

## SITE proposal

Title: Developing a global forum for intercultural critical literacy

A group of university faculty from Pennsylvania, Virginia, Minnesota, Sweden, Germany, and Finland has developed a web-based forum to engage their students in global discussions of interpretations about print and media texts. In this roundtable presentation, participants from the different universities will share analyses of the discussions that took place to highlight the character of intercultural critical literacy supported by the forum. They will also share an analysis of the development of the software interface, and forum content, to highlight how the web-based forums support easy use and an international e-learning community. Systematic data gathered from the forums and the participating students and teachers provide the basis for the analyses.

### The character of intercultural critical literacy

This portion of the presentation will share descriptive statistics of forum interactions, sequences of discussion that highlight intercultural critical thinking, and key survey data from participants evaluating the international forum experience. As if the submission of this proposal, the piccleForum at consists of the following forum categories and specific forums:

#### **piccleForum: A Pedagogy for Inter-Cultural Critical Literacy Education**

##### **Media and Popular Culture**

- Cultural Icons
- Discuss News Articles
- Arguments on Global Events

##### **Technology and Society**

- Impacts of Technology

##### **Literature and Culture**

- Discuss Short Stories
- Intercultural Encounters
- Interpretation
- Children's worlds in novels

##### **Pedagogy and Literacy**

- Cultural Perceptions of Literacy
- Critical Literacy
- Early childhood and ESL issues

##### **Student Open Forum**

- Student Forum 1

##### **Teacher Forum**

- Teacher Forum 1

##### **Help**

- Tutorial Forum

In the Spring and Summer semesters 2004, three forums were active: Discuss News Articles, Discuss Short Stories, and Intercultural Encounters. Respectively, they had 102, 42, and 19 students who logged in 1,044, 231, and 238 times to read and post 434, 99, and 93 messages. The Discuss News Articles Forum was built around 5 articles reporting on news events in Africa, Sweden, and the United States. The Discuss Short Stories forum involved reading a short story about two young girls, one a Swedish immigrant and the other African-American, separated by race. The Intercultural Encounters forum engaged students in comparing selections from a Swedish novel *Popular Music* and a Hispanic-American novel *House on Mango Street*. At the time of this proposal, Fall 04 semester forums are in progress.

The analysis of completed forum discussions suggest that participants' initial responses to the content provided international partners with opportunities to learn about others' cultures, to question the cultural basis for interpretations, and to reflect and revise on one's own interpretations as culturally shaped. Each of these types of interaction highlight different aspects of critical literacy.

#### The character of the PICCLE forum software interface

This portion of the presentation will share descriptions of how the forum content was developed and authored by the participating faculty, and how the software interface was designed to support forum interaction.

In the 2003-04 academic year, the forums were housed on a Swedish based platform called PingPong. The technical side of this platform required extensive administrative involvement to create accounts and author content for the discussion forums. PingPong also had many courseware features that supported the delivery of distance education courses, but that created many superfluous options and screens for the student user. In the 2004-05 academic year, the forums are housed on a specifically designed global forum, built from the open-source software Moodle. The forum environment was reduced to just those courseware modules that might support international discussion, greatly simplifying the interface.

The participating faculty experienced many difficulties in negotiating and creating the forum content. Most of these difficulties centered around finding partner faculty who had common interests, and courses with students who might see the international discussion as relevant to their learning activity. Some difficulties arose from differing academic schedules as faculty sought time frames for student interaction. Time differences between partner locations did not pose a problem. However, geographic distance did pose some difficulty to faculty as they struggled with ways to interact with their partners to develop the appropriate content for a forum. Ultimately, email connections between faculty, and strong leadership at each university location in content development, facilitated the goals of the global forum. Participants in this presentation will share their leadership strategies and particular stories of faculty motivation to be involved.