

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

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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.

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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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