How and when do students become "invested" in online collaboration?

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Teacher candidates often express concern with the conventional pedagogy of their methods classes, complaining of a need to see challenging, reform-oriented teaching in action (Ferdig, Hughes, Packard, & Pearson, 1998; Hughes, Packard, & Pearson, 2000). They describe instruction that is limited to articles, books and lectures about methods of teaching reading and writing (Ferdig et al., 1998). Most universities have responded to this call, supplementing students' in-class experiences with classroom observations and internships. However, even when provided with these opportunities to 'watch' pedagogy in action, pre-service teachers often fail to see (or are failed to be provided with) teaching models that align with the focus of university pre-service preparation programs (Kinzer & Risko, 1998).

Educational researchers have responded to this problem by introducing web-based learning environments that attempt to supplement preservice teacher education through technologies such as web-based learning environments (Ferdig, Roehler, & Pearson, 2001). Research in this area provides evidence that this form of instruction and electronic medium can be successful. In one study, Ferdig, Roehler, and Pearson (2001) found evidence that students who participated in the electronic forum were more likely to demonstrate a deeper understanding of pedagogical diversity as well as a more complete approach to the teaching and learning of literacy. In a different study, students who posted more frequently to an electronic discussion forum (and thus participated most in the assigned classroom activities) reported both increased interest in the course and mastery of the material (as evidenced by their self-evaluations and class journals) (Davis & Ferdig, 2001). In both cases, students had the opportunity to become meta-analytic and meta-cognitive about their participation and journey towards becoming fully enculturated into the community of practice known as teaching.

Unfortunately, in both cases, researchers reported data suggesting these claims were substantiated only when students became "invested" in the technology. In other words, gains and successes were measured only when students fully participated in the electronic activity. Neither case reported the process in which students became invested, nor did they describe the characteristics or context under which students became emotional, intellectually, and behaviorally involved in the activity. In both cases, authors called for future research to examine and define exact contexts in which students would become invested in both the classroom integration and the new technology.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss, from a psychological perspective, ways in which several preservice teachers became invested in electronic innovation. We describe how supplemental discussion forums were used in preservice education courses to further students': a) skills and abilities in working with diverse populations of students; b) knowledge and adoption of psychological and developmental theory; and c) ability to integrate cutting-edge technology innovations into their instructional design. Most importantly, we describe characteristics of electronic learning contexts in which students are most likely to become invested emotional, intellectually, and behaviorally.

References

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