

**Theory Meets Practice in Teacher Education:
A Case Study of a Computer-Mediated Community of Learners**

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Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

Curriculum and Instruction

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July 2, 2003

Blacksburg, Virginia

Keywords: computer-mediated communication, educational psychology,
pre-service teachers, teacher education, situated cognition

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(ABSTRACT)

This research investigated the uses of computer-mediated communication in providing an online field experience in an educational psychology course for pre-service teachers at a large research university in the southeastern United States. Twenty-seven pre-service teachers in one section of a Psychological Foundations of Educational Psychology course for pre-service teachers, eight practicing teachers, and eight university professors participated in this study. The participants viewed CD-ROM based video case studies as part of an online field experience component and communicated electronically through chat rooms and threaded discussion lists. Data sources included transcripts of all chat room and threaded communication, surveys, field notes, observations, and student tasks and reflections, as well as interviews with the pre-service teachers, practicing teachers, university professors, and one technical support person. The methodology involved a mixed method approach. A template organizing approach with the constant comparative method was used in order to develop patterns and themes. Content analysis was applied to the content of the chat transcripts. Finally, a quantitative component was included in the analysis of the thread transcripts with a measurement of the development of the pre-service teachers' reflective comments over time using an analysis of variance test of within subjects effects. This document reports the findings concerning the nature of the conversations among the participants as they developed across time; the learning outcomes of the students, teachers, and professors; how a computer-mediated learning environment supports reflection; the benefits and challenges of using computer-mediated communication to study and learn about educational psychology and teaching; and the benefits and challenges of creating and maintaining such a learning environment.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

No major accomplishment is ever achieved without the support and kindness of others. There are so many people who have helped to make this dissertation a possibility and I would like to express my heartfelt thanks and appreciation to them all.

To Dr. Susan Magliaro, my committee chairperson and advisor, I would like to extend my deepest appreciation and gratitude for the support, guidance, and professional mentoring she has offered me throughout this process. She allowed me into her classroom to explore my ideas in the pilot work, has offered support and encouragement both professionally and personally throughout my program, and has prepared me well for a future in academia. There could have been no better role model for me to learn from and I am honored to have been mentored by the best.

I would also like to thank Dr. Peter Doolittle for allowing me to conduct this research in his class and for always making me feel welcomed and supported. His door was always open and he was never too busy to talk, to help, or just to listen. His lighthearted spirit and easy nature have made him a joy to know.

I also would like to acknowledge and extend my appreciation to the other members of my committee, Dr. John Burton, Dr. Jerry Niles, and Dr. Martha Ann Stallings. Each of them provided feedback and thoughtful insights that were very helpful in putting together this research. They were a wonderful committee that made all those oral exams an enjoyable experience!

A very special acknowledgement is extended to all of the teachers and professors that gave of their time to make this research a possibility. It truly could not have been done without them. To the teachers who worked with me to plan this research and who gave so generously of their time to work with our next generation of teachers, I extend my deepest appreciation. They make me very proud to be a teacher. I also would like to offer my thanks to the professors who participated in this research. Typically hard to find at a major research institution, are professors with enough time on their hands to truly nurture and mentor their

students. This was not the case at Virginia Tech. The faculty of the Teaching and Learning Department were supportive beyond measure during this research and throughout my program. Their mission states the importance of teacher education, but their actions manifest it. I could not have asked for a better doctoral program or a more supportive learning environment than I have experienced at Tech. I am forever grateful for the education I have received here. And, to the pre-service teachers in the Educational Psychology course, again, I extend my thanks and appreciation.

The faculty of the Educational Psychology program, Dr. Jane Abraham, Dr. Peter Doolittle, Dr. Susan Magliaro, Dr. Tom Sherman, and Dr. Terry Wildman have given of their time, have shared their experiences and knowledge with me, and have allowed me into their program meetings to help me develop into an academician and an educational psychologist. They welcomed me into their program and have always treated me as a colleague. Dr. Wildman also provided me many opportunities in my work for him at the Center for Excellence in Undergraduate Teaching to practice and sharpen my research skills and has played a major role in my development as a scholar. I extend a special thanks to Dr. Jane Abraham for stepping on to my committee at the last minute.

I have had the encouragement and support of many friends over these past five years. I've enjoyed the security and comfort of maintaining old friendships while also enjoying the pleasure of making new ones. They have all been there when I needed them and have helped me maintain some balance between work and play.

June Hartig has seen me through two graduate degrees, from helping me learn how to do a power point presentation for my master's thesis at 1:00 a.m. back in 1997, to chatting online for my dissertation research in 2002. She has been there every step of the way. No one has ever had a better friend.

Ginger Bowden, Brenda Hendrix, and Joyce Hines have all kept me current on the happenings back at the beach and have supported me the whole way through this program. They have listened tirelessly to the highs and lows over the last five years.

Debbie Bays has become one of my closest friends in Blacksburg and a friend that I know I will have a lifetime. Wherever life's roads take us, I know I'll always have her friendship and she will always have mine.

Robert Prickett has been my lunch buddy and my sounding board. I've enjoyed his sense of humor immensely and his ability to see the lighter side of every situation.

Sandra Dika, Kris Lubbs, and Sue Magliaro, the other "Women on the Verge of a New Paradigm" have shared my joys and my tribulations for the last three years. We have formed a bond that I'm sure will last a lifetime and have made memories we'll treasure for years to come. We became so much more than a writing group. Sandra, Kris and I experienced the whole ride of graduate school and doctoral exams together. Having each other, friends who truly understand the inexplicable experience of a PhD program, and who were always there to talk, laugh, and cry with, made this graduate school experience really something special. And, Sue, who led us patiently through all our "firsts," became my friend in addition to being my advisor.

A very special thank you goes out to Tony who has helped me see there is life beyond graduate school and whose patience and love have been immeasurable.

Finally, I am thankful for my family. My mom has always encouraged my thirst for learning and has always supported me through my many "adventures." My dad, who passed away during this graduate program, was a source of much encouragement and was so proud that I would soon be a "doctor." My Uncle David, whom I loved like a father, taught me the importance of generosity and kindness to others. I love him and miss him every day. My brother, Todd, and his wife, Julie, have reminded me to play once in awhile and their daughter, Lauren, has brightened my days beyond measure. And finally, my grandmother, Helen, who gave me my first book and who taught me about the joys of reading and learning about new worlds, built in me the fire to learn that has lasted my lifetime. Many family members have nurtured and supported me all my life to get me to this point. I am forever thankful for their love.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to two children who have affected my life greatly. First, this dissertation is dedicated to my beautiful niece, Lauren. She came into our lives at a time when there did not seem to be a lot to smile about and gave us the joyous gift of seeing the world through a child's eyes once again. Her bright smile and shining personality have captured my heart and have reminded me of the wonder and joy childhood should bring.

Secondly, I dedicate this work to Sheldon. Sheldon was a young child in my kindergarten class who tragically lost his life at the age of six. His struggles and his death were two of the major catalysts in prompting me to reassess my career goals. School is the happiest and safest place to be for many of America's children and they deserve the best we can offer them.

To Lauren and Sheldon, and to all the children who are our future, I dedicate this work.

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