This document describes a pilot study to provide an opportunity for preservice teachers enrolled in elementary language arts methods courses at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB) and Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) to communicate with one another over time and distance through electronic mail (e-mail). Students at both IUSB and SEMO must enroll in a basic technology course as part of their teacher education program to become familiar with the Internet and e-mail programs. To encourage use of e-mail the 19 students at each campus were required to exchange 6 e-mail messages with a partner, keeping a copy of each transmission sent and received. Students enjoyed the e-mail assignment and discovered that corresponding with someone off campus was informative, therapeutic, and a great way to share lesson ideas. Problems encountered during the semester included various technical difficulties, the reluctance of some students to use the technology, and lack of Internet access at one professional development school. The use of e-mail technology was found to have great potential for these preservice teachers. Through its use preservice teachers were able to share teaching ideas, problems, and concerns; learn alternative ways to help students learn; and exchange web site resources. (ND)
CONSTRUCTING AN UNDERSTANDING OF ELECTRONIC MAIL:
PRESERVICE TEACHERS MAKING CONNECTIONS

Daniel T. Holm, Indiana University South Bend
Diana J. Quatroche, Southeast Missouri State University

The challenge to fundamentally change public schooling and teacher education has been made (Goodlad, 1990; Holmes Group, 1986). One of many approaches assisting in this change process is a constructivistic view of learning which suggests learning occurs as a learner seeks out information and tools to reach a goal and, in the process, constructs a personalized understanding. Relating constructivism to technology, the premise advanced here is that applying a constructivist view to the utilization of technology can assist preservice teachers overcome their resistance to use technology.

The purpose of this paper is to describe a pilot study which provided an opportunity for preservice teachers enrolled in elementary language arts methods courses at Indiana University South Bend (IUSB) and Southeast Missouri State University (SEMO) to communicate with each other over time and distance through electronic mail (E-mail).

Utilizing field notes, reflective student questionnaires, and an analysis of E-mail correspondence, we will describe the following five areas: 1) background and development of the E-mail program, 2) the content of E-mail correspondence, 3) student response, 4) challenges experienced during the pilot semester, and 5) suggestions and future possibilities.

Background and Development of the E-mail Program

Students at both IUSB and SEMO must enroll in a basic technology course as part of their teacher education program. The courses at both institutions are designed to familiarize preservice teachers with the Internet and E-mail programs. Although all education students have been enrolled in the course, we had observed that many of them are reluctant in using the technology they had learned.

We became interested in the idea of having university students correspond with each other via E-mail after meeting at an International Reading Association conference session on cross-age pen pals. We discussed the possibilities associated with utilizing E-mail as a vehicle for pen pal correspondence and felt that requiring our students to communicate as a course assignment would provide our students a context in which to correspond.

In the Fall semester of 1996, E-mail addresses were exchanged and the nineteen students at each university were instructed to exchange ten messages with their E-mail partner. That number of messages was later revised to six as we were unable to begin the correspondence at the very beginning of the semester. Each student was asked to keep a copy of each E-mail transmission sent and each received.

Paper presented at the 11th Annual Midwest ATE Conference, April 6-8, 1997
Content of E-mail Correspondence

Students were not directed as to the content of the E-mail messages. We suggested that they treat their E-mail partner like a pen pal and to communicate whatever they deemed important. The amount of correspondence ranged from several lines to several pages. The difference in length seemed to depend on the type of students. Nontraditional students for example, that is students over the age of 22, tended to write longer, more detailed letters. An analysis of the content of the letters indicates that correspondents tended to focus on two main areas: personal experiences and professional experiences.

All of the correspondence tended to begin with general introductions. As the students became more familiar with each other, several focused their letters on their personal lives. All of the students discussed their public school classroom experiences and tended to compare differences in the instructional environments. As they discussed the classroom experiences they often gave detailed explanations of their lessons and the planning they engaged in to develop lessons. Several students discussed individual students with whom they worked as well as classroom management, educational programs, web sites, and university courses.

Student Response

The students generally enjoyed the E-mail assignment. They discovered that corresponding with someone off campus was informative, therapeutic, and a great way to share lesson ideas. Comments such as the following were typical:

> From the first letter, we seemed to share a common thread and a commitment to education. Her letters contained some good examples of projects to do with a class of 5th graders since her field experience also was with that grade.

> Once I started it was very exciting. It was a relief to be able to share experiences with another preservice teacher.

> We exchanged a few ideas for lesson plans and our reactions about teachers in the classroom and professors in our classes.

> I thought this was a great idea!!! I really enjoyed talking to my pen pal and sharing ideas. We wrote about twice a week, sometimes less. We were at similar planning stages of lessons and we shared ideas back and forth. It was also nice to have someone to empathize with.

Challenges Experienced During the Pilot Semester

1. Southeast Missouri State University was in the process of converting all technology on campus to be IBM compatible. As a result, there were many "glitches" as the offices and labs were being rewired.
2. There was a continued reluctance of several students to use the technology.
3. The E-mail addresses for some students were misunderstood. For example, in some addresses 1
4. When students use an on campus computer lab to engage in their correspondence, there is a tendency for lab personnel to do the process rather than explain the process.
5. When students attempt to send their E-mail at peak times the lines may be busy.
6. The Southeast Missouri students attend university education courses in a professional development school. Because the school does not have Internet access, there is not an opportunity for the instructor to help students who are having difficulty with the sending and receiving of E-mail.

Suggestions and Future Possibilities

The use of E-mail technology has great potential for preservice teachers. Though E-mail, preservice teachers are able to share teaching ideas, learn alternative ways in which to help students learn, exchange web site resources, and become a listening ear for problems and concerns.

As we continue to explore the possibilities of E-mail with our preservice teachers, we have discovered that streamlining our E-mail assignment we need to try out E-mail addresses to work out any address errors, share school calendars to know when students will not be on campus to read their E-mail, and provide more structured topics for correspondence.

In looking to the future, teacher educators need to encourage, support, and provide guidance to students as they construct their understandings of the endless possibilities of E-mail and Internet resources. As we look to the future development of our classes and an expansion of this pilot, we are interested in having our preservice teachers E-mail with children in different parts of the country, link with university faculty who are considered experts in their fields, and communicate through E-mail and web sites with authors and illustrators of children’s books.

References


III. DOCUMENT AVAILABILITY INFORMATION (FROM NON-ERIC SOURCE):

If permission to reproduce is not granted to ERIC, or if you wish ERIC to cite the availability of this document from another source, please provide the following information regarding the availability of the document. (ERIC will not announce a document unless it is publicly available, and a dependable source can be specified. Contributors should also be aware that ERIC selection criteria are significantly more stringent for documents which cannot be made available through EDRS).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Publisher/Distributor:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Address:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Per Copy:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quantity Price:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

IV. REFERRAL OF ERIC TO COPYRIGHT/REPRODUCTION RIGHTS HOLDER:

If the right to grant reproduction release is held by someone other than the addressee, please provide the appropriate name and address:

Name and address of current copyright/reproduction rights holder:

Name:

Address:

V. WHERE TO SEND THIS FORM:

Send this form to the following ERIC Clearinghouse: ERIC Clearinghouse on Teacher Education
One Dupont Circle, NW, Suite 610
Washington, DC 20036-1186
Phone: (202) 293-2450

(Rev. 9/91)
I. DOCUMENT IDENTIFICATION:

Title: Constructing An Understanding of Electronic Mail: Preservice Teachers Making Connections (Paper Presented at 11th Annual Midwest ATE Conference)

Author(s): Daniel T. Holm & Diana J. Quatroche

Corporate Source: 

Publication Date: April 6-8, 1997

II. REPRODUCTION RELEASE:

In order to disseminate as widely as possible timely and significant materials of interest to the educational community, documents announced in the monthly abstract journal of the ERIC system, Resources in Education (RIE), are usually made available to users in microfiche, reproduced paper copy, and electronic/optical media, and sold through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS) or other ERIC vendors. Credit is given to the source of each document, and, if reproduction release is granted, one of the following notices is affixed to the document.

If permission is granted to reproduce the identified document, please CHECK ONE of the following options and sign the release below.

X Sample sticker to be affixed to document

Check here

Permitting microfiche (4 x 6” film), paper copy, electronic, and optical media reproduction

Sample

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Sample

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN OTHER THAN PAPER COPY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Sample

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Level 1 Level 2

or here

Permitting reproduction in other than paper copy.

Sign Here, Please

Documents will be processed as indicated provided reproduction quality permits. If permission to reproduce is granted, cut neither box is checked, documents will be processed at Level 1.

"I hereby grant to the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) nonexclusive permission to reproduce this document as indicated above. Reproduction from the ERIC microfiche or electronic/optical media by persons other than ERIC employees and its system contractors requires permission from the copyright holder. Exception is made for non-profit reproduction by libraries and other service agencies to satisfy information needs of educators in response to discrete inquiries."

Signature: Daniel T. Holm

Printed Name: Daniel T. Holm

Address: 1700 Mishawaka Ave.
P.O. Box 7111
South Bend, IN 46634-7111

Position: Assistant Professor of Literacy Educ.

Organization: Indiana University South Bend

Telephone Number: (219) 237-4853

Date: April 14, 1997