacle and keep students connected to each other.

Definition of Terms

Computer-mediated communication is a term that refers to the communication that is transmitted via the computer such as email, list serves, and electronic discussion boards. The terms, web-based discussion board, asynchronous discussion board, electronic discussion board, and online discussion board are used interchangeably in this chapter. They are referring to a website that will give students access to a place where they can read, post, and respond to messages exchanged among student teaching peers. The discussion board is threaded which means different topics will be separated from each other, rather than one long discussion that lasts for the duration of the semester. Threaded discussions also allow preservice teachers to read and respond to specific posts. The asynchronous nature of the electronic discussion board means that students do not have to be online at the same time to read messages, post messages or reply to messages.

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