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A Classroom Teacher Responds to Carico and Logan: A Commentary

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As so many of my students want to be heard and their opinion to be considered, the MOO virtual reality discussion of literature can supply just such an outlet. Today's English language arts classroom includes large class sizes, and soliciting immediate responses from all students becomes a difficult task. The more confident, gregarious students often dominate the discussion, and shy, reserved students save their thoughts for their journals, or simply keep them internalized. Even when prompted, many teenagers will sit silently and feel separated from the response "club" because they feel insecure about speaking aloud in class, believing their responses to be inadequate. Extended response with thoughts triggering more thoughts without interruptions (a common factor in the secondary classroom!) is allowed in the MOO discussion. This special outlet is a "room" where those students less apt to talk will be able to express enthusiasm unabashedly through the relatively anonymous chat that MOO supplies.

With this purposeful and structured literature response opportunity, middle-school students begin "creating meaning" with each other and are enthusiastically promoting self-learning. The older students demonstrate the lifelong learning model that can only be taught through example; and what better model than "cool" college students?

Yet the college students were suddenly concerned about how to interact with eighth graders. Preservice teachers need multiple occasions to learn the many facets of teaching and learning with adolescents. A concern among many college professors is that their preservice teachers are unprepared for the reality that their classrooms will be laden with all types of learners representing numerous cultures and microcultures. Creating an environment such as the MOO will provide practice for prospective teachers to converse with and get to know all types of students: Limited English Proficient, various socio-economic backgrounds, learning disabled/gifted/general, and so forth.

After reading and reviewing this article, I am very interested in doing the MOO in a community college literature class with a friend's eighth grade English class, but I am concerned about some safety issues that may arise. Parents/guardians/administrators often feel uncomfortable with any e-mail exchanges due to the risk of an inappropriate relationship between a college student and a middle-school student. Discussing the etiquette of the "wandering" period and emphasizing minimal personal information exchange during the literature discussion could be a proactive effort toward minimizing potential problems. Also, all students should understand that the hosts would read a printout of the text after each MOO session to deter irrelevant discussion. As with many introductions to technology infusion in schools, issues of ethics and education become crucial. We must continue to explore opportunities that bring together preservice teachers and students to learn how best to prepare the teachers of tomorrow to use technology to enhance

student learning.

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