


1-2001

## E-Mail Response Journals as a Tool for Facilitating Critical Reflection of Diversity Issues

Virginia E. Causey

Follow this and additional works at: <http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil>

 Part of the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#), [Online and Distance Education Commons](#), [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#), and the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Causey, V. E. (2001). E-Mail Response Journals as a Tool for Facilitating Critical Reflection of Diversity Issues. *Perspectives In Learning*, 2 (1). Retrieved from <http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil/vol2/iss1/6>

This Research is brought to you for free and open access by CSU ePress. It has been accepted for inclusion in Perspectives In Learning by an authorized editor of CSU ePress.

## PERSPECTIVES IN LEARNING

Volume 2: pp 15

### E-MAIL RESPONSE JOURNALS AS A TOOL FOR FACILITATING CRITICAL REFLECTION ON DIVERSITY ISSUES

by Virginia E. Causey

Teacher educators face a daunting task. As school populations diversify (Hill, 1989; Protheroe and Barsdate, 1991), the demographic trend among preservice teachers is toward more homogeneity (Cuellar and Huling-Austin, 1991; Jordan, 1995; Zimpher and Ashburn, 1989). In addition, these predominantly White, middle-class college students enter teacher education with limited experiences with persons from another ethnicity or social class (Banks, 1991; Finney and Orr, 1995; Garcia, 1993; Grant, 1991; Irvine, 1990 and 1992; Jordan, 1995; Ladson-Billings, 1991; Zimpher and Ashburn, 1989). These largely monocultural prospective teachers need structured opportunities to confront and reflect upon critical issues related to diversity. Electronic mail response journals can provide teacher educators an effective tool for such reflection, particularly in an effort to facilitate greater cultural sensitivity in young teachers.

#### Preservice Teachers' Beliefs About Diversity

Several factors make the task of preparing effective teachers of diverse students even more difficult. One is the tenacity with which preservice teachers cling to prior beliefs about diversity. Many studies have documented the difficulty of influencing preservice teachers' prior beliefs (Calderhead, 1991; Carter, 1990; Goodman, 1988; Hollingsworth, 1989; Holt-Reynolds, 1992; Kagan, 1992b; Lonka, Joram, & Bryson, 1996; Richardson, 1996; Wubbels, 1992; Zeichner and Gore, 1990). Prior beliefs act as "filters" (Kagan, 1992a) or "intuitive screens" (Zulich, Bean and Herrick, 1992) through which prospective teachers interpret new information and fit it into existing belief schema.

Not only do students persistently cling to prior understandings, many resist even engaging in reflection upon their beliefs (Chavez Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998). Such students tend to deny the existence of racism and often become angry and resentful when issues of race are raised (Balenger, Hoffman, & Sedlacek, 1992; Chavez Chavez & Gallegos, 1995; Davis, 1992; O'Donnell, 1998). They refuse to recognize the existence of White privilege, believing strongly in the inevitability of triumph over any obstacle through hard work and individual efforts (Ahlquist, 1992; Finney and Orr, 1995; McCall, 1995). When it comes to children, preservice teachers often are color-blind, thinking that "kids are kids" regardless of their cultural background or that the same "good" pedagogy is equally effective for all students (Finney and Orr, 1995; Garcia, 1993; Grant, 1991; Irvine, 1990 and 1992; Jordan, 1995; Roman, 1993).

Gaining a window into preservice teachers' attitudes and beliefs provides an important advantage for the teacher educator. To move young teachers toward different ways of thinking, it is important to provide opportunities for reflection on new information and experiences. As Richardson (1990) notes, teacher cognitions may be influenced by experience, but that experience is educative only with time for reflection.

When those experiences are in unfamiliar settings with diverse student populations, without structured reflection, prospective teachers' negative stereotypes can be reinforced rather than challenged (O'Grady, 1998; Wiest, 1998).

One effective way to encourage reflection with preservice teachers is through journaling (Garmon, 1997; Goodman, 1988; Grimmest, Erickson, MacKinnon, and Ricken, 1990; Zehm, 1997; Zulich, Bean, and Herrick, 1992). Studies have documented the importance of creating a reflective dialogue (Johnston, 1994; Joram and Gabriele, 1997; Richert, 1990). Salomon and Perkins (1998) emphasize that individual learning is embedded in a social process where others are always involved. Language plays a key

role in this social construction of knowledge. Holt-Reynolds (1991, p. 20) connects this dialogue to preservice teacher beliefs, noting, "It is incumbent upon us to enter the dialogues of our students of teaching and work with their assumptions, acknowledging them before we try to reshape them." Shuy (1987) asserts that dialogue is the heart of learning and that interacting with students through their writing is the next best thing to actually talking with them. But as Blanton, Moorman, and Trathen (1998, p. 253) caution, reflection is "a thinking activity aimed at an object." When the "object" is preservice teachers' beliefs about diversity issues in education--beliefs closely held and often unexamined--considerable activity is required to promote true reflection. In this case, the "activity" was mediated through the intersection of computers, telecommunications, and language. I found that electronic response journals can be an effective tool for facilitating what Zehm and Kottler (1993) call "critical reflection"--examining the moral and ethical implications and consequences of teaching.

Computer-mediated telecommunication offers many avenues for creating and sustaining a reflective dialogue with young teachers (Bull, Harris, Lloyd, & Short, 1989; Casey & Roth, 1992; Flake, 1993; Garmon, 1997; McIntyre & Tlusty, 1993; Merseth, 1990; Powers & Dutt-Doner, 1997; Sumrall & Sumrall, 1995; Waggoner & Switzer, 1991; Yan, Anderson & Nelson, 1994; Zehm, 1997). Zehm (1997, p. 6) summarized the value of using e-mail journals in giving voice to preservice teachers' reflections. This type of journaling can provide "the gentle assistance [students] need to direct their questions, concerns, and emotions, their doubts and fears, joys and delights . . . to their own continuing self-reflection."

### **The Context for Using E-Mail Response Journals**

I used e-mail response journals to create a form of "chat room" in a required junior-year class on diversity issues in a middle grades teacher preparation program in an urban university. When I have raised diversity issues in other courses in the past, usually only a few students voluntarily participated in the in-class discussions. Many students were silent, especially if the issue were controversial or if one or two students offered aggressive opinions or if the group were racially mixed. As O'Donnell (1998) points out, preservice teachers usually enter classrooms with limited experiences in discussing racism and other diversity issues. They need to engage in dialogue to "map their racial experience[s]" (p. 63). For this course, I focused on whether electronic journaling would facilitate the creation of a community dialogue where students openly confronted and discussed controversial and sensitive issues. The class composition included 11 White females, 8 Black females, 1 Hispanic female, 4 White males, and 2 Black males. In the previous quarter, all students took a course in instructional technology that provided initial training in the use of electronic mail. In the following four quarters the students would take methods courses that emphasized diversity issues and would participate in field experiences in urban schools.

The diversity course was conceptualized as an introductory survey of selected issues related to schools: gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, learning styles, ability/disability, language, and the role of the school in the community. Considerations of the relationship of these issues to teacher expectations, curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment were woven throughout the course. Each week of the quarter, students were required to give one "thoughtful response" to an e-mail question posted by the instructor. I tried to develop what Cummins (1994) calls "collaborative" rather than "coercive" relationships and to build a sense of community among the learners (Nieto, 1998). In addition, I strove to create what Williams and Meredith (1995) characterize as "undominated dialogue." Though I posted the initial questions, I intentionally limited my public electronic role. Overly structured or completely unstructured conditions seem not to produce the meaningful, free exchange of ideas among e-mail discussants (Roddy, 1997; Thomas, Clift, & Sugimoto, 1996). Attempting to strike a balance (Harrington &

Quinn-Leering, 1994 and 1996; Schlagal, Trathen, & Blanton, 1996), I evaluated student responses only by participation, not through the content of their responses. I sometimes asked clarifying questions about responses and responded (usually privately) to student questions, but otherwise remained an observer. The questions extended a topic considered in class that week and/or sought reactions to school visitations. In addition to the e-mail journal, students created an autobiographical narrative focusing on prior experiences with and knowledge about diversity, observed and conducted a mini-research project in urban schools, completed assigned readings, and participated in structured class activities and discussions.

### Outcomes from the Use of E-Mail Response Journals

Three interrelated themes arising from analysis of the data were:

- e-mail response journals allowed introverted students to participate more equally
- students were more frank and open in controversial and sometimes confrontational discussions over e-mail than in face-to-face class discussions
- students actively constructed and refined their understandings through the course of the quarter-long dialogue.

One advantage of e-mail journaling is that it can quickly provide a window into students' beliefs. As Richardson (1996, p. 11) notes, these beliefs "should be surfaced and acknowledged" if we hope to "make a difference in the deep structure of the knowledge and beliefs held by the students." An early exchange provided the opportunity for just such "surfacing." It also illustrated how e-mail facilitates more introverted students' participation and can lead to a frank discussion.

The two most outspoken students on e-mail were a White male, John, and a Black male, Hassan. In the classroom setting, John was very extroverted, but Hassan tended to be quiet. The medium of e-mail seemed to facilitate Hassan's participation in dialogue (Bishop-Clark & Huston, 1992; Casey, 1994; Garmon, 1997). One of the first topics posed was why diversity in schools has become a bitterly debated issue. An angry response from Hassan sparked an outpouring from the White students in the class. He wrote :

...The only reason why America has paid no attention to diversity in the first place is because of the WHITE MAN!!! It was the white man who wanted students in schools to take british literature, european literature, american history (white history), and anything else that dealt with CAUCASIAN CULTURE!!! ... [T]he reason people are scared of diversity in the classrooms is because of THE FEAR OF AN EDUCATED BLACK MAN (or any other minority). [M]ainstream white america become fearful when a minority figure finds out the truth (THAT WE BUILT THIS COUNTRY, THAT WE TOOK CARE OF THEIR FAMILIES, AND THE ONLY REASON THEY ARE SO WEALTHY AND "WELL-OFF" TODAY IS BECAUSE THEY WORKED MY ANCESTORS FOR 400 YEARS WITH NO PAY!)

Several White students immediately censured Hassan for "cursing" and "yelling," for his bitterness, for blaming the "WHITE MAN." John illustrated his resistance to the notion of White privilege when he advised Hassan that he and other minority group members "should be taking responsibility for their present status and doing something about it." John continued in a response that repudiated White guilt:

Yes, our (my) ancestors did some awful things. But guess what, I AIN'T THEM! ... If I have done something wrong or mistreated anyone in any way, I take full responsibility, but I will not apologize for being a white male in a Eurocentric culture. ... I have made great efforts to grow beyond the stereotypes I am saddled with, and I hope my children will grow even further. But I expect the same of my brothers and sisters of African, Asian, Spanish, and European descent. If you cannot meet me in the middle, then I will

continue to stand my ground and watch you from afar, wondering what you are really like and why you choose to remain at a distance.

John's reaction was typical of several White students who questioned the existence of institutional racism (Davis, 1992 ; Finney and Orr, 1995; O'Donnell, 1998; Roman, 1993).

Hassan expanded on his original point about the difficulty of escaping the effects of past discrimination:

[I] really don't blame the past for [my] present status, however, the past has had such a strong impact on the economic status of the minority today. [J]ust think, my parents and grandparents could not attend [this university]. . . . [I] believe. . . there is no such thing as unity for America. [W]e live in two different worlds. . . however, we do meet each other constantly in the schools and in the educational arena. THAT IS SCARY! [C]ommunication is the key, but when will we start listening??

The other Black male student, Alex, who verbally participated infrequently in class, only when directly questioned, supported Hassan's position:

When we have enough respect for one another to unify with different people, diversity will become a non-issue. Diversity will come when everyone truly feels that this is OUR country, and the school curriculums reflect that FACT. This has become a bitter debate because some people want their cake and want to eat it too. I know this is the United States. Yeah! Yeah! Yeah! To tell you the truth, I can live with that. No problem. Just give everyone a FAIR shake. We need to stop living like hypocrites and live the way we pretend to in this country.

Most White responses were akin to that of Colleen, who stated that Hassan must have a lot of personal problems and he should not blame the school system for his lack of knowledge but instead take responsibility for his shortcomings. This is an expression of what Henriques (1984) calls the "rotten apple theory" of racism--that racism is an individual pathology and not institutionalized. The exchange between Hassan and Colleen became heated. In the last of a volley of messages, Hassan exclaimed,

"[I] can't wait to be a teacher so [I] can do to white america what they have done to me all along (teach my side of the story). . . .[I] just might end up teaching at a predominantly white school too (SCARY ISN'T IT!!)"

But Hassan eventually apologized to his colleagues in a message titled "I AM SORRY! (i am sorry)." After expressing regret for "shouting" on e-mail [writing in capital letters] and for his sarcasm, he wrote,

"[B]elieve it or not, this class has taught me that people are really trying to understand each other. . . .[I] have always been quiet in class and have kept my passionate opinions to myself (which really is not good)." The e-mail dialogue had given voice to his formerly silent "passionate opinions."

He also appeared to have reflected upon his classmates' responses and moved to a more open-minded position. This early exchange seems to have been cathartic for Hassan; from that point forward, he spoke only in positive terms about his attitudes and the experiences he had during the quarter. While the responses to Hassan's attack on the "WHITE MAN" tended to be emotional, the overall tenor of the discussion over why diversity is controversial was thoughtful. Jack, an older White male who rarely volunteered his opinion in face-to-face discussions, wrote,

". . . [T]oo many people view life as a 'zero-sum' game, one in which every one's gain is also someone's loss. Until we come to realize that life can be a 'win-win' situation we are doomed to look out for ourselves at the expense [of] others."

Jennifer, an outgoing White female, pointed out that

"[History] is very personal when people start to mess with or argue about who we think we are. Or if we feel that we are excluded in some way then part of

history is missing. This creates fear in people. People are scared that some of their concrete ideals may be blowing in the wind."

But Trey, a White male who sat in the back of the room and never voluntarily participated in class discussions, did not recognize the existence of White privilege and believed that too much emphasis was being placed on diversity:

I really don't think we should go overboard with trying to give everyone certain attention with certain holidays etc. This is america. [A] country which [I] am very proud to be a part of. . . I feel people who come to america should be proud to be here. [T]hey should be proud to be an american. [I]f there not happy with this lifestyle then why did they come. [I] think its great that we can be a country of many people and if a group of peoples want to practice their heritage when there at home or in there neighborhoods that[s] fine but I don't think it should become apart of everyday curriculum in our schools. . . [H]onestly, this is america and when our ancestors came over they learned how to adapt to america just like everyone else. [H]owever, they did respect and acknowledge other [cultures].

While this view of the "melting pot" was in the minority, several students shared Trey's perspective. Christina, a White female refused to recognize that racism exists in the present: ". . . We cannot acheive the goal of unity if we cannot all move forward and leave the past behind." Another White female, Nancy, believed that individual effort could overcome all obstacles:

"The multicultural elitists are the ones that we always hear from about the need for change. They try to push the idea that America is bad. . . I wish we would get to where we just accept that people get what they get because they deserve it. . ."

The passion and open expression of the e-mail discussion on why multiculturalism sparks controversy was not matched in the classroom discussion that preceded the journaling. In the face-to-face discussion, students generally offered one or two sentence responses to questions I posed. The exception was John, whose aggressive dogmatism seemed to inhibit the discussion. There was little peer exchange and the majority of students were silent. E-mail seemed to offer a psychological distance that allowed for "less intimidating interaction" (Bishop-Clark & Huston, 1992, p. 483), and it gave students opportunities to organize their thoughts and to return to the discussion later with new understandings gained after time for reflection. The introverted students participated on a more equal footing with those who tended to dominate in-class discussions. These patterns continued throughout the quarter as the class considered other aspects of diversity in schools.

The most passionate and extended e-mail exchange centered on language issues raised near the end of the quarter. I gave students a ninth-grade African American's essay on Romeo and Juliet to provoke a discussion on Black English. The Oakland, California Board of Education just weeks earlier had taken its stand in support of "Ebonics," and the media was full of debate on the controversy. Students were asked to grade the essay and give a rationale for their assessment, then discuss how a culturally sensitive teacher might approach the issue of Black English. Typical initial comments included Colleen's observation that ". . . [A] ninth grader should have more grammar and spelling skills than this student portrayed. I thought it was inappropriate. . ." and Christina's interesting judgment that "Although the content was probably on a B level, content is not going to cut it in the real world." Most White students and several of the Black students agreed with the responses such as "I do not feel that Black English has any place in the school system" and "I have never seen so much fuss over a language that, to me, should be kept at home."

An extensive discussion developed over a two-week period primarily sustained by John and Hassan, though others jumped in frequently. John saw his future classroom as one that would uphold "higher standards" than those represented by the ninth-grader's paper. He felt to give the essay a grade above an F would "compromise the purpose of

education." He went on to announce, "I will be a culturally sensitive teacher whenever possible but I will not compromise educational standards for the sake of 'facilitating success' [for students]." He also posited his notion that Black English is being promoted by "those who claim to be the saviors of the lower class [but] who seek to maintain their status by making sure that others remain in their place."

Hassan wrote back,

"Well, what exactly is keeping African-Americans 'in their place.'" He related a story of his cousin talking on the telephone to a salesperson about a refund. First she spoke in "black dialect" and got no satisfaction. Then she called back and "talk[ed] like a white person (what we are suppose to call correct English), and they accepted the package back for a refund."

John's reply indicated he did not perceive the dual standard to which Hassan referred: I can only assume that the "white or European" dialect to which you refer is standard English. The cultural norms/macroculture have determined that standard English is the "correct" way of speaking. It is unfortunate that so many intelligent, black people choose to support an effort that would only keep the African American population of this country "in their place," a place they have been struggling to get out of for many years.

John did not see the conflict between the African American struggle for equal access to resources and the pressure from the "macroculture" to give up African American cultural distinctiveness.

Hassan attempted to make the point again: "[I]f Ebonics is having a positive effect (which it is according to research) on African-American children[s] reading scores and comprehension then I am for the issue. . . .It seems [as] though we are not taking into consideration what is best for [the] child's interest." But John still clung to the importance of maintaining "standards."

. . . [E]ncouraging any dialect to be spoken regardless of circumstance will certainly bring limitations on the environment of that individual. Effective communication with all groups is a necessary skill and refusing to work toward a competence in standard English denies many students that skill and therefore limits their opportunity for achievement. I will work to "liberate" and "empower" children as well. But I will do it by expecting only the best and not lowering the bar for those would use their dialect or culture as a crutch to allow them to achieve less.

To John, the issue was absolute--he saw use of Black English only in deficit terms and any acknowledgement of its value would devalue education. Hassan in his last message tried to find common ground:

. . . [Y]ou stated the same thing that I've been trying to convey also. I believe in using Ebonics as a tool, but not setting a new standard of English. . . .The main purpose for teaching children to read is to "gain understanding" from text. It's like a math problem--you cannot solve the problem without knowing the mathematical language. That is why I believe in using Ebonics as a tool to help blacks understanding the text.

The depth of the discussion on Black English and the give-and-take among the students would have been difficult to achieve in the classroom setting. Time constraints would have limited the discussion, but more importantly, interpersonal factors would have intervened. John's overbearing demeanor and Hassan's verbal passivity would probably have shut down the discussion after the opening volley. The e-mail format put them on an equal footing. And it allowed other students to really hear what each had to say, reflect upon what they read, and to enter the discussion at any point.

### **Measuring Professional Growth**

At the end of the quarter, each student conceptualized his or her own "Diversity Model" with a plan for continuing growth. Hassan believed he experienced great growth during

the quarter, writing:

I can just compare my e-mail messages from the beginning of the quarter to the end of the quarter and I can actually see the difference. My attitude about diversity was very vague at first. I did not believe in taking this class at first, Honestly! I was so sick and tired of the "diversity issue." I had thought diversity meant people trying to communicate in order to understand one another (which it does), but I had often found that it wasn't the majority (Whites trying to understand Blacks, etc.). It was always the other way around (the minority trying to understand and agree with the "white man's" way). I saw this happening at the beginning of the quarter, but that has changed.

Other students spoke of changes in their outlooks. Susan, a Hispanic female, wrote, "I'm also not as naive [as] I was when we started this class. I assumed students were in the tracks they were suppose to be in because of there test scores. Now, I will also watch closely for signs that a particular student or students have been wrongfully tracked. I know that this happens particularly to Hispanics and African Americans." Jack, the older White male student, noted changes from his prior understandings:

My attitudes and beliefs have shifted from a conservative legalistic viewpoint towards a more caring, supportive position. At the beginning of the quarter, I felt we could and should treat everyone the same. . . . I've come to realize that there's much more to being an effective teacher than just putting the information out there for everyone to get it as best they can.

Even John pointed to his personal growth, though his "filter" remained one that assumed White culture as "The Standard." He acknowledged the need for teachers to vary pedagogy according to the makeup of the student population: "Simply imparting knowledge in the same ways and assessing students with the same methods will inevitably spell failure for many students." This outlook is a long stride from his attitude in the first class meeting when he stated, "Diversity has nothing to do with the actual teaching of mathematics," and restated in an early e-mail message, ". . . [T]wo plus two will always equal four no matter what type of diverse background may be present in the classroom." But as John expanded on his Diversity Model, his "methods for including all students in the educational process" began,

"First, it is important to establish goals, expectations, and standards which will not waver when presented to a diverse population. The subject matter to be mastered is an absolute," though he went on to state that many "teaching styles, educational methods, and assessment strategies" should be used with students.

A few students seemed to experience little growth toward cultural sensitivity. For example, Christina, who earlier had stated her belief that we need to "move forward and leave the past behind," noted that her classroom observations took place in a school that was "not very diverse." Actually, its ethnic makeup was approximately 50 percent African American, 40 percent Caucasian, and 10 percent Asian and Hispanic. She saw no diversity there: "I consider these two groups [African American and Caucasian] to make up the mainstream of America. While there are differences between the two groups, I do not see these differences as much of an issue. . . . I did not and my students did not live during segregation or desegregation." Prior beliefs are tightly held and difficult to change. Perhaps her structured experiences over the next four quarters as she interns and teaches in urban schools would broaden and deepen her perspective.

### **Benefits and Limitations of Using E-mail Response Journals**

The use of e-mail response journals provided an added dimension to this class on diversity issues, but there were some limitations and difficulties. There was always the possibility of misinterpreting written responses without the aid of body language or vocal inflection to make meaning of the writer's words. In an in-class discussion of the



limitations of the medium, Colleen expressed her frustration: "I wish people would just stop replying to my messages!" She stated she was tired of being challenged, corrected, and misunderstood.

Another problem was that some students, typically those who were less thoughtful in other class activities, did not engage in the discussions. They usually gave the one response as required. Though I could reply and ask follow-up questions, it was more difficult to gauge their involvement and prod them than in face-to-face discussions.

One logistical difficulty was student access to e-mail. Several studies have indicated that success in e-mail networks depends on ease of student access to computers (Casey, 1994; Casey & Roth, 1992; Kearsley & Lynch, 1992; Russett, 1994; Sumrall & Sumrall, 1995; Thompson & Hamilton, 1991). The university provided free e-mail service for students, but if students didn't have e-mail at home, their participation became more limited. Sometimes students experienced difficulty in getting a terminal in one of the university computer centers. Some students accessed their e-mail only once a week, often the last half-hour before their messages were due. This made dialogue difficult. By the time they saw other students' messages or my follow-up questions, the class had moved to another topic.

Despite limitations, e-mail response journals were very useful in the diversity issues class. The greatest benefit was the psychological distance the journaling provided. Many of the issues in the class were controversial and fraught with potential conflict. From the safe distance of an e-mail conversation, students seemed freer to say what they really thought (Bishop-Clark & Huston, 1992; Copley, 1992; Harrington, 1992; Powers, 1995; Yan, Anderson & Nelson, 1994). This led toward Zehm and Kottler's (1993) notion of "critical reflection" and provided opportunities for constructing new understandings (Bishop-Clark & Huston, 1992; Casey, 1994; Copley, 1992; Garcia, 1993; Harrington, 1992; Powers, 1995; Zehm, 1997). For example, it's hard to imagine quiet Hassan making his statements about the "WHITE MAN" in person to the class with its majority of White students. His e-mail comments provoked many responses and led to a franker discussion than would have occurred in a face-to-face setting. It certainly produced a multi-voice dialogue that would have been impossible with traditional journals. For me, this openness was important in moving toward an understanding of the beliefs students held.

The e-mail journals expanded student consideration of issues rising from classroom activities, from readings, and from school visits. The dialogue seemed to shape the perceptions of students, particularly as many perspectives on the same event emerged. Student reactions to school visits, for example, diverged greatly. After a visit to two urban schools some students responded that it was "not a positive experience," it was "a waste of time," and "I felt I gained nothing," while other students who visited the same schools at the same time wrote that "[i]t was a profound experience for me, an awakening or revelation of sorts," that the schools represented "an ideal environment," and "I admired the programs at both schools and was happy to see such positive happenings in the inner-city." These differing viewpoints opened the door for a lively discussion in class about what students thought were the purposes of schools, the role of the school in the community, and what "excellence" in schools would include.

E-mail also provided immediate response and feedback from the instructor and peers, an advantage noted in many studies (Bishop-Clark, 1992; Bull et al., 1989; Casey, 1994; Garcia, 1993; Garmon, 1997; Kearsley & Lynch, 1992; Powers, 1995; Sumrall & Sumrall, 1995; Waggoner & Switzer, 1991; Zehm, 1997). The instructor had to choose her language and tone carefully, however, as a message too critical or too strident could quickly shut down the discussion (Garmon, 1997). It was more difficult to judge student reactions and mediate their responses on e-mail than in face-to-face discussions.

An additional benefit of e-mail was equal access. Many students logged in late at night as their schedules permitted (Russett, 1994; Thompson & Hamilton 1991). And students who were not particularly verbal or who were introverted could enter the discussion at any

point and on the same footing with those students who would tend to dominate in a person-to-person discussion (Bishop-Clark & Huston, 1992; Casey, 1994; Garmon, 1997). The result was that all voices were heard more clearly.

E-mail journals provided another benefit for the instructor and the students. Each could track the development of student concepts and perceptions over time. The messages created a written record, just as traditional journals can, of the journey of the student through the course (Garmon, 1997). But the e-mail journal resided with both the student in messages sent and the instructor in messages received. Critical reflection at the end of the course was more easily facilitated by referring students to reread their messages and chart their growth.

Growth of preservice teachers toward greater cultural sensitivity is usually a slow process. One quarter's diversity course will not lead to a complete turn-around in an insensitive student. However, the long-term effects of such a course are difficult to measure. John came back to see me after two quarters of internship in urban schools. He said he'd learned a lot in the diversity class, and that knowledge helped him be a more effective teacher of diverse children. The seeds planted there had (at least partially) borne fruit. Through structured dialogue and critical reflection, change can begin to occur. E-mail response journals may provide one effective vehicle to facilitate that dialogue and reflection.

## REFERENCES

- Ahlquist, R. (1992). Manifestations of inequality: Overcoming resistance in a multicultural foundations course. In C.A. Grant (Ed.), Research and multicultural education: From the margins to the mainstream (pp. 89-105). Washington, D.C.: Falmer.
- Balenger, V.J., Hoffman, M.A., & Sedlacek, W.E. (1992). Racial attitudes among incoming White students: A study of ten-year trends. Journal of College Student Development, 33, 245-252.
- Banks, J.A. (1991). Teaching multicultural literacy to teachers. Teaching Education, 4, 134-144.
- Bishop-Clark, C., & Huston, B. (1992). Using telecommunications in teacher education: A student perspective. In D. Carey, R. Carey, D. Willis, and J. Willis (Eds.), Technology and teacher education annual--1992 (pp. 482-484). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.
- Blanton, W.E., Moorman, G., & Trathen, W. (1998). Telecommunications and teacher education: A social constructivist review. In P.D. Pearson & A. Iran-Nejad (Eds.), Review of research in education. Vol. 23 (pp. 235-275). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.
- Bull, G., Harris, J., Lloyd, J., & Short, J. (1989). The electronic academic village. Journal of Teacher Education, 40, 27-31.
- Calderhead, J. (1991). Images of teaching: Student teachers' early conceptions of classroom practice. Teaching and Teacher Education, 7, 1-8.
- Carter, K. (1990). Teachers' knowledge and learning to teach. In W.R. Houston (Ed.), Handbook of research on teacher education (pp. 291-310). New York: Macmillan.
- Casey, J.M. (1994). TeacherNet: Student teachers travel the information highway. Journal of Computing in Teacher Education, 11 (1), 8-11.
- Casey, J.M., & Roth, R.A. (1992). An impact analysis of technology-based support in student teaching. Teacher Education and Practice, 7 (2), 23-29.
- Chavez Chavez, R. & O'Donnell, J. (Eds.). (1998). Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non)engagement in the multicultural education terrain. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Chavez Chavez, R., O'Donnell, J., & Gallegos, R. (1995, April). Multiculturalism in the pedagogy of the "Everyday": Students' perspectives on "dilemmas" in a multicultural course. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco.
- Copley, J.V. (1992). The integration of teacher education and technology: A constructivist model. In D. Carey, R. Carey, D. Willis, and J. Willis (Eds.), Technology and teacher education annual--1992 (pp. 617-622). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.
- Cuellar, E., & Huling-Austin, L. (Eds.). (1991). Achieving an ethnically diverse teaching force. Austin: Texas Education Agency.
- Cummins, J. (1994). From coercive to collaborative relations of power in the teaching of

literacy." In B.M Ferdman, R. Weber, and A. Ramirez (Eds.), Literacy across languages and cultures. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Davis, N.J. (1992). Teaching about inequality: Student resistance, paralysis, and rage. Teaching Sociology, 20, 232-238.

Finney, S., & Orr, J. (1995). "I've really learned a lot, but. . ."Cross-cultural understanding and teacher education in a racist society. Journal of Teacher Education, 46, 327-339.

Flake, J. (1993). Reflections on reflective learning in a computer environment. Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 1, 373-391.

Garcia, J. (1993). Reconceptualizing multicultural education: Understanding diversity through technology in the information age. Teacher Educator, 29 (1), 32-42.

Garmon, M.A. (1997, March). Dialogue journals as a tool for assessing and challenging students' racial attitudes and beliefs. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Goodman, J. (1988). Constructing a practical philosophy of teaching: A study of preservice teachers' professional perspectives. Teaching and Teacher Education, 4, 121-137.

Grant, C. (1991). Culture and teaching: What do teachers need to know? In M. Kennedy (Ed.), Teaching academic subjects to diverse learners (pp. 237-256). New York: Teacher's College Press.

Grimmett, P.P., Erickson, G.L., MacKinnon, A.M., & Ricken, T.J. (1990). Reflective practice in teacher education. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Harrington, H. (1992). Fostering critical reflection through technology: Preparing prospective teachers for a changing society. Journal of Information Technology for Teacher Education, 1, 67-82.

Harrington, H., & Quinn-Leering, K. (1994). Computer conferencing, critical reflection, and teacher development. In J. Willis, B. Robin, & D. Willis (Eds.), Technology and teacher education annual--1994 (pp. 661-665). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Harrington, H., & Quinn-Leering, K. (1996). Computer conferencing and moral discourse. Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 4, 49-49-68.

Henriques, J. (1984). Social psychology and the politics of racism. In J.Henriques, C. Urwin, C. Venn, and V. Walkerdine (Eds.), Changing the subject: Psychology, social regulation and subjectivity (pp. 60-89). London: Macmillan.

Hill, H. D. (1989). Effective strategies for teaching minority students. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

Hollingsworth, S. (1989). Prior beliefs and cognitive change in learning to teach. American Educational Research Journal, 26, 160-189.

Holt-Reynolds, D. (1991). The dialogues of teacher education: Entering and influencing preservice teachers' internal conversations. (Research Report 91-4). East Lansing, MI: The National Center for Research on Teacher Education.

Holt-Reynolds, D. (1992). Personal history based beliefs as relevant prior knowledge in course work. American Educational Research Journal, 29, 325-349.

Irvine, J.J. (1990). Black students and school failure: Policies, practices, and prescriptions. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Irvine, J.J. (1992). Making teacher education culturally responsible. In M.E.Dilworth (Ed.), Diversity in teacher education: New expectations (pp. 79-92). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Johnston, S. (1994). Conversations with student teachers--enhancing the dialogue of learning to teach. Teaching and Teacher Education, 10, 71-82.

Joram, E., & Gabriele, A.J. (1997, March). Preservice teachers' prior beliefs: Transforming obstacles into opportunities. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Jordan, M.L.R. (1995). Reflections on the challenges, possibilities, and perplexities of preparing preservice teachers for culturally diverse classrooms. Journal of Teacher Education, 46, 369-374.

Kagan, D.M. (1992a). Implications of research of teacher belief. Educational Psychologist, 27, 65-90.

Kagan, D.M. (1992b). Professional growth among preservice and beginning teachers. Review of Educational Research, 62, 129-169.

Kearsley, G., & Lynch, W. (1992). Teacher training and telecommunications: From bulletin boards to Internet. In D. Carey, R. Carey, D. Willis, and J. Willis (Eds.), Technology and teacher education annual--1992 (pp. 479-481). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1991). Beyond multicultural illiteracy. The Journal of Negro Education,

Lonka, K., Joram, E., & Bryson, M. (1996). Conceptions of learning and knowledge: Does training make a difference? Contemporary Educational Psychology, 21, 240-260.

McCall, A.L. (1995). Constructing conceptions of multicultural teaching: Preservice teachers' life experiences and teacher education. Journal of Teacher Education, 46, 340-350.

McIntyre, S. & Tlusty, R. (1993, April). Electronic dialogue journaling and its effective on reflective practice with preservice teachers. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Atlanta.

Merseth, K.K. (1990). Beginning teachers and computer networks: A new form of induction support. (NCRTE Research Report 90-0). East Lansing, MI: The National Center for Research on Teacher Education.

Nieto, S. (1998). From claiming hegemony to sharing space: Creating community in multicultural education course. In R. Chavez Chavez and J. O'Donnell (Eds.), Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain (pp. 16-31). Albany: State University of New York Press.

O'Donnell, J. (1998). Engaging students re-cognition of racial identity. In R. Chavez Chavez & J. O'Donnell (Eds.), Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain (pp. 56-68). Albany: State University of New York Press.

O'Grady, C.R. (1998). Moving off center: Engaging White education students in multicultural field experiences. In R. Chavez Chavez and J. O'Donnell (Eds.), Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non) engagement in the multicultural education terrain (pp. 211-228). Albany: State University of New York Press.

Powers, S.M. (1995). A qualitative examination of an interactive computer program on multiculturalism. In J.L. Schnase and E.L. Cunniss (Eds.), Proceedings of CSCL '95: The first international conference on computer support for collaborative learning (pp. 268-272). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

Powers, S., & Dutt-Doner, K. (1997). Enhancing the preservice teacher experience through electronic discussions. In J. Willis, J. Price, S. McNeil, B. Robey, & D. Willis (Eds.), Technology and teacher education annual--1997 (pp.1213-1217). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Protheroe, N.J., & Barsdate, K.J. (1991). Culturally sensitive instruction and student learning. Arlington, VA : Educational Research Service.

Richardson, V. (1990). Significant and worthwhile change in teaching practice. Educational Researcher, 19 (7), 10-18.

Richardson, V. (1996). The role of attitudes and beliefs in learning to teach. In J. Sikula (Ed.), The handbook of research on teacher education. 2nd ed. (pp. 102-119). New York: Macmillan.

Richert, A. (1990). Teaching teachers to reflect: A consideration of program structure. Journal of Curriculum Studies, 22, 509-527.

Roddy, M. (1997). Using the Internet to unite student teaching and teacher education. In J. Willis, J. Price, S. McNeil, B. Robin, & D. Willis (Eds.), Technology and teacher education annual--1997 (pp. 1218-1221). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Roman, L.G. (1993). White is a color! White defensiveness, postmodernism, and anti-racist pedagogy. In C. McCarthy and W. Crinchlow (Eds.), Race, identity, and representation in education (pp. 71-88). New York: Routledge.

Russett, J.A. (1994). Telecommunications and pre-service science teachers: The effects of using electronic mail and a directed exploration of the Internet on attitudes. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association for Research in Science Teaching. ERIC Document 268 571.

Salomon, G., & Perkins, D.N. (1998). Individual and social aspects of learning. In P.D. Pearson & A. Iran-Nejad (Eds.), Review of research in education. Vol. 23 (pp. 1-24). Washington, D.C.: American Educational Research Association.

Schlagal, B., Trathen, W., & Blanton, W. (1996). Structuring telecommunications to create instructional conversations about teaching. Journal of Teacher Education, 47, 175-183.

Shuy, R.W. (1987). Research currents: Dialogue as the heart of learning. Language Arts, 64, 890-897.

Sumrall, W.J., & Sumrall, C.M. (1995). Introducing electronic mail applications within preservice elementary science methods courses. Journal of Computing in Teacher Education, 11 (4), 23-20.

Thomas, L., Clift, R., & Sugimoto, T. (1996). Telecommunication, student teaching, and

methods instruction: An exploratory investigation. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 46, 165-174.

Thompson, A.D., & Hamilton, J. (1991). Patterns of use of an electronic communications network for student teachers and first-year teachers. ERIC Document 334 180.

Waggoner, M., & Switzer, T. (1991). Using computer communication to enhance teacher education. In D.

Carey, R. Carey, D. Willis, and J. Willis (Eds.), *Technology and teacher education annual--1991* (pp. 135-139). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Wiest, L.R. (1998). Using immersion experiences to shake up preservice teachers' views about cultural differences. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 49, 358-365.

Williams, H., & Meredith, E. (1995). Internet outposts: Communication patterns in computer-mediated classrooms. In D. Willis, J. Robin, & J. Willis (Eds.), *Technology and teacher education annual--1995* (pp. 638-642). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Wubbels, T. (1992). Taking account of student teachers' preconceptions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 8, 137-150.

Yan, W., Anderson, M., & Nelson, J. (1994). Facilitating reflective thinking in student teachers through electronic mail. In J. Willis, B. Robin, and D. Willis (Eds.), *Technology and teacher education annual--1994* (pp. 657-660). Charlottesville, VA: Association for the Advancement of Computing in Education.

Zehm, S. (1997, March) E-mail dialogue: Supporting the preservice teacher's personal-professional voice. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Zehm, S., & Kottler, J. (1993). *On being a teacher: The human dimension*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press.

Zeichner, K., and Gore J. (1990). Teacher socialization. In W.R. Houston (Ed.), *Handbook of research on teacher education* (pp. 329-348). New York: Macmillan.

Zimpher, N.L., and Ashburn, E.A. (1989). The RATE Project: A profile of teacher education students. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 40, 27-31.

Zulich, J., Bean, T., & Herrick, J. (1992). Charting stages of preservice teacher development and reflection in a multicultural community through dialogue journal analysis. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 8, 345-360.

Dr. Virginia E. Causey is an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and Program Director for History/Social Science Education at Columbus State University. Her research interests include the history of school segregation and desegregation, diversity issues in teacher education, and effective social studies teaching. She has recently published "Drafted Into the Front Lines: Teacher Efficacy During School Desegregation in Columbus, Georgia, 1968-1975," *Research in the Schools*,

Fall 1999; "Cultural Diversity Is Basically a Foreign Term to Me': The Challenges of Diversity for Preservice Teacher Education" (with Christine Thomas and Beverly J. Armento), *Teaching and Teacher Education*, Winter 2000; "Social Studies" in *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Lesson Planning for Elementary and Middle Grades*, edited by J.J. Irvine and B.J. Armento, McGraw-Hill, 2001; "Strategies for Increasing Achievement in History," in *Educating Everybody's Children: More Teaching Strategies for Diverse Learners* Vol. 2 (with Beverly J. Armento), Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, in press.

All names used are pseudonyms.

Student journal entries are printed as written. I did not correct spelling and grammar.

---

Virginia E. Causey is an Assistant Professor in Curriculum & Instruction at Columbus State University. Her research interests include school segregation/desegregation and effective teaching of history. She is Program Director of History/Social Science Education at Columbus State University.