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UWP1Y: Garin Hay

To Be An Educator

Abstract

As the COVID-19 pandemic follows us into 2021, current and future educators are learning and developing remote pedagogy. Students hoping to enter the field of education may find themselves daunted by the new expectations and challenges that come with remote instruction. This may deter students from studying education as an undergraduate, prompting them to either find a new area of interest or take all their education classes in graduate school when the pandemic is, hopefully, over. However, going into a graduate education program can be difficult if one has taken little to no courses in the subject during their first four years of college. To encourage UC Davis students who are interested in education to explore the subject as early as possible either through a minor or individual undergraduate courses, I have analyzed the discourse community of educators to present some of the expectations, experiences, and qualities of educators. Using the experiences of current educators as well as general information from secondary sources, I highlight the aspects of the education discourse community that have become even more important during COVID-19. In this paper, I analyze a specific genre of communication that is commonly used among educators to show how teachers use technology to engage students. With almost everything online, being knowledgeable about technology and feeling comfortable using it has become critical for educators. From my personal experience as a student and my interview with a current high school teacher, I have found that educators work together to create lesson plans, develop teaching strategies, introduce new methods, and more. Lastly, every educator must know their overall goal and how to go about achieving it. Looking at the discourse community of educators, I have concluded that teachers must be able to identify and actively work toward a common goal by communicating effectively with students using various methods, and they must collaborate with colleagues to develop pedagogy as education evolves. Having knowledge of what is expected of educators and what is valued both during and after the pandemic will help students determine whether or not they want to pursue this career.

Introduction

Teaching requires communication. An educator must effectively communicate both inside and outside of the classroom to engage students with the material and promote learning. Amidst the current global pandemic, communication within educational institutions has never been more important, nor has it been more difficult. With most schools having adopted remote learning programs, teachers everywhere have been forced to adjust their instruction methods so they can continue to support their students in their academic journeys. COVID-19 has introduced more skills and expectations for both current and future educators, and has made gaining classroom experience difficult for education students. All these new challenges may overwhelm students who wish to become teachers, making it more difficult for them to understand what will be expected of them in a teaching career. Educators collaborate, participate in professional development, and design unique lesson plans to achieve their goal: to engage students and encourage them to learn. By this definition, the community of educators is a discourse community. John Swales, a linguist with a focus on discourse analysis, explains in his essay “The Concept of Discourse Community” that a discourse community is a group of people who use multiple methods of

communication to work toward a common goal (221). Although most students already know that student learning is the goal of education, looking at educators using Swales' framework will help students identify the best ways educators can work together to achieve that overall goal. In this essay, I will analyze four of Swales' six discourse community characteristics to show how educators are part of a discourse community and how COVID-19 has impacted how this community operates. Understanding how educators actively communicate and collaborate as a discourse community will help students who are interested in teaching work effectively in the field.

Methods

To gain a better understanding of what is expected of educators, I interviewed Maribel Albarran, my former high school teacher, who has just started teaching a class of her own. Before becoming a full-time teacher, Maribel worked as a lab technician in the science department at the high school. Additionally, she was a coordinator for Crossroads, a program that allows high school students to tutor and teach after-school classes to local middle school students. I also performed a genre analysis on one of her lesson plans to explore some of the methods she uses to engage her students with the material. While I was in high school, I participated in the Crossroads program as a tutor and a teacher, so I have had experiences in educational settings as both a student and an educator. Additionally, I participated in in-person and online classes, even prior to the COVID-19 outbreak and can draw upon these experiences, as a student, to identify effective methods of communication. For my secondary research, I read and analyzed articles from academic journals. I also examined documents from sources such as the California Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences to learn more about how educators are trained. Using both primary and secondary resources has allowed me to create a more comprehensive understanding of what an educator experiences. The secondary sources provided information regarding training and professional development, while the interview focused more on educators' personal goals, responsibilities, and individual interactions. Through my research, interview, and my personal experience, I have identified aspects of this community that are consistent with those of a discourse community and why these characteristics are important for educators to promote learning effectively.

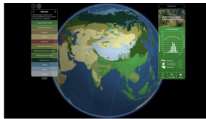
Results and Discussion

Lesson Plan: Presentation

According to Swales, a discourse community "utilizes one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims" (221), and many educators collaborate to design group lesson plans, classroom activities, and unit presentations to engage students with the material. In the interview, Maribel revealed that she meets with other teachers in the biology department almost every day to discuss learning plans, presentations, labs, and assessments. Figures 1 and 2 show sample slides from a presentation Maribel and her colleagues designed for one of their biology modules. The process of creating and presenting information through a slideshow can vary depending on the educator. When learning remotely, presentations are typically shared through "screen-sharing" or are displayed clearly behind the teacher. During in-person classes, they are presented using a projector or a similar device. In addition to showing it during class, Maribel also shares it with her students either as a Google Slides file or a pdf so they can refer to it whenever necessary. According to Maribel, the presentations can take anywhere from a couple of hours to a few days to create, depending on the size of the unit and the complexity of the material. There are advantages to creating an online presentation as opposed to a physical one, the primary one being the ability to edit and share it with colleagues and students with ease.

Practicing with the BiomeViewer!

Click this link [BiomeViewer](#) and launch the interactive tool.



- Click and hold the globe to spin it and explore different parts of the world.
- Click and release a spot on the globe to drop a pin there to see a summary of the characteristics of the biome for that location.
- You can also search for locations by name, latitude/longitude, or zip code.
- In the biome summary panel, click on "More" to see a longer description, photos, a larger climate graph, and wildlife data.
- Click on "Compare" to view details on two biomes side by side.
- On the biomes legend, use the arrows at the top to see different layers including anthromes, temperature, precipitation, and terrain.
- Click the gear icon to toggle grid lines and political boundaries on and off.
- Click on the globe icon to switch between a spherical view and a flat projection of Earth.

Biomes

Communities of plants and animals defined by their climate and dominant vegetation

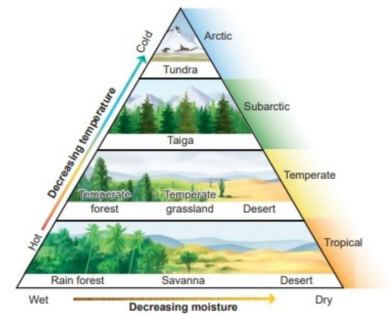


Figure 1: Slide that links to an interactive tool and displays instructions.

Figure 2: Slide that introduces new vocabulary from the module along with a relevant image.

When students interact with the presentation, they may be taking notes, participating in a poll, or using it to study for an assessment. Since they are not reading a wall of text from a textbook, but are instead learning from a more interesting yet concise source, students should expect to be introduced to the larger ideas within a module and then encouraged to dive deeper into each topic independently.

Maribel identified herself as a visual learner during the interview and explained how presentations have helped her learn in her own academic career. Empathizing with students with a similar learning style, she consciously adds significant images, graphs, and tables to help her students visualize concepts. Additionally, with each new slide, there are subheadings that help organize the material so students are not overwhelmed with a large amount of seemingly unrelated information. The language is kept simple, and new vocabulary is always defined, allowing students to capture the main ideas without confusion. If activities or polls are included in the presentation, they often link to an external site that the instructor controls. For instance, Maribel and other science teachers at the high school use Pear Deck through Google Slides for easy check-ins and practice problems. To combat “learner’s fatigue,” as Maribel calls it – which is when students have been asked to absorb so much information in one sitting that they are unable to take in any more – she provides interactive widgets in every presentation so students can reflect on their learning without feeling overwhelmed.

There are many studies that show the benefits of using slideshows or presentations in educational settings, but they must be designed properly (Alley et al. 223). If presented effectively, slideshows should cater to almost all learners. They contain images and figures for visual learners; the teacher will still verbally communicate information for auditory learners; and there are interactive modules for experiential or hands-on learners. If a presentation is designed poorly, one or more students may find themselves lost and unmotivated to continue exploring the subject. Therefore, I believe that the best way to measure the success of an education presentation is to ask the students. If the students find themselves confused or bored with the lesson, it is unlikely they have retained the information presented. In order to confirm comprehension of the material, Maribel includes a short survey, poll or open comment section at the end of each slideshow. If it is revealed that the students are not grasping the concepts, the presentation will be altered to clarify any confusion. Visual presentations offer so many methods of communication to

educators. It allows them to introduce new information to students in an organized and interactive manner, helping to engage students in the lesson.

Main Goal

The community of educators reflects one of Swales' most fundamental characteristics of a discourse community, as most educators understand and actively work toward their main goal (Swales 221). As education in America expands to reach as many students as possible, finding committed, caring, and knowledgeable teachers is of utmost importance (Lauwerys). While some educators may have different personal goals, it is likely that these individual objectives are more specific versions of an educator's ultimate goal. For example, the Commission on Teacher Credentialing writes in "California Standards for the Teaching Profession" that teachers are expected to practice multiple methods of instruction as well as use various resources to serve students with different learning styles (7). These are expectations that, if met by an educator, are one step closer to the overall goal. In order to spark interest in students and inspire them to learn, it is important that educators understand that everyone has a different way of learning. By catering to multiple learning needs, more students will be engaged with the material, and they will be more likely to have a desire to continue learning. In my interview with Maribel, she states that her primary goal is to get her students excited about the subject she teaches as well as learning in general. To achieve this, she explains how she challenges her students to "think outside the box" and "find out what they can bring to the table." Maribel teaches her students to think critically in the context of biology but also encourages them to use those same strategies in other classes across multiple subjects. Maribel offers her students a rich educational experience by providing students with a solid foundation in biology in addition to skills they can use in any class, which satisfies both her personal and professional goal as an educator.

Written and Online Communication

All educators must be able to communicate clearly and effectively with students to promote learning and to properly support them through their academic endeavors. In his essay, "The Concept of Discourse Community," Swales states that a discourse community "possesses one or more genres in the communicative furtherance of its aims" (221). Whether it be through verbal or written communication, educators are expected to find common methods of communication so they are able to interact with their colleagues and students productively. When the COVID-19 pandemic swept the nation, written and virtual communication became more widely used as verbal communication began to fall behind. Some educators rely on frequent and direct communication to build relationships with students, so they are able to create more comfortable and effective learning environments. Keith Berry, an Associate Professor in the University of South Florida's Department of Communication, explains in his essay "Anchors Away: Reconciling the Dream of Teaching in COVID-19" how the different pedagogy of online learning impacted his communication with students. Berry identifies the connections with his students as "fundamental part[s] of [his] teaching and overall life as a teacher," and without them, he is unable to identify what they need, how they are doing, and how they are taking in his instruction (487). Seeing his students in-person allowed for more direct communication, which allowed him to teach to their personalities and learning needs more easily. Now that educators must rely primarily on written and online communication to interact with students, it is hard to cultivate relationships with them. Quiet students are forgotten as they hide behind their webcams and bury their answers in overcrowded online education platforms. Questions go unanswered when classes are held asynchronously, and technical

difficulties hinder effective communication even further. With all these limitations presented by virtual learning environments, it is crucial that educators learn to utilize technology to communicate with students in the most effective manner.

Technology and Educational Software

Educators typically have similar methods of communicating with students. Classes, lectures, discussions, and office hours are used to communicate material and expectations, while class and assignment pages, emails, progress reports, assessments, and transcripts are common methods of written communication. Due to the recent health crisis, most of this communication has been moved online, highlighting both the capabilities and limitations of technology in an educational environment. Pre-recorded classes, asynchronous lectures, and virtual office hours can all provide opportunities for students and teachers to communicate information verbally. Before remote learning became the default mode of education, technology was slowly being integrated into classrooms around the world. Many schools began introducing technology as a tool to provide more interactive learning and subsequently began offering training and instruction on the use of educational technology to educators (Schmitt 64). Teachers need to be able to integrate technology into the classroom seamlessly as to eliminate possible distractions or confusion among students. With technology as a medium for learning, educators can utilize educational websites and software to give students opportunities to interact with the material in ways they may be unable to otherwise. For instance, in some mathematics courses, precision is crucial. There are some functions that cannot accurately be drawn by hand, and tools such as Demos or GeoGebra can create these types of graphs in seconds. Graphing software helps students to visualize the behavior of certain functions without overwhelming them with the task of drawing it themselves (Drijvers et al. 26). In my personal experience with online learning, I used Student Desmos for my last quarter in calculus. Once your unique class code is entered, you can access the activities that the teacher has set up for you. In addition to interacting with functions and graphs, there are discussion exercises that encourage collaboration with classmates. It is an incredibly useful tool for online and in-person mathematics classes. Although there are certainly disadvantages to teaching exclusively online, both educators and students can benefit from implementing select technological tools into the classroom.

Professional Development and Mentorship

As education evolves, the educators must evolve as well. A teacher who has just finished their certification and a teacher who has been teaching for half a century will have different expectations, experiences, and teaching styles. Although their training may have differed when they were receiving their credentials, all educators must continue to develop their teaching practice to better support students in their education. Many teachers participate in professional development workshops throughout the year to broaden their instructional skillset. According to the “California Standards for the Teaching Profession,” teachers should “move forward in their professional practice in a variety of ways, developing at different rates in different areas of teaching” (2). Depending on their specialty, educators will develop different methods of communication, instruction, and assessment. As the world continues to discover and design new technologies, teachers must grow continuously to best serve their students. While newer teachers may be less comfortable in the classroom, they may be more familiar with recent technological advances and are capable of implementing them into their curriculum. Meanwhile, older educators have had more opportunities to develop their pedagogy and can draw on years of experience. According to Swales, “a discourse community has a threshold level of members with a suitable degree of relevant

content and discursal expertise” and there is a “reasonable ratio between novices and experts” (222), which is reflected by the discourse community of educators. While there is no single hierarchy in the discourse community of educators, as each teacher has their own valuable skills and experiences, there may be several smaller ones. For example, Maribel is one of the youngest faculty members and is the newest teacher. Although she has never taught a formal high school class, she has assisted during lab exercises in almost every science course offered at the school. She is familiar with the general procedures and is comfortable guiding students through experiments without referring to the laboratory manual. Meanwhile, she finds herself more confident when teaching online than in-person, as she has had more practice with remote instruction this year. She may still be gradually improving her presentation and discussion skills, but there are certainly areas where she can offer more than even some of the most experienced teachers at the high school.

Although there may not be an established hierarchy amongst educators, there are those who step forward and lead others into the unfamiliar. Mentorship and collaboration are strongly encouraged, if not required, of educators, but they are not to be confused with professional status. The Commission on Teaching Credentialing concludes that “teachers are never ‘finished’ as professional learners, no matter how extensive or excellent their formal education, preparation, and experience” (2). Maribel also says, “no one is ever done learning, even teachers,” meaning neither subjects nor students can be studied completely. Educators are constantly discovering information and developing new instruction methods, and even the most experienced teachers need to grow with the world. If there is one thing that never changes, it is the educator’s objective. Teaching methods will come and go, learning styles will continue to evolve, and with each new discovery, educators will find a way to best support students in their educational experiences.

Conclusion

The community of educators is a community of learners. They communicate with one another as well as with their students to create the best educational environments. Teachers promote learning through effective communication and instruction, foster meaningful relationships with both colleagues and students, and are constantly developing their professional practices. In a world struck by COVID-19, educators have had to redesign their lessons for remote learning. This rapid transition has highlighted the most important aspects of an educator. As teachers are challenged to continue engaging their students with comprehensive lesson plans, they are still working to provide emotional and academic support through a computer screen. Students who are currently pursuing or plan to pursue a career in education must see these challenges and find their own ways of responding to them. These students are more familiar with technology and have gone through a school system more recently, making them invaluable resources in the community of educators. People in undergraduate and graduate teaching programs must reflect on their experiences as students and use what they have learned in their education courses to develop their own pedagogy. As potential educators, these students will need to focus on developing their communication methods to create meaningful and engaging lessons and assignments, whether they be online or in-person. Learning how to communicate and collaborate with students and colleagues both online and in the classroom is fundamental for future educators, and developing these skills early will help them function effectively in the discourse community of educators.

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