

THE CHALKBOARD

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Closing the Gap: A Special Issue on Technology in Education

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Greetings from the Dean

**Deborah Shanley,
Dean, School of Education**

Anyone who has ever watched a child engaged in a highly complex computer game can appreciate how far technology has infiltrated our daily lives—and how far we must go to integrate it into the academic lives of children. As educators of future classroom teachers, we realize that technology has become fundamental to the educational process. However, if we choose to “get with the program” and include technology in the curriculum of teacher preparation, we must become proficient ourselves.

In her article, “Beyond Novelty,” Barbara Rosenfeld examines the environment that educators—and students-- require in order to gain that proficiency. For a glimpse at the administrative side of the school setting, David Bloomfield takes us inside the technology-rich offices of New York City’s Department of Education, outlining the improvements that task-specific computer programs have brought about. And finally, Koshi Dhingra presents an in-depth view of the creation, development, and evaluation of the School of Education’s first on-line course offering.

Taken together, these three essays present technology as both a boon to education and a work in progress. The School of Education stands at a threshold: we are committed to embrace the challenge of technological change, and continue to explore ways that it can enhance teaching and improve children’s learning.

Beyond Novelty: Integrating Technology in the New Classroom

Barbara Rosenfeld

Assistant professor, secondary education

Brooklyn College is the recent recipient of a \$500,00 grant aptly titled, "Booting Up Brooklyn," providing us with a new stationary Macintosh computer lab, educational software, digital cameras, and accessories. We have four mobile carts, each housing 24 wireless laptop computers and a printer. The second floor of James Hall has been wired so that the carts can be wheeled into any classroom on the floor for instant Internet access. We are connected. We have the technology. Now what should we do with it?

Surprisingly, you do not learn to use technology just by being in close proximity to a computer! Learning to use technology is a process that takes time. Although some may consider observation of good technology modeling sufficient to enable teachers to use technology in classes with their own students, it has been my experience that you do not learn to use technology simply by watching. Modeling is useful, but it is not enough. Learning new skills takes practice. Learning to use technology is a process that takes time. For faculty to use computer technology as part of their classroom repertoire, they need to attain a level of competence and ease with it, and to feel confident that they will be able to use it effectively in the classroom. Moreover, research suggests also that educators need to perceive that they can use computers effectively and confidently *before* they adopt them for classroom use. Some research recommends the creation of a non-threatening environment for technology learners so that they can feel more comfortable about their computer use and can thereby reduce their anxiety; other studies suggest computer conferencing as a means to allow and encourage technology learners to work together in a self-paced manner to build self-esteem and confidence.

Within the School of Education we need to consider the technology use of our own faculty as well as that of our students who are pre-service and in service teachers. There are several elements that need to be in place to help new technology learners to become competent, confident, and comfortable in their technology use. They need hands-on, continuing training and support, time to practice their new skills, and equipment that is easily accessible. The training should be provided in a non-threatening environment and should be on-going (or at least should be available until the trainees feel that they no longer need it.). Support is also necessary to enable technology use. When questions or problems arise, it is helpful if support personnel are readily accessible to provide answers in a timely manner. Support can be in the form of a mentor who may be contacted in person or via e-mail or phone, or it could be in the presence of a technician who is readily available to fix the equipment so that it will work as it should.. Another means of support is telephone help, such as the Help Desk. The personnel assigned to the Help Desk should be knowledgeable and trained in technology problem solving so they are able to help all technology users.

Pre-service teachers in the School of Education usually spend a semester as student teachers before taking over their own classes. They have time to gain confidence, competence, and comfort in practicing new teaching skills before taking their solo flights. However, though there are many required courses geared to insuring a solid background in education, at present there is no technology course requirement for our undergraduate pre-service teachers. New drivers get a learner's permit before they receive their licenses so that they have time to practice their driving skills. Why should teachers be expected to use technology in the classroom without appropriate training and time to practice?

As a strong proponent of technology in the classroom, my mantra has been, "Technology is great...when it works." Technology has not been perfected yet. Breakdowns occur: the server goes down, the connection fails, the computer freezes. Sometimes the problems are easily resolved. At other times, a professional is needed. Particularly when a faculty member decides to risk trying something new, it is essential that support be available when problems occur. Otherwise, the frustration level may rise to the point that the faculty member decides that using technology is not worth the trouble. The equipment needs

to be kept in good working condition so that it can be used as needed as an essential classroom tool.

Another element that is very important for technology use is ease of accessibility. If the computers are readily available they are more likely to be used. If it is too difficult, again, faculty will not bother. In our School of Education, along with our static lab, we have four mobile carts, each with 24 wireless laptops. Faculty who wish to use the carts are required to have a brief training session before they are permitted to sign up to use the cart with their classes.

All the classrooms on the second floor of James have the connectivity needed for the carts to operate. Faculty and students may access Internet resources easily to find current Web sites that are relevant to student learning. BlackBoard can be used both in the classroom and outside to enhance communication among students and also between students and faculty. The Internet connection enables expeditions outside the classroom to sites almost anywhere in the world. Online library access makes it easier for everyone to search for and retrieve resources. Online connectivity can enable faculty to try new activities with students to enhance their learning.

Dean Shanley has been instrumental and supportive in helping the School of Education faculty use technology in the classroom. For example, this semester, I have been able to team teach with Professor Carolina Mancuso in ED 701.12 – Introduction to Literacy Research, in an effort to help her infuse more technology in the course. We are both gaining new ideas from our collaboration, and our students seem to appreciate having two instructors with whom to discuss their research ideas. When technology problems arise, someone is there to help to resolve them in a timely manner.

Our pre-service and in service students also need to learn to use technology tools. Although there are 21 states with no technology requirement for initial licensure for teachers, many of these states have a technology requirement in their state standards for students. New York is among them. Thus, teachers are expected to use technology in their classes without being required to learn it.

On the graduate level, there are two educational technology courses presently being offered, ED784.1 (Introduction to Technology in Childhood Education) and ED784.2 (Integrating Technology and Media in Adolescence Education). An educational technology course is required in some programs in mathematics education and science education, and is an elective in other programs. Students who take educational technology courses are given practical, hands-on experiences with technology to prepare them to infuse technology tools in the classroom. Several students have inquired about taking other educational technology courses to learn more about this field and to learn about new activities to try in their classrooms. A program in educational technology, offered by the School of Education, would serve the emerging need for technological literacy in teacher preparation as well enhance the skills of teachers entering the New York City school system.

Online Learning: Extending the Classroom Experience

Koshi Dhingra,

assistant professor, secondary education

The School of Education's first online course offering was a course I taught in fall, 2001. The class consisted of 24 TOP (Teaching Opportunity Program) scholars who were about to teach math / science in NYC high schools for the first time. The TOP program is an intensive experience for students who, like the Teaching Fellows, have a broad range of professional backgrounds, and who spend the summer immersed in a concentrated program consisting of math and methods courses.

The fall semester is an extremely challenging, and usually stressful, time for the TOP students, since they begin teaching while continuing with their Master's programs at Brooklyn College. For this reason we decided to experiment with introducing an asynchronous (Webster: not occurring or existing at the same time or having the same period or phase), online course as one of the fall course offerings in the TOP program. Since Education 611, a foundations course, was largely text-and discussion-centered, it was selected as the most appropriate course to transform into online mode. I initiated the course over the summer,

while the students were in the midst of their summer program, with an orientation to Blackboard (the online platform we would be using) and a few face-to-face and online discussions. My hope was that the students could get an advanced look at their fall readings and that I could create a schedule more sensitive to their teaching situations with a relatively easy September.

I divided the course into four randomly assigned discussion groups and worked with three master teachers in math to moderate online discussions. Each of us was a group discussion leader. In addition to moderating my own group, I was a second moderator to the 3 other groups. The goals of the course included:

- active student-student sharing of experiences and ideas;
- practitioner responses to student questions and issues
- Instructor facilitation of discussion on theory and theory-practice connections.

The Events of September 11 made that fall an incredibly difficult time for my students, who had all just begun their teaching careers. A couple of students withdrew from the course for personal reasons, and all of us needed more time to refocus. The online dimension allowed me to build in flexibility as well as to share resources on coping with 9/11 in schools with the students. It also provided an accessible forum for students to share their experiences in their schools throughout this terrible time.

After about seven weeks of online discussions, it became apparent that having six students per group was not a sufficient number to ensure dynamic interchange of ideas. Many of the students would delay posting till the end of the week, which resulted in limited dialogue among students. I decided to combine groups so that there were two discussion groups with 12 students and 2 moderators each. A second change I made was the schedule for each discussion week. After noticing for several weeks that students posted largely over the weekend, I changed the week from Sunday - Saturday to Wednesday - Tuesday. Both these changes resulted in significant improvement in the quality and frequency of postings.

Midway through the course, I administered an anonymous questionnaire to all students in which I asked what their advice to a graduate student in the School of Education who is considering taking their first online course would be. Here are some responses:

- It saves time compared to going to college but you need to have (Internet) access at home.
- You can read and comment on what someone in your group or class posted. In the classroom, you do not have this freedom.
- Your time is more flexible.
- Make sure you go online as often as you can.
- Do not submit garbage. Submit well thought-out responses.
- You should communicate with group members online at least twice a week.
- It's not a very good idea if you don't have access to the Internet 24/7.
- Don't procrastinate.
- Go for it. Especially if you are a first-year teacher. The time is convenient, the readings are pertinent but not overwhelming, the other students and faculty are accessible. Discussions are thought-provoking.

Other comments included preference for leaving home to work on a course, and enjoying face-to-face interaction over online interaction. Clearly, students seemed to see the advantage in an online offering when it came to time and flexibility, but also recognized how easy it was to procrastinate. Plus – and I agree completely with them – *there is no substitute for face-to-face interaction.*

In summer, 2002, I taught two sections of Education of 742. One section consisted of thirty middle school math immersion

Teaching Fellows in an extremely concentrated course to be completed in mid-August; the other of fifteen TOP middle-and high school math teachers following the course model described which extends the course through the fall semester.

The major modification I have made is to build in more face-to-face time. Approximately 1/3 of the course was conducted on campus and 2/3 followed the asynchronous format. The face-to-face meetings were used to review online discussion and to further discuss and question ideas that were challenging to students, as expressed in their online postings. Moreover, the face-to-face meetings proved to be a valuable venue for student presentations derived from online discussions or long-term assignment. Based on my own readings about best practices in online learning, it seemed that conducting courses for longer than six weeks online was not recommended; participants tended to lose momentum. By building in face time, I structured the course as mini-courses, with the scheduled face-to-face meeting providing a short-term objective for the conclusion of the mini-course.

Clearly defined course expectations are key to the success of any course. Given that most students had not participated in an online course before, I provided a guideline of expectations for online participation to all three courses (see Fig.1). Other recommended strategies that worked well for me include student self evaluations using the guidelines at several junctures in the semester; open-ended discussion questions that draw on students' own experiences; and regular email contact with students not meeting required standards for participation. I liked the idea of using experienced practitioners to make the theory-practice link explicit. However, without additional time for them to be familiar with the course readings, their ability to respond well to student postings is limited.

Administrative Technology Pervades Today's Schools

David C. Bloomfield

Associate professor
Educational administration

Just as modern business and government are entirely dependent on technological backbones to sustain their administrative work, the New York City Department of Education relies on a vast array of information technologies to meet the organizational demands of a modern school system. While less evident and controversial than instructional technology (some of which will also be touched on here), these elaborate systems do everything from meeting payroll for 85,000 workers to tracking the performance of over 1.1 million students.

This article seeks to reveal a few of the many ways that administrative technology pervades our schools. Hands on practice and analysis of this critical material is reflected in the curriculum of Brooklyn College's Advanced Certificate Program in Educational Administration and Supervision.

Automate the Schools

The hub of the New York City Public Schools' school-based information technology is Automate the Schools ("ATS"). According to the Department of Education, "ATS standardizes and automates the collection and reporting of data for all New York City public schools students."

Through its Student Information System (SIS), ATS provides for automated entry and reporting of citywide student biographical data; on-line admissions, discharges, and transfers; attendance; grade promotion; pupil transportation and exam processing; and many other functions. In addition, it has a school-based management component that supplies aggregate student data, human resources data, and purchasing information for use by school administrators and school-based

management committees.

While access to ATS is limited to school system personnel, publicly available information similar to that found on ATS is available at the Department of Education's extensive website <www.nycenet.edu> , with a particularly helpful tutorial booklet, the Website Users Guide, available at http://nycenet.edu/offices/diit/internet/PBD/performance_based_data_5a.htm>. Virtually all of the data pertinent to Attendance, Registers and Enrollments, Assessments (Exams), School based Expenditure Reports and the like are available from this single, yet powerful, comprehensive link.

Also built into ATS, and of particular utility for the business side of school administration, are Fastrack and Galaxy. Fastrack is the Department of Education's online purchasing system, which speeds the ordering and delivery of goods and services from pre-approved vendors via Purchase Order, Imprest Funds, General School Funds/ Cash Funds and/ or PTA/ PA Funds. Galaxy is DOE's new budgeting system for public schools that, like Fastrack, implements important school based management and performance driven budgeting requirements of the State's 1996 New York City School Governance Reform Act. Galaxy is able to build school-based discretionary budgets from School Leadership Team recommendations while accounting for state and federal mandates, collective bargaining agreements, and DOE and community district initiatives.

The Grow Network and Other Online Instructional Support

The Grow Network is a private company that provides software to the City Department of Education for integrating print reports, web tools, instructional materials, and professional development assistance for data driven decision-making regarding the student, class, grade level, school, and district academic performance. Tied to New York State learning standards, Grow Reports, suggest appropriate classroom activities and teaching strategies for progress in areas of weakness.

Further enhancing professional development opportunities on the web will be NYC Online PD, a web portal that will be intended a wide variety of university-like professional development opportunities free to teachers currently working for the New York City Department of Education. Further enhancing web based instructional support, the Department of Education has recently announced a relationship with Power to Learn <www.powertolearn.com>, an online educational resource owned by Cablevision, that promises to provide "an online learning community for parents, students, and educators."

Financial Data Analysis

Using automated financial information management, the Department of Education has established a revenue claiming process to recover reimbursement for educational and related services from the State Education Department (SED). In this complex process, student-specific applications known as STACS are created then processed and crosschecked for accurate matching of student and service data. The resulting files then represent the documentation for a claiming process that realizes approximately \$180 million per fiscal year. This process has various cycles to achieve an optimum matching of the data so as to as fully as possible claim eligible reimbursement.

The Child Assistance Program

The Child Assistance Program (CAP) is a computerized data collection system that was developed and implemented as a result of the 1979 Jose P. federal court decision, mandating the New York City Department of Education to develop a data system to track the process students go through when referred for possible special education services.

Online Communication

A new, comprehensive system of email connectivity has recently been established by the Department's Division of

Instructional and Information Technology (DIIT). Using Microsoft Exchange/Outlook 2000, an e-mail, calendaring and messaging system, all central, district and school-based administrators are now linked for instantaneous communication and calendar coordination. Over 32,000 accounts have been created and are now being used by school personnel to collect, organize, and share information with others in the school system.

Conclusion

A wide array of information technology is now available to help school administrators work more efficiently and effectively. And more is always on the way! Together with the federally subsidized creation of wireless environments in all of our schools, the vision of specially configured handheld computers, such as Palm Pilots, in use by school personnel promises to revolutionize instruction, management, and budgeting all at the same time.

The challenge for the Department of Education and graduate programs like the Brooklyn College Advanced Certificate Program in Educational Administration and Supervision is to provide the necessary professional development to help educators migrate smoothly into this new information age and to provide appropriate feedback so that assistant principals and principals can master the technology and not the other way around.

Program Updates

Brooklyn College School of Education Is Lead Partner in School Reform Project

Stephen Phillips

Instructor and program head,
New Century High Schools

Brooklyn College has accepted the role of lead partner, in a collaboration with the Brooklyn High School Superintendency to radically change the nature of education in five unsuccessful large, Brooklyn High Schools. Nearly thirty faculty members—half from the School of Education and half from the College of Liberal Arts And Sciences—have indicated interest in working on the project. The project is funded by New Visions of New York, a school reform foundation, which received \$7.5 Million from by the Carnegie Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Soros foundation.

The five targeted high schools (Bushwick, Prospect Heights, George Wingate, Thomas Jefferson, and Erasmus Hall) have chronic records of poor student achievement. Their test scores are among the lowest in the city, their chronic absenteeism and dropout rates are among the highest, and each graduates fewer than 20 percent of the students who enter each year. Numerous redesign efforts over the past twenty years have failed to improve their performances. New Century High Schools, will phase out the seven schools over several years by limiting new enrollments and transferring faculty, after which each of the five buildings will become an “educational condominium,” housing four or five small, independent high schools. Previously, such projects in Manhattan and the Bronx have had dramatic impact on student achievement in schools that have failed for decades.

In addition to serving as fiscal agent for the project, Brooklyn College is taking on other roles. Funds are being provided for faculty members from all academic departments to act as consultants or full participants in developing the nearly twenty new schools. Most of the projects under way are theme-based, offering natural ties to the liberal arts and sciences faculty and disciplines at the college. Other faculty have expressed interest in doing research on the process and results of the project, which is cited as a model of urban education reform across the nation. Rather than developing magnet schools for gifted

students, this project will introduce “schools of choice” to students in normal, zoned high school areas of the city, tackling an issue that has thus far remained unmet in places such as Chicago, which still has nearly two dozen failing, zoned high schools despite its overall reform efforts.

Approximately thirty project teams are currently developing concept papers for new schools, some with consultation help from members of the Brooklyn College faculty. In late November a competitive rating of the concept papers selected ten projects to move to the next stage—drafting implementation proposals to open in fall, 2003. Each will receive a \$10,000 planning grant to develop a final proposal. Brooklyn College faculty members are expected to work with many of these project teams as well. In April 2003, a second competition will determine specific schools will be opened the following September. Each project will receive up to \$500,000 for furniture, equipment, and supplemental staffing; the individual amount awarded each school will depend on the ultimate enrollment of the school. The supplemental funding will be a one-time over the initial four years of the program, after which each school is expected to operate with normal Department of Education per-capita funding. Additional information on the project and how individual may participate can be obtained from Stephen Phillips, Phillips@brooklyn.cuny.edu.

Conference Report: From School Violence To Safe Schools

Robin Shaw

assistant professor, school psychology program

From School Violence to Safe Schools, a conference hosted by the School Psychology Program in collaboration with the New York State Psychological Association, was held at Brooklyn College on May 10.

Laura Barbanel, program head of the School Psychology Program at Brooklyn College, chaired and introduced the conference to an eager and receptive group of New York City teachers, psychologists, social workers, students, and administrators. The history, dynamics, and types of school violence were addressed at a panel discussion in the morning, and a variety of workshops on prevention and intervention were presented in the afternoon. The conference fulfilled the two-hour instructional requirement on violence prevention for teachers, administrators, and psychologists.

The morning session focused on understanding the nature and causes of violence and possible interventions. Members of the panel viewed violence as a release of anger and/or frustration, as a way to control others, as a means of retaliation, and as a learned behavior. Bullying was described as a pervasive form of childhood violence that is disruptive and emotionally destructive and often causes lingering negative effects. Adults who experienced abuse as children are more likely to suffer from depression, abuse alcohol or drugs, commit crimes and develop chronic health problems. A survey of the audience revealed that nearly every participant had been bullied as a child, clearly demonstrating the pervasiveness of the problem. Bullying may be either physical or psychological: boys generally engage in more physically aggressive acts while girls tend to bully through verbal means. Sexual harassment and gender violence in schools was also discussed. Research indicates that up to 50 percent of female youths experience abuse and often fail to hold the males involved responsible, and that of those abused, gay and lesbian youths are more likely to be victims than any other group.

Also presented was Project Save/Safe Schools Against Violence in Education, a district wide program of prevention that contains educational packages for grades K-12. It includes teacher and staff training in interventions and the prevention of school violence as well as a self-efficacy and character development component for students. Anti-bullying strategies that were

presented included empowering the bystander, encouraging pro-social behavior, creating a bully-free classroom, learning steps for mediation, and helping both the victim and the bully.

Afternoon workshops covered such important topics as how to recognize the warning signs of violence, crisis intervention, and prevention programs. Jan Peterson, assistant executive director of the American Psychological Association, conducted a workshop on “APA’s Warning Signs, a program that was introduced in 1999 by the APA in collaboration with MTV which aims to teach youngsters and parents how to recognize the warning signs of violence in themselves, their peers, or their children and how to get help before violence occurs. Two lists of “recognizing violence warning signs” were presented. The first illustrated the more immediate and dangerous behaviors that indicate a serious possibility of violence--daily loss of temper, vandalism or property damage, increased use of drugs or alcohol, risk-taking behaviors, and the hurting of animals. The second delineated behaviors to be recognized over a period of time that indicate the potential for violence--drug and alcohol use, gang membership, fascination with weapons, threatening others, withdrawal from friends and usual activities, and experience as a victim of bullying.

David Drassner, director of the Crisis Response Team and supervising psychologist for The Bronx high schools, conducted a workshop entitled, “Crisis Response Teams in the Schools: Organization and Counseling/Intervention Strategies.” Drassner designed crisis response teams in schools to cope with situations that range from terrorist attacks to sexual assaults, from suicide to arson. The teams are multidisciplinary and multiethnic because a wide variety of skills and knowledge are needed--administrative, medical, psychological, and organizational. In addition to dealing with crises, the teams are also trained to cope with post-traumatic stressors and to intervene with at-risk students, faculty, and parents. It was emphasized that all school districts could benefit from studying this comprehensive crisis intervention design package. It has proven to be thorough, efficient, well planned, and highly effective.

Social Studies Program

Professional Development Day

Barbara Winslow

assistant professor, secondary social studies program

On November 5 more than fifty social studies teachers from Brooklyn schools attended the first-ever Brooklyn College School of Education Professional Development Day. Barbara Winslow introduced the participants to the new Brooklyn College Library, after which they attended a presentation and discussion about the use of technology in social studies classrooms in the new James Hall computer classroom. Winslow also made a presentation on globalizing women's history. Professor of History Stuart Schaar spoke on *perestroika* and the downfall of the Soviet Union. Fifteen of the teachers were Brooklyn College alumni; eight of which were former students of Professor Schaar.

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