Chapter XX
Using Blogs to Foster Inquiry, Collaboration, and Feedback in Pre–Service Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a critical case study on the use of information technology in a pre-service teacher education program. The authors integrated Weblogs (blogs) into two constructivist-oriented teacher preparation courses with the goal of helping students learn to think like a teacher through enhanced inquiry, collaboration, and feedback. The authors found that, through the use of blogs, pre-service teaching candidates grew in their abilities to reflect on their own teaching and to provide constructive comments to peers. The authors’ experience also indicated that while instructor and peer feedback via blogs was valuable, it functioned best when paired with face-to-face meetings between the instructors and students. They discussed design principles for combining online and face-to-face environments and offer possibilities for the expanded use of blogs in pre-service teacher education.
Constructivist theory suggests the centrality of active participation and social interaction to the learning process (Phillips, 1995). Although forms of constructivism in education range broadly from Dewey’s (1938) notion of experience to Vygotsky’s (1978) zone of proximal development, constructivism in education maintains a focus on student participation and interaction as central to learning. Information technology is uniquely situated to facilitate dynamic and collaborative learning environments supportive of constructivist principles. In higher education in general, information technology can provide structures to support learners in both making sense of their own experiences and communicating these understandings to a larger community (Garrison & Anderson, 2003). In teacher education in particular, it can bring authentic classroom experiences to the college curriculum through videos and artifacts, strengthening the theory-practice connection (Gomez, Sherin, Griesdorn, & Finn, 2008).

Working together as teacher educators and pre-service teachers, we used information technology in the form of weblogs (blogs) to enhance student inquiry, collaboration, and feedback in two teacher preparation courses at a highly-selective liberal arts college. In this chapter, we illustrate the partnership between constructivism and information technology through a critical case study of the use of blogs in our courses. In particular, we examine the ways in which blogging helped students learn to think like a teacher through inquiry, collaboration, and feedback. We then introduce data from the blogs and peer comments, analyzing it in relation to constructivist principles. We conclude with recommendations for future use of blogs in pre-service teacher education.

As teacher educators, we support a foundation of constructivist principles in our practice. Our classes, advanced undergraduate courses for pre-service secondary teachers, work toward the ultimate goal of teaching how to think like a teacher (Crowe & Berry, 2007). We believe that beginning teachers should have not only the knowledge and skills necessary for teaching, but also the ability to think critically about instances of classroom practice from a variety of perspectives. Five key principles for thinking like a teacher include:

- **Principle One:** Thinking like a teacher involves learning to see teaching from the viewpoint of the learner. Experiencing the role of learner is an important means of developing an understanding of the learner’s viewpoint.
- **Principle Two:** Prospective teachers need opportunities to “see into” the thinking like a teacher of experienced others.
- **Principle Three:** Prospective teachers need opportunities to try out thinking like a teacher in order to develop their thinking as a teacher.
- **Principle Four:** Prospective teachers need scaffolding (guidelines, questions, structures) to support them in the process as they begin thinking like a teacher.
- **Principle Five:** Developing responsive relationships is at the heart of learning to think like a teacher and at the heart of supporting our students (Crowe & Berry, 2007, p. 33).

We believe that these principles create a core set of abilities necessary for pre-service teachers to reflect and think deeply about their practice and learn from experience. Exposure to these higher-level abilities during the undergraduate years can prepare future teachers to continue learning from their practice and interacting with communities of learners throughout their professional lives.