Abstract

This paper presents the results of a study to explore the use of weblogs with pre-service teacher education students during their classroom based practicum and identify the students’ perceptions of a sense of connection and community with their fellow students. The purpose of the study is to examine pre-service teacher education students’ use of weblogs during their field based practicum and examines the students’ perceptions of the degree to which a community of learners was created during their experiences. Results and suggestions for the use of blogs are presented.

Introduction

The use and acceptance of weblogs as an educational tool has increased and continues to be documented in reports and studies (Blanchard, 2004; Lowe & Williams, 2004). The goal, role, or intent of a blog is just a place for self-reflection, thinking, exploring ideas and thoughts “out-loud”, sharing ideas and learning from what you write and from the comments others place on your blog. This open publication of your ideas can be linked to other blogs, articles, websites, or whatever else you are thinking and writing about. The availability of blogging software and host sites in most cases is free for now and is easy to set up, use, and contribute to other blogs. This study was an investigation into the use of weblogs with pre-service teacher education students during their practicum experiences. The issues examined included the use of blogs by the students, the effect this use had on the perceptions of maintaining connections with classmates, building a community of learners, and becoming reflective practitioners.

Setting

Typically, teacher preparation programs require pre-service teacher education students to complete several classroom experiences that range from a single day’s observation to that of a full semester of student teaching. As the students progress in their degree program, these experiences increase in both the duration and the responsibilities assigned to the pre-service teacher education students. Student complete a variety of activities during these field experiences and reflect on what they see and learn. Many times it is only the professor that contributes feedback to the student’s reflections and the interactions with classmates may be limited.

This study was conducted to explore the use of weblogs as a means for creating an environment for open communications and increasing the opportunities pre-service teacher education students have to interact with each other and reflect on their experiences when they are in the field placements. Participants in this study were ten pre-service teacher education students enrolled in a 5-week classroom based advanced practicum course prior to their study teaching semester. Each of the participants were
placed within a school setting and classroom where they would be completing their student teaching. All the school locations were geographically dispersed with a maximum distance of 300 miles, making face-to-face meetings impractical. Students were given a list of projects and activities to complete on a weekly basis, with corresponding reflective questions to generate comments and discussion.

A course weblog site was created for the purpose of organization of the 5-weeks and as a common area for checking the list of activities, reflective questions, and discussions. Students were co-authors of this site and full editing abilities to add their thoughts, reflections, and to comment on other postings.

Findings

Participants reported that the blog allowed them to share their thoughts, ideas, issues, and concerns and greatly appreciated the feedback provided by the supervising professor. But more importantly, the discussion, comments, and feedback from their classmates on their individual experience proved to be more valuable in developing a sense of connectedness and community. Participants reported that they felt they could share both the good and the bad experiences and were comforted by the comments of others in a similar situation. The use of the weblog allow for the participants to connect with each other and have deeper discussions of the issues they were facing in their classrooms.

Suggestions for further study include use of weblogs early in the degree program to develop a sense of open communication and publication of student thoughts, ideas, and concerns to develop both their understandings of begin an educator and to increase their ability to critically reflect on their learning and share their thoughts.

http://blogresearch.com/ref.htm