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Crossing Educational Boundaries: Text, Technology, and Dialogue as a Critical Pathway

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Description

Can the perceived boundary between professor and student be crossed? Can technology be used as a pathway to cross that boundary? These questions were answered as a result of a project initiated to meet the requirements in creating an honors option for an undergraduate educational psychology course. In constructing the course requirements, the professors set a goal of reflecting with a student on critical issues as they reviewed a book of such articles written by Alfie Kahn. The sequence of analysis took place throughout the semester, using electronic media dialogue following the reading of each chapter. Through the reflections of the professors, the student connected theory and practice while crossing the perceived boundary between professor and student. In addition to crossing the perceived boundary and using technology to facilitate dialogue, the student and the professors experienced intellectual and professional growth. This project explores the reflective comments of both professors and a student that occurred during this reflective exercise.

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Education

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Crossing Educational Boundaries: Text, Technology, and Dialogue as a Critical Pathway

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ABSTRACT: Can the perceived boundary between professor and student be crossed? Can technology be used as a pathway to cross that boundary? These questions were answered as a result of a project initiated to meet the requirements in creating an honors option for an undergraduate educational psychology course. In constructing the course requirements, the professors set a goal of reflecting with a student on critical issues as they reviewed a book of such articles written by Alfie Kohn. The sequence of analysis took place throughout the semester, using electronic media dialogue following the reading of each chapter. Through the reflections of the professors, the student connected theory and practice while crossing the perceived boundary between professor and student. In addition to crossing the perceived boundary and using technology to facilitate dialogue, the student and the professors experienced intellectual and professional growth. This project explores the reflective comments of both professors and a student that occurred during this reflective exercise.

In an age of technology, many students find themselves in distance learning classes via technology. As the pros and cons are debated, some critics point out the impersonalization of never meeting face-to-face in the traditional classroom setting. This impersonalization is not new, given that the warehousing of students in large lecture halls often prohibits the personalization of instruction and student–teacher relationships. So often in these situations, a professor participates in a monologue, leaving the student as a nonparticipant in his or her learning. This occurs for many reasons, including large classes, time constraints, students' feelings of inferiority, and proximity (defined as personal interaction with the instructor). Each problematic issue encourages one-way communication and restricts the development of participatory learning environments.

Technology continues to provide a medium with which to overcome some of these obstacles, using the avenue of personal dialogue and flexibility in the time of discourse. For example, one participant may be available at 9:00 a.m. whereas another may find that 8:00 p.m. is more convenient. Using technology to engage in dialogue, the student has more control and can express opinions in a less threatening atmosphere by reflecting on one's thoughts, views, and comments before expressing them, thereby diminishing the feeling of inferiority. In addition, the dialogue can occur from different parts of the city, county, state, or country, thus allowing the student to contribute to the dialogue from many miles away. Overcoming all these obstacles through technology not only crosses the perceived educational boundary between teacher and student but also creates a two-way dialogue and, in effect, creates a small community of learners.

Boundaries

Obstacles to two-way dialogue, as well as the educational boundaries between teacher and student, were overcome as a result of creating an honors option for an educational psychology course at our university. This action research project was initiated when a preservice teacher candidate approached her educational psychology professor (Professor 1, a quantitative researcher) with a request to take his class for honors credit. Professor 1 reflected on the nature of his class, which used an interactive lecture format that included 30 hours of field observation, and he thought about the possibility of using dialogue in this project. He approached another professor (Professor 2, a qualitative researcher) who used dialogue not only in teaching her classes but as a primary narrative inquiry methodology.

The honors program at our university is defined by students' receiving credit for 18 hours of honors courses and an accumulated grade point average of 3.50 upon graduation. The students are responsible for selecting courses from an approved honors course list or approaching their professors with the request to take courses for honors credit. The student in question began the process of crossing the educational boundaries when she took the initiative to request that her professor add the honors dimension.

The next opportunity to cross boundaries occurred when Professor 1 requested that Professor 2, who uses dialogue in teaching (Burbules, 1993) and research, join him in designing the honors addition to the course. Professor 2 agreed to participate in the project and suggested the use of dialogue and narrative inquiry in constructing an additional course requirement to meet the honors credit for this project. The goal of the professors was to reflect with the student on critical educational issues as they reviewed Alfie Kohn's book *What to Look for in a Classroom* (1998).

The final project involved textual topic analysis, which took place through electronic media dialogue after the reading of each chapter. Through the reflections of the professors, the student connected theory and practice while participating in her learning and crossing the perceived boundary between professor and student. In addition to crossing this boundary and using technology to facilitate dialogue, the student and the professors experienced intellectual and professional growth.

Opportunities for Growth

Despite opportunities for growth presented by the dialogue process, Roy and Swaminathan (2002) recognized that teachers are often involved in monologue instead of dialogue with their students. Monologue arises when

➢ we fail to open ourselves up to others,
➢ we fail to acknowledge someone's point of view,
➢ we fail to overcome hierarchical orders of power, and
➢ we fail to notice the existence of others.

One dangerous outcome of a monologic pattern lies in producing a "discourse that instructs, cajoles, threatens, rewards and punishes" (Roy & Swaminathan, 2002, p. 41) the potential learners. An environment produced by a monologic pattern stifles the students. Although students and faculty experience the same environment, the nature of the interaction between the two is mostly formal, keeping them from getting to know each other on a more personal, cultural level. The goal of a participatory teacher is to create a more welcoming environment that encourages the students to participate in their learning and that attempts to decrease this cultural separation. It is difficult to facilitate genuine conversations where there is separation between participants. Genuine conversations accomplish more than just an exchange of information; they create changes in the character of the participants (Nesteruk, 2001). As the character of the participants changes, the relationship between them changes. When teachers and students go beyond their "safety zone of traditional roles" (Roy & Swaminathan, 2002, p. 50), they are able to break down the barriers that encourage monologue. By breaking down the barriers, the teachers and students can change the student–teacher relationships in the schools from "its fundamentally narrative character" (Freire, 1970/2003, p. 71), where the teacher narrates information to students, who listen without becoming actively engaged participants in the communication process—a process that is important for learning to take place.

Communication is an intricate part of learning, and dialogue is an intricate part of communication; therefore, dialogue is an important part of learning. Burbules (1993) described his concept of dialogical relations:

It (only) assumes that people are committed to a process of communication directed toward interpersonal understanding and that they hold, or are willing to develop some degree of concern for, interest in and respect toward one another. Within this relation there is a great deal that people, however different they might be, can do to pursue ways of speaking with and understanding one another. (p. 25)

Dialogue in teaching gives teachers insights into the thinking of students, allowing the teachers to adjust their teaching to meet the needs of the students. There can be true dialogue between teacher and students only when

the teacher views and experiences things from the students' perspectives (Roy & Swaminathan, 2002) and sees or views the students as co-contributors to the learning process. A participatory teacher should then reflect on the information received during the discourse, altering subsequent communications that transpire between the members to reflect knowledge gained from previous conversations. Dynamic conversations "that change those involved and that develop new capacities of questioning, engagement, and reflection" (Nesteruk, 2001, p. 123) result in learning and growth. As a result of reflection, each participant can become a more dynamic learner. A dialogical relationship evolves when both the teacher and the student are learning, "co-evolving" (Roy & Swaminathan, 2002). Ideally, all participants in a dialogue have the opportunity to learn as well as change.

Reflection

In a classroom setting, this dialogue creates an opportunity for students to be participants in their learning and, therefore, lifelong learners. When students are included in the dialogue, their "role is transformed from passive to active participation and their learning from isolated to contextually situated" (Graham & Thornley, 2000, p. 239). When teachers allow students to be participants in their learning, the students perceive ownership of their learning. When learners reflect and interpret, they become owners of their thoughts, and these thoughts will not weaken over time (Graham & Thornley, 2000). This process of reflecting and interpreting produces lifelong learners, as opposed to short-term learning, where students simply focus on course content or specific objectives.

The reflective learning process involves surfacing "contradiction between what [one] intends to achieve within any situations and the way [one] actually practices" (Johns, 1999, p. 241). Through reflection, the participants examine their beliefs and become vulnerable as they expose bits and pieces of themselves and their background. This reflective process distinguishes humans from animals and so results in the potential for change by "constantly recreating and transforming thinking" (Freire, 1970/2003, p. 99). This process also begins to empower the participants through critical thinking and reflective dialogue, and it allows them to eventually perceive reality as a process rather than a static entity. If growth is to be experienced, each participant must be willing to be vulnerable during reflection. This type of reflection involves more than an examination of one's thoughts; it also involves digesting someone else's beliefs and combining the two into a new perspective.

When dealing with complex issues, sometimes it is difficult to know exactly what one's opinions are initially. Reflection enables one to reach within and examine thoughts. One must "relate [oneself] to [oneself], to go deep within to know self and to [know] where the root of contradictions lie" (Johns, 1999,

p. 248). Some of these contradictions become evident through dialogue with others as they express their reflections to us. During discussions of controversial issues, students and professors are able to "articulate their own theory, critically examine it, check for consistency, coherence and adequacy, compare it with alternative theories and reconceptualize it in order to increase the effectiveness of their own professional thinking" (Griffiths & Tann, 1992, p. 69). Both the students and the professors grow from the interaction. During our project, we had the opportunity to reflect on the diverse views of one another, as well as our own perspectives. The dialogical process resulted in reflection on moral, ethical, and sometimes controversial issues.

In the process of reflecting with another participant, there is a difference between face-to-face and electronic discourse. Rodrigues (1999) observed, in her study of an online master's course, that the nature of the communication among the participants was more reflective during the online sessions, as opposed to the discourses of the face-to-face sessions. She found "that the structure of the forum discourse was significantly different from discourse found in face-to-face sessions" (p. 266). The structure of electronic discourse tends to become more in-depth. King (2001) noted, in a study of the influence of online dialogue, that discussions were more in-depth, participants brought their experiences into the dialogue to support their positions, and students perceived more in depth and critical thought. Students' comments are richer and more reflective because they have more time to formulate their thoughts before presenting them and because they can express their entire thought without the possibility of interruption from others (Rodrigues, 1999). Moore (1991), who conducted a telecommunications project with fifth graders, found that when the students engaged in dialogue via the Internet, they were more motivated to reflect on their thoughts and in turn express them to others. She also found that the longer students reflected through telecommunications, the deeper and more elaborate the responses became. One additional benefit that she found was that the students began to refine their communication skills. These benefits could not be realized in a face-to-face discourse.

Conversely, there are drawbacks to using technology for dialogue and reflection. Technology can sometimes be a hindrance when one has to wait for access, which is not always convenient and which can be poor or slow (Rodrigues, 1999). This obstacle infringes on the benefit of proximity that technology possesses. When listing obstacles to online communication, King (2001) cited several sources:

- Inequality in access to technology among the wider circle of adult learners
- The need for technical skills in order to participate
- The inconvenience of technology problems that sometimes prevent online connections
- Lack of immediate delivery of and response to communications

- Inability to "see" body language and hear expressions of voice
- Lack of the emotion and spontaneity of live conversations
- The possibility that technology can cause educators to be less responsive to students when it is used as an additional "layer" of separation
- Comfort level with technology is a consideration
- Uncertainty whether others read your posts when no one responds
- Reduced intimacy and personal contact
- Disadvantageous heavily text-based nature of the Web-board medium for certain learning styles. (pp. 348–349)

If teachers and students are aware of these obstacles, they can overcome them. For example, King (2001) urges teachers to be aware of students' experience with technology. Some have had poor experiences with the Internet, and others are simply uncomfortable. Rodrigues (1999) offers some suggestions for online education. For example, face-to-face contact is conducive to building a rapport, which is essential to online dialogue; furthermore, technology needs to be accessible to all participants. In sum, the perceived benefits of electronic dialogue outweigh the observed drawbacks.

Another benefit to electronic dialogue is the crossing of the perceived boundaries between students and teachers (Graham & Thornley, 2000). Any dialogue, not just electronic, between students and teachers contributes to the crossing of these boundaries. Griffiths and Tann (1992) suggested that there are different languages that a teacher utilizes when making connections between academic theory, personal theory, and everyday planning and evaluation. The researchers explained that teachers need to be able to translate from one language to the other. For boundaries to be crossed, a professor must translate his or her language for students. Students feel more comfortable when a teacher talks to them in their language without using educational jargon. It is difficult to communicate and build relationships when there is the communication barrier of language.

The relationship between teachers and students is important at the university level. However, universities are finding that the demographics of their student population are changing. Many students expect the university to adjust to their time constraints and the distance that they may have to travel; they often view themselves as being equals with the professors, and they do not desire to become passive listeners (West, 1999). Thompson (2001) cited many studies that indicated that informal student–faculty interaction has a positive influence on the attitudes, interests, and values of college students. From his study of community college students, Thompson concluded that there is a direct correlation between the amount of interpersonal contact with the professor and the value placed on the course. He indicated that his study implies that to create better learning environments, instructors should make every effort possible to create better relationships with students. To provide

the education that these students expect, professors need to find ways to cross the educational boundary at the college level.

Method

Framing

This research project was framed within our broad understanding of scholarly inquiry in the social context of preservice teacher education. Based on the problem statement and theoretical frame, multiple research processes were used to encourage reflective dialogue. This resulted in the promotion of a collaboration between two professors and a preservice teacher, empowering each participant through professional growth. In addition, the participants were enabled to critically analyze the process for emergent themes and knowledge—both personal and professional. First, they were committed to reading, reflecting, and responding to each chapter of Alfie Kohn's *What to Look for in a Classroom* (1998), to the use of dialogue to create a learning community of three members, and to the use of electronic mail to facilitate communication across time and distance. We began with the perspective that our research project would be a critical study because we were using a critical text that problematized education in schools in the United States. We analyzed the work through our practical experience and in turn critically analyzed our experience through reflectively reading the text (Anderson, 1998; Lather, 1986).

Professor 1 had initial discussions with the student to identify a text that could be discussed electronically throughout the semester. Kohn's text was eventually agreed on, owing to its topical and often controversial essays (i.e., school uniforms, grade inflation, self-esteem) and it length of chapters, which varied from 2 or 3 pages to 20 on some topics. Knowing the background of Professor 2 and her research interests in dialogical, narrative, and critical reflective analysis, Professor 1 found her participation a welcomed addition to the dialogue. Initially, the participants agreed to read one of the 18 chapters of Kohn's text each week. Because the honors option was for the student, she took responsibility to initiate dialogue by typing a response and electronically sending it to Professors 1 and 2. Each professor typed responses within the preservice teacher's text, thereby producing dialogue. It was not predetermined whether Professor 1 or 2 would respond first or second. The second professor to respond could address Kohn's text, the preservice teacher's text, and the other professor's comments. After receiving the initial round of comments, each participant reflected and responded a second time, which resulted in raising additional questions and resulting in renewed clarity. Each week, hard copies of all comments were made and archived for analysis following the completion of the book.

Professor 1 maintained weekly in-class contact with the student as a part of the general course requirement. Professor 2 began participating in the electronic dialogue from the beginning but did not have a face-to-face meeting with the student until late in the semester following the completion of the book reading and dialogue.

The next stage of the research project was designed to support the development of the preservice teacher's research and writing skills. Professor 2 had already engaged in several projects supporting the use of dialogue to create a learning community, but all three participants conducted searches and met to talk about analyzing the data and writing the review of the literature. Because the preservice teacher was required to complete a research project as part of the honors program, Professors 1 and 2 agreed to provide guidance and support while encouraging her to take the lead on writing the review of the literature and analyzing the data. Because the primary components of this participatory action research project included a critical text, technology, and dialogical inquiry methods to cross traditional instructional and learning boundaries, the participants experienced equal opportunities for learning and growth.

Adapting Narrative Analysis to an Honors Project Methodology

Grounded in narrative methods of analysis, as delineated by Polkinghorne (1995), Professor 2 designed the honors project similarly to the way that she teaches her regularly scheduled courses, integrating teaching and narrative research methods. The honors project was a critical narrative action research project in the way that it was designed, with the intention of shifting the traditional power relationship—namely, that of monologuing teacher—to one of dialoguing teachers with student. The preservice teacher assumed an equal, if not privileged, role as student/teacher in the way that she initiated the dialogue for each chapter by engaging the two professors (who had agreed to respond to the text only after she had first stated her perspectives) and by creating a dialogue pattern with them.

The project was similarly critical in that the two professors took a backseat role as guide and mentor while the preservice teacher assumed the role of lead researcher and author. Following the collection of data through the electronic dialogue process, Professor 2 explained the process of analyzing narrative texts and writing a narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). The preservice teacher assumed the role of lead researcher by analyzing the narrative data from the electronic dialogues and writing a narrative analysis of the research process and product. The two professors read the narrative analysis and offered reflective feedback as a part of the process to ensure fidelity in the intersubjective inquiry process as a measure of trustworthiness (Moss, 2004).[1]

Narrative Analysis

The honors project began during the first week of January of the spring 2002 semester, and all the dialogue data used in this analysis were collected during January, February, March, and April 2002. Each participant reflected his or her thoughts on each critical topic that otherwise might not have been explored in the traditional classroom owing to lack of time and direct personal contact. Because the discourse occurred via the Internet, the topics were explored at the leisure of each participant, allowing flexibility that the classroom did not permit. Because the initial dialogue was not face-to-face, each participant was able to reflect more deeply in a nonthreatening environment. In this electronic environment, the participants made themselves vulnerable, bridging the gap between educator and student, as is evident in the dialogue that follows.

Student: [Kohn] commented that students who think about grades are less interested in really learning. I am a living testimony of this fact. When I was in high school, I was very concerned about grades. I would memorize, memorize, and memorize in order to get an A on the test. I did not investigate any further than I needed to. I did receive the rewards I want for my memorization—all A's. However, if I were asked to recall anything I had memorized for a test a week later, I would not be able to respond. I memorized for the reward, but I did not learn for life.

Professor 2: I am not sure about my personal view of grades in terms of my own motivation. For me, the A represented the amount of learning. I did not see the grade as a reward, but as an indicator of the learning that had taken place. I wanted the grade and learning to be the same. I strove for the A, but it was learning that the A represented that I really wanted. I never feel like people understand that. I am reminded of how much my daughter enjoyed basketball practice, maybe more than the game. She enjoyed playing. Even in the game, she enjoyed playing as much as winning.

Professors and students do not often expose a piece of themselves in a classroom setting, thus making it more difficult to cross the boundaries. In a traditional classroom setting, the student may not have openly admitted her "foolishness" to just learn for the moment. In addition, most professors do not take the time to discuss their experiences as students themselves.

As each professor responded, the student reflected on her views as a preservice teacher and so began to create a framework in which to develop a philosophy of teaching. Griffiths and Tann (1992) suggested that when referring to the education of teachers, the terms *public* and *personal* should replace the labels *theory* and *practice*. Preservice teachers create their personal theories, which they revise from their practice through reflection. Griffiths

and Tann further indicated that "personal theories need to be revealed (at different levels) so that they can be scrutinized, challenged, compared to public theories, and then confirmed or reconstructed" (p. 72). During our discourse, the student revealed her personal theories and compared them to the professors' public theories. The student then reconstructed her theories through the process of reflection.

The professors' sharing of experiences also influenced the preservice teacher's construction of her theories.

Professor 2: I always approached my middle school students from the perspective that they were "filled vessels" and it was my job to help them to get to the outside what was already on the inside. I would talk to my students about how they had to learn to show the adults on the outside what they knew. They had to do it in a way that the adults, who were limited in their abilities to see, could understand. So, if we have a state test, and that is the only way adults can recognize children's learning or knowledge, the children are left with the responsibility to translate their knowledge into that form. It's sad to me. We give a lot of responsibility to children. As teachers, I have always thought we should be looking inside our students to learn what they know.

Professor 1: Ha . . . much of my early years teaching middle school were survival I think, so I wish I could have had more of the [Professor 2] perspective in my early career. I think in my early career, I lacked the ability to be reflective to the point that I thought this deeply about the learning process. In mathematics, especially, I was always driven by the curriculum and got caught up in the issues of pouring as much information as possible into those "empty vessels." I now understand the poor perspective I had at the time. At this point in our state and country with the testing frenzy in full swing, it will continue to be a difficult discussion to encourage meaningful learning while also trying to meet state mandated testing goals and standards. Kohn addresses these issues more completely in a later chapter I think.

Students are not typically exposed to dialogue between teachers in a traditional atmosphere. This type of discourse enables the student to be an onlooker during the conversation and so extract some of the professors' experiences to supplement his or her own. In this example, the student becomes an active observer of different opinions and experiences and is allowed to participate and share her perspective.

The results of the reflective electronic dialogue suggest that the student experienced a sense of critical expertise. The following are excerpts of dialogue that suggest that this experience provided evidence of the reflective growth of our student.

In the student's first entry, she demonstrates her inexperience at reflection.

Student: I know a lot of my opinions and thoughts at this point are very idealistic since I have not faced the "real world" of teaching. I am still in the position of being easily swayed [by the author or the professors] because everyone's (pro and con) opinions sound so logical.

In an entry dated January 28, the student begins showing reflective growth after the reading and reflection of chapter 1.

Student: I think Kohn puts it well when he suggests that we are asking the wrong questions when trying to solve some [behavioral] problems and therefore set out to solve them in a less than beneficial way. We should not be asking how to teach kids the skills of responsibility and respect, but rather why they are not being responsible and respectful.

In an entry dated April 15, the student reflects on the growth that she had realized throughout the project.

Student: In the last year, so many of my views of what school is and should be have changed. I used to think the grade and the product were the most important results of school. I did not give any consideration to the process of learning. Through reading Kohn's book, dialoguing with [Professor 1] and [Professor 2], completing research on various topics, and participating in classroom discussions, I have changed a lot of my views. I now see the value of the process of learning, the [potential] detriment of competition, and the harm of rewards.

The student's participation in the project contributed to her learning experience, exposure to critical issues, reflective capacity, and teaching philosophy—in other words, her growth.

In a similar fashion, both participating university professors were allowed to engage in a critical dialogue on the sensitive and controversial educational topics that Kohn presents. As the professors engaged in this collegial dialogical process, they each had the opportunity to reflect on and experience their professional growth with each other, as well as encourage the growth of the student. The student learned from the professors, and the professors learned from the student. Sample excerpts are listed as follows.

Professor 1: I agree with [student participant's] statement above [that advanced placement classes should not be the total focus of the school]. However, schools that are very AP driven are very much focused on producing results from their students on these exams and they determine their success

by their passing rates. Professor 2 and I recently visited —— private high school last fall and their principal was quick to suggest that they are very AP driven and "teach to the test" specifically. He even suggested that when they have tried to incorporate non-AP courses for students to select, they have found that these courses are quickly "ghettoized" by the AP courses [seldom having enough students enrolled to constitute a course].

During a discussion concerning school uniforms, Professor 2 reflected on her experience and expressed her opinion concerning uniformity of thought.

Professor 2: My thoughts are similar to [Professor 1's]. I might add a concern that we sometimes forget that patterns of behavior are simply that—patterns or norms of behavior. Somehow, these patterns or norms become reified, and we work to sustain the patterns and norms without questioning their origin.

Teachers do not realize how much they can learn from students and thus create growth for themselves. Crossing the boundaries between student and teacher enables the teacher to observe issues from the student's perspective and in turn grow from the exchange.

Discussion

The outcome of this project produced more benefits than what were originally expected. One such benefit was the enhancement of lifelong learning. It is important for students to do more than memorize facts and new terminology if they are to successfully absorb the knowledge and obtain a deeper understanding. Without appreciating the knowledge that they have obtained, they will begin to question the worth of their education (Nesteruk, 2001). For students to become lifelong learners, they must become engaged in their learning through reflection. This dialogue gave the student an opportunity to fully study and reflect on the controversial issues—not just to memorize. She learned more through this reflection than she would have in a traditional course that required memorization of facts. This changed the preservice teacher's attitudes and perspectives through reflecting on what she believed with regard to certain issues. Moreover, the dialogue encouraged the discussion of other subjects, which could not have been accomplished during a traditional class, with its time constraints. In addition, the student appeared to gain confidence in challenging her professors' comments and opinions and those of a critically acclaimed educational author, Alfie Kohn, as seen in the following excerpts from the 2002 narrative data.

Student: I did, however, feel Kohn chose some of the worst case scenarios to establish his case against logical consequences discipline. The examples he

provided from his sources were not a logical consequence to any behavior. I would be interested to know what some of the authors' other examples were. I am sure there are occasions when a logical consequence is appropriate. For example, if a student turns homework in late without a justifiable reason, then it is not accepted. This is a logical consequence to an action.

Professor 2: I find myself wanting to disagree with you that not accepting late homework, unless for a justifiable reason, is a logical consequence. From my point of view as teacher of seventh-grade students in a low socioeconomic school, I never turned down a completed assignment, no matter how late. It was interesting how my students developed a pattern of doing homework as they experienced learning from the process of doing the work and getting feedback from me. For me, it was logical that if I accepted the work and encouraged my discouraged students, they would respond by doing more learning instead of less.

Professor 1: [Professor 2] makes a good argument here. Logical consequences are sometimes hard to define. If kids start a food fight in the cafeteria, then the logical discipline consequence may be to have them grab a mop and bucket rather than three days of suspension. I agree with [Professor 2] to a point that flexibility is important but I personally am willing to only be flexible to a point. Therefore, in the case of late homework or assignments, I would rather have the assignment be turned in late and a quality product, rather than be in on time and piece of junk that is not worthwhile. But there eventually comes a deadline and in effect, encourages students to eventually meet a standard that is acceptable and reasonable. I also agree with [student] and her comments that Kohn could have selected much better examples for this chapter.

The reflection helped set the stage for a lifelong learner, and it helped the preservice teacher connect theory and practice.

Student: The author has a very interesting way of approaching these sometimes controversial subjects. I like the way he causes me to stop and think.

Professor 2: Are you conscious that is evidence you are reflective? When, at other times, you have insights surface from the complexity of all the stopping and thinking, you are experiencing the metacognitive.

Professor 1: Good comment by [Professor 2] here in that it is important to think about the reflective nature of the teaching experience. This reflective practitioner approach is really the best way to continue to revise your teaching perspective and grow as a teacher.

The student was able to read Kohn's perspective on controversial issues, reflect on them, relay her thoughts, read the professor's comments, and then revise her own theories. The student's theories may not have been challenged in a traditional classroom. In addition, the practice of reflection and revision in this manner is not introduced in the constraints of many classroom settings.

The constraints of the classroom often create a barrier between teacher and student. This may be created by the proximity of the teacher to the students—you are there, I am here (often referred to, euphemistically, as being a sage on the stage, rather than a guide on the side). During electronic discourse, the issue of proximity begins to dissolve; each participant has the opportunity to function on the same level of discourse. This enables the participants to participate in the dialogue as equals, encouraging the revelation of personal information and potentially crossing perceived or stereotypical educational barriers.

Professor 2: I suffered from low self-esteem as a child, adolescent, and adult. Sometimes, I still do. I'm not sure if low self-esteem can ever be totally eradicated from one's life. It has been my experience that when I push myself to access relationship[s] with others and allow their personhood to influence my personhood, I grow. . . . Even this ongoing dialogue about Kohn's text takes time and work on the part of the three of us. Though I have not met [student] face to face, my life has been nurtured by the dialogue with her. I feel the time and effort she puts into what we are doing. I think this contributes to my self-esteem, my consciousness that "I am."

Eliminating proximity and providing a nonthreatening environment crosses the barrier between professor and student, educationally and personally. However, Graham and Thornley (2000) noted one drawback when using technology: the absence of visual clues to initiate continual dialogue. Unlike face-to-face discourse, dialogue via the Internet does not allow the participants to observe body language, facial expression, or tone of voice. The student found it difficult to evaluate the meaning of some of the professors' comments because she was not able to gain clues readily obtained in face-to-face dialogue and because she could not easily ask for clarification of comments. As a result, the student felt somewhat demeaned.

Student: I think Kohn has some very logical comments concerning rewards.

Professor 2: Logical to whom?

In addition, the student, who had not been introduced to one of the professors, observed that personal contact is lost through the use of electronic technology. After the student met the professor and subsequently reread the

responses, she found statements previously viewed as being critical to be less so. Given that facial expressions and tone of voice are absent to aid in the interpretation of statements, some type of personal contact before initiating an electronic dialogue could diminish misunderstandings that may result.

The student also found there were issues that she wanted to continue to address, but she found it difficult to carry on an actual conversation concerning these issues. At times, the student posed questions that the professors failed to address.

Student: I agree the reason for the implementation of any program helps determine its effectiveness. Professor 2, what was the underlying justification for the uniforms in your school? Also, were the students and parents informed of the justifications?

Student: Professor 1, what factors do you feel have caused support of uniforms in your wife's school that are not evident at schools that have not received such support?

Electronic dialogue inhibits repeated conversational contact unless the participants continue to respond until all questions have been addressed.

Although there are drawbacks to the use of electronic technology in dialogue, this method of discourse provides benefits to teachers and students that should not be ignored. Through this project, it was evident that the student began to connect theory and practice as she reflected on critical issues, listened to views of the professors, and revisited her conclusions and revised what she believed. Furthermore, the student actively participated in her learning by participating in two-way dialogue with the professors. In addition, educational boundaries were crossed when student and teachers entered a less-threatening atmosphere, potentially placing themselves on a level playing field of discourse. In the university setting, where students can easily become numbers and statistics, it is critical that instructors provide additional avenues of participatory learning experiences. Particularly in schools of education, where preservice teachers should be experiencing best-practice instructional methods while discussing critical and controversial educational topics, it becomes essential that both students and instructors become continual participants and learners of new information, as well as welcome consumers of different points of view, opinions, and experiences. Most important, the use of dialogue and narrative inquiry is perhaps a first step in crossing traditionally perceived academic and personal boundaries, as well as an effort to enhance the professional and intellectual growth of all participants. Professor 2 expressed this in one of her last e-mail entries: "Thank you, [student], for all the teaching you have done in this collaborative and dialogical learning process. I, too, have learned." TEP

Note

1. The two professors have conducted a similar dialogue research project with an Amish teacher (see Zehr, Moss, & Nichols, 2005). Although electronic modes were not used, cultural and formal education boundaries were crossed.

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