

Teacher Talk: Capturing Innovative Teacher Voices on the World Wide Web

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Integrating practical wisdom from teachers in the field with teacher preparation provides several challenges that technology can overcome. This paper reports on an innovative use of the World Wide Web that allows practicing teachers to share their experiences with preservice teachers. *Teacher Talk* focuses on issues relevant to teachers and uses the Internet to reach its audience and multimedia to engage teachers. In an evaluation of one issue of *Teacher Talk* on sexuality issues, those students who had access increased their knowledge and their comfort level in dealing with sexuality issues in the classroom.

For years teacher educators have struggled with the integration of practice in the public school classroom with the theory of the college classroom. Emerging teachers need to both absorb classroom experience and listen to the sage advice of teachers in the field. The need to learn from experienced classroom teachers increases as preservice teachers approach their student teaching assignments. Providing the opportunity for preservice teachers to hear innovative teachers talk about their trade is essential to broaden horizons and make connections between theory and practice. However, this is often a difficult component to implement in teacher education programs.

Preservice teachers' preference for practical advice for the classroom is well known to teacher educators. The philosophical underpinnings of their

preparation are often shunned by preservice teachers in favor of the more "relevant" need to compile teaching tips and strategies to use when they get into the classroom. Helping preservice teachers to understand that teaching is not as simple as they may think presents a challenging task for teacher educators. Rodriguez (1993) asks pointedly, "Where do students get the impression that learning how to be a teacher can be packaged into easily transferable sets of classroom management routines, teaching strategies or learning-enhancing devices?" (p. 217).

Katz and Raiths (1992) refer to a dilemma for teacher educators between an emphasis in coursework on the current versus the future needs of teacher candidates. The current needs, as perceived by candidates, are represented by the packaged, step-by-step teaching practices. The future needs are more complex and difficult to pursue, such as helping preservice teachers uncover their own beliefs and concerns, but will yield much greater returns in effective teaching and learning. Wilson (1990) echoes this, explaining that her students expect to learn recipes for teaching and feel cheated if they do not get them. Instead, Wilson engages preservice teachers in the arduous task of critically examining their own ingrained conceptions of the nature of teaching, learning, and knowing and relates these constructs to their future roles as educators.

These issues are directly related to the debate over theory versus practice in teacher education. This involves a balance between providing preservice teachers with knowledge of major theories and movements in education as well as pragmatic teaching strategies. The practical experiences are largely realized through field-based placements of classroom observations and student teaching. However, these field experiences have their limitations; students are only able to observe a few teachers. It is no surprise, then, that preservice teachers tend to see student teaching as the most beneficial experience in their education program because it is entirely relevant to their future profession. This further exacerbates the incongruence between what is taught in education courses and what is learned in the field (Guyton & McIntyre, 1990). Despite the present situation, the theory/practice dilemma need not be an either/or proposition in teacher education. The practicing teacher can serve an important role by satisfying preservice teachers' needs to hear teaching tips "right from the horse's mouth" and by helping them to understand the issues teachers face in the classroom.

Historically, the linkage of preservice teachers with practitioners has been a natural and common one in the United States. Based on the apprenticeship model, teachers-to-be learned the trade from a mentor in the field.

By the mid-1900s, laboratory schools served to provide preservice teachers with opportunities to work with students as a way to complement their own studies. This hands-on practice gradually changed with the development of student teaching and field placement experiences (Stallings & Kowalski, 1990). Despite the value of these efforts, each requires an enormous commitment of time and resources to adequately support it.

Recently, there have been calls for innovative practitioners to play an increased role in the preparation of preservice teachers (Goodlad, 1990; Holmes Group, 1986; Nowicki, 1991), though options for providing a place for the practitioner in teacher education programs have been difficult to create. Professional Development Schools (PDS) have sought to build a more substantial school-university partnership aimed at improving education and better preparing teachers (Abdal-Haqg, 1992; Levine, 1988). Some teacher educators have found that bringing in practitioners as guest speakers in methods classes is enthusiastically received by preservice teachers. Whatever the approach, dialogue between future and veteran teachers is vital to the preparation of preservice teachers (Feiman-Neimser & Parker, 1990; Nowicki, 1991).

With the advent of new technologies and media, there are new ways in which preservice teachers can access innovative teachers' voices as they prepare to enter the field. This paper describes one such approach on the World Wide Web, *Teacher Talk Forum*. In this paper, we will describe the content and the processes by which it was created and a preliminary evaluation of the impact *Teacher Talk* has on preservice teachers.

TEACHER TALK

Teacher Talk gives practicing teachers more opportunities to reach out to preservice teachers, without the limitations of geography and time. Developed at the Center for Adolescent Studies at Indiana University, *Teacher Talk* is offered through three media: print, video, and the World Wide Web. Beginning with a print format, *Teacher Talk* was created to provide a means of helping preservice teachers understand the emotional, social, and cognitive developmental needs of secondary students. This was accomplished through interviews with innovative teachers. The voices of practicing teachers were accessed by several means and then translated to the *Teacher Talk* publication for preservice teachers.

Process

To guide the development of the publication, an advisory board was created. The *Teacher Talk* Advisory Board consisted of the target population (preservice teachers), student teachers, and young, practicing teachers. This group served to advise on topic selection, help identify resources, write articles, and edit material. They were also supportive in distribution and in the evaluation processes. For example, one of the young teachers on the Advisory Board discovered a very effective book for first-year teachers. She wrote a book review of that book for the second issue of *Teacher Talk*.

For teacher contributions, we initially talked to teachers with whom we had worked previously and later broadened the search nationally to include master teachers. Members of the Advisory Board and the Center staff all knew of teachers who had innovative, effective practices around the themes we were discussing. Those teachers were asked to contribute ideas or specific lesson plans in the area of interest. Often those teachers referred us to other teachers in their school districts or to colleagues nationally. We also made contacts with teachers through a number of ongoing research projects at Indiana University. Thus, we were able to identify examples of innovative practice nationally.

After the second edition, we tapped into several computer networks and lists. We posed the general question or theme raised in an issue of *Teacher Talk*, and teachers on these networks freely gave us advice and lesson plans. Often teachers that contacted us in this way had also published their ideas in one of the journals or other professional publications. Adaptations of those articles always included an interview with the teacher to authenticate the practice and to identify those elements that would be most relevant to preservice teachers.

Features

The print format of *Teacher Talk* is a brief four page publication enhanced with lively illustrations. Each issue focuses on a particular theme (see Table 1). In addition, a pullout, middle-page section called "Great Ideas!" provides some ready-to-use classroom ideas surrounding each issue's theme.


Initially, the Advisory Board created a long list noting types of articles that are often found in publications for teachers. These included interviews with teachers, ideas for lesson plans, ideas for unit plans, book reviews,

program descriptions, information articles, quizzes, interviews with teachers, and resources for further information. Using the list created by the Advisory Board as a basis, we experimented with a number of different features in our initial issues of *Teacher Talk*. (Figures 1 and 2 show examples of two unique *Teacher Talk* features.) Each time we distributed an issue, we also included a reader evaluation form. This reader evaluation survey asked about the utility of various topics.

What is your classroom management profile?

Answer these 12 questions and learn more about your classroom management profile. The steps are simple:

1. read each statement carefully;
2. Choose your response, from the scale below, and write it in the shape that precedes the statement;
3. Respond to each statement based upon either actual or imagined classroom experience;
4. Then, follow the scoring instructions on the next page. It couldn't be easier!



Strongly Disagree Neutral Strongly Agree


1 2 3 4 5

□ ◊ ◻ ○ ◊ ◻ △ □ ○ △ ○

If a student is disruptive during class, I assign him/her to detention, without further discussion.

◊ □ △ ○

I don't want to impose any rules on my students.



□ The classroom must be quiet in order for students to learn

△ I am concerned about what my students learn and how they learn.

◊ If a student turns in a late homework assignment, it is not my problem.

○ I don't want to reprimand a student because it might hurt his/her feelings.

◊ Class preparation isn't worth the effort.

△ I always try to explain the reasons behind my rules and decisions.

□ I will not accept excuses from a student who is lazy.

○ The emotional well-being of my students is more important than classroom control.

△ My students understand that they can interrupt my lecture if they have a relevant question

○ If a student requests a hall pass, I always honor the request.

Figure 1. Classroom management quiz.

Volume 1, Issue 3

Teacher Talk

Topic: Earth Science.


Lesson objective: To have students understand the dynamics of how AIDS is transmitted.

Grade level and subject area: Grades 10, 11, Earth Science, Biology, and Chemistry.

Activities and strategies: The teacher distributes a cup to each student which is half full for half empty of water. At least one student has a cup with the "AIDS" virus, which can be any base, including a small amount of baking soda or baking powder or a weak solution of NaOH.

The students then mill about the room interacting with at least 10 other students, sometimes just talking, but always holding their own and/or another's cup. Finally, the teacher will give another student a cup full of the indicator, phenolphthalein, to each cup. These cups

Probability, and A.I.D.S.



which have been "infected" with the base will change from clear to a color.

This activity can be followed by a discussion or serve as a bridge to other activities. The teacher can explain that the activity symbolizes the transmission of the AIDS virus, and that while it is true that many people contract the virus, many people do not become exposed to the disease.

Resources and materials: cups, a base and phenolphthalein. This activity was conducted by 20 teachers at Grover Cleveland HS in Ridgewood, VA.

Figure 2. Example of a lesson plan from the "Great Ideas!" section

Lesson plans—"Great Ideas!" After the first issue, readers expressed a need for specific lesson plans to put into practice the ideas expressed in *Teacher Talk*. In response to this need, we created a one-page insert for each issue which contained four "Great Ideas!". Each "Great Idea!" details a classroom-tested lesson or unit plan. Topics for "Great Ideas!" include science experiments, activities for first day of classes, oral history, integrating art, and AIDS education.

Teacher Talk video forum. The video extension of *Teacher Talk* grew out of the need to provide views on controversial subjects from multiple perspectives. The first video was based on a panel discussion on sex education curricula for issue three. In the video, a group of educators shared their views on the purposes, rationale, and implementation of sex education curricula, as well as their views on how sexual issues arise in the secondary classrooms of today. The participating educators represented the spectrum of voices heard in the current debate about sex education. An edited version of this forum served to complement a print issue of *Teacher Talk* on the same topic.

The second *Teacher Talk* Video Forum focused on conflict resolution and violence prevention. The Forum served as the source of material for *Teacher Talk* issue six and a video. Secondary educators and administrators from middle and high schools gathered to discuss the topics. They came from urban, suburban, and rural school districts. The participants discussed the prevalence of conflict, strategies for addressing conflict, and examples of how to deal with specific situations that involved conflict.

World Wide Web. Once the success of *Teacher Talk* was established as a means of integrating teacher voices into preservice teacher education, we began to explore options for expanding the audience. Because educators' access to the Internet has been increasing, the World Wide Web has become an important medium for communication. Through the Web, *Teacher Talk Forum* was established (<http://education.indiana.edu/cas/tforum/tforum.html>). The core of *Teacher Talk Forum* is nine issues of *Teacher Talk* (see Table 1). In addition, there are the following links:

- **Museums:** Links to museum homepages as well as virtual museums with an educational focus.
- **Lesson Plans:** Over 20 headings and about 100 lesson plans are available on-line from sources throughout the world.
- **News and Information:** Updates on legislation, conferences, requests for proposals, and other education related information.
- **Schools:** Highlights some exemplary homepages and Websites from schools throughout the world.
- **Teacher Resources:** Direct links to educational databases and other Websites.
- **Internet Field trips On-line:** For topics such as "zoos" or "space exploration," links to a variety of Web resources in these areas.
- **Kids on the Internet:** Websites and homepages of work done by students.
- **For Teens Only:** Links to teen-zines, teen-oriented Websites, and other information about positive teen activities.

Table 1
Description of *Teacher Talk* Issues

ISSUE	THEME	MEDIA	CONTENT
#1	Building Student-Teacher Rapport	Print, Internet	-Interviews with 3 classroom teachers about their strategies -Resources -Caring teachers: students' perspectives -Service learning
#2	Classroom Management	Print, Internet, Lesson Plans, Cartoons	-Assess your classroom management profile -Descriptions of 4 different styles -Book review - Wong & Wong, <i>The First Days of School</i> -Conflict mediation
#3	Sexuality in Schools	Print, Video, Internet, Lesson Plans, Cartoons	-Questions teens ask about sex -Assess your knowledge about teen sexuality -Dealing with sex issues in the classroom -School-based clinics -Educational programs for pregnant teens
#4	Education Outside the Classroom	Print, Internet, Cartoons, Lesson Plans	-Changes in the workforce -Global education -Service learning -School-business partnerships -Senior volunteers -Communications technology -Internet primer
#5	Diversity	Print, Internet, Cartoons, Lesson Plans	-Assess your knowledge of diversity issues -Characteristics of special populations -Strategies for success in diverse classrooms -T. E. S. A. -Resiliency
#6	Conflict in Schools	Print, Video, Internet, Cartoons, Lesson Plans	-What to expect -Strategies for dealing with conflict in classrooms, halls & on school grounds -Crisis management -Teaching about peace

(continued on next page)

Table 1 (Continued)
Description of *Teacher Talk* Issues

ISSUE	THEME	MEDIA	CONTENT
#7	Student Teaching	Print, Internet, Cartoons, Lesson Plans	-Preparing for effective student teaching -Common concerns -Building rapport with students -Building rapport with your cooperating teacher -Student teaching program alternatives
#8	Mental Health Issues	Internet, Cartoons, Lesson Plans, Web linkages	-Quiz: how much do you know about ADD, suicide, depression, eating disorders -Accounts on each mental health concern from a teacher's experience and from a teen's experience -You have the right to remain silent: Teacher legal responsibilities -Good drugs
#9	Alcohol and Other Drugs	Internet, Cartoons, Lesson Plans, Web linkages	-Prevention -Intervention -After Care -Programs that work -Risk factors -Definition of Student Assistance Programs

EVALUATION

Method

As a preliminary evaluation of the impact of the *Teacher Talk* publication, 57 preservice teachers, enrolled in a general methods course at a Midwestern university, completed a survey. The data were collected on two occasions, one week apart. During the intervening week, students were encouraged to read the issue of *Teacher Talk* focusing on teen sexuality. The articles addressed topics such as school-based clinics, teen sexuality, a program for school-aged mothers, homophobia, sexuality curricula, AIDS, and dealing with sex issues in any classroom. Many of the articles were adapted from the transcript of the first *Teacher Talk* Video Forum.

Students who completed the survey were representative of that university's preservice teacher population and included 41 females and 14 males ranging in age from 19 years to 44 years. The experimenters presented the survey at the beginning of a class session and allowed the preservice teachers 15 minutes to complete the survey. Participation was voluntary.

Students in three sections of the general methods class took a pre-test survey. Two sections were experimental ($n = 39$) and the third was the control section ($n = 18$). The experimental sections received *Teacher Talk*. Preservice teachers were asked to read the publication outside of class time. The following week, students in the control and experimental sections completed a survey identical to the pre-test.

Instrument

The survey included 23 forced-choice questions. The preservice teachers responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale. These 23 items formed four sub-scales: attitudes, self-efficacy, knowledge, and comfort.

The first scale measured attitudes relating to sexuality with questions such as, "Teenagers should not engage in sexual intercourse." The second scale measured the preservice teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy when addressing circumstances relating to teen sexuality. An example of an item from this scale is the statement, "As a teacher, I can help a teenager who indicates that s/he may be gay." The third scale measured the preservice teachers' self-assessment of how knowledgeable they are of what to do in circumstances where teen sexuality is manifested. "I know what to say or do with a teen who is pregnant and is exploring options" is an example from this sub-scale. The fourth scale measured the preservice teachers' comfort when addressing situations that involve teen sexuality. An example of an item is, "How comfortable do you feel talking to teens about homophobic attitudes and behavior?" Table 2 indicates the number of items in each scale and the results of the reliability analysis.

The survey asked the preservice teachers if they had seen the publication prior to the evaluation. In addition, it asked the preservice teachers in the experimental condition how much of the publication they read after the initial survey. Based on the answers to these questions, responses from preservice teachers who had read the publication before ($n = 9$) were excluded from any further analysis. Also, responses from those teachers in the experimental condition who did not read the publication at all were excluded ($n = 10$). Three preservice teachers met both criteria. The result was three

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categories: true experimentals ($n = 28$), true controls ($n = 13$), and those who fit neither of the above ($n = 16$). The small number of teachers in the latter two categories precluded any further meaningful analysis. The remainder of the results, displayed in Table 2, come from the true experimental category.

Table 2
Survey Scales, Reliability Analysis, and Mean Responses for True Experimental Condition ($n=28$)

Scale	Number of items	Alpha	Mean ¹ (pre-test)	Mean ¹ (post-test)	Two-tailed significance
Attitudes	4	0.5421	1.68	1.77	0.195
Self-efficacy	6	0.7449	2.87	2.79	0.278
Knowledge	5	0.7501	2.49	2.67	0.029*
Comfort	3	0.7138	2.19	2.34	0.069**

1 (Range = 1 to 5)
* $p \leq .05$
** $p \leq .10$

Findings

As can be seen in Table 2, the results indicate a statistically significant increase in self-assessment of knowledge ($p < .05$). Additionally, there was an increase in attitudes and in comfort, with the latter change being significant at $p < .10$. The change in self-efficacy was in the opposite direction, but was not significant.

Another effort to evaluate *Teacher Talk* relied upon reader responses to surveys enclosed in each issue. Some preservice teachers had comments on the utility and layout features of the publication as well as their overall reactions to it:

It's interesting to consider teachers' experiences and solutions to problems.

I feel that it has helpful insights. This is something I would like to continue receiving.

I think this is an excellent publication! It has given me lots of useful information I can use in my classroom.

The articles are really helpful and the layout of the publication is very easy to follow.

I just wanted to say that I find *Teacher Talk* to be very informative and useful for secondary teachers. I have been impressed with the information provided and the design. I hope you continue to publish it.

In an effort to gain another perspective on the overall usefulness of *Teacher Talk*, teacher educators at a Midwestern university were interviewed. Among their comments were the following positive statements:

Teacher Talk has several good things: Great Ideas! and thematic focus. It is a very worthwhile publication.

Teacher Talk is impressive with the topics it covers and it is journalistic, as opposed to scholarly.

Teacher Talk has potential as a common communication piece.

CONCLUSION

Though preservice teachers are exposed to knowledge of theory and practice in teacher preparation programs, they clearly desire and benefit from increased contact with innovative teachers. Veteran teachers, with their experience and wisdom, can assist preservice teachers as they prepare for their future roles in the classrooms. *Teacher Talk* uses the Internet to respond to the need to integrate the best classroom practices and the voices of master teachers into preservice teacher education. Initially through print and video formats and now through the World Wide Web, educators have access to current ideas and innovative practice, centered around themes such as classroom management, diversity, and sexuality.

The evaluation of the *Teacher Talk* issue on sexuality has identified that this approach is effective in increasing both self-assessment knowledge and comfort level in preservice teachers. This demonstrates that *Teacher Talk*, a multimedia publication, responds to the needs of preservice teachers and can be a powerful intervention for increasing their knowledge base and expanding their sensitivity to issues in classroom practice. Via the World Wide Web, teacher educators have easy access to this resource for personal use, as well as for use in their classrooms.

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