Using Computer Networks to Communicate with Teachers

Rodney H. Clarken
Department of Education
Northern Michigan University

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Abstract

This session will describe computer mediated distance learning implications for education for teachers. Northern Michigan University's (NMU) project for student teachers, supervising teachers, and first year teachers to communicate with one another will be discussed along with hands on use of this system in this region to support the professional development of teachers.

I have long supported the value of using technology to aid in education. It offers the possibility of delivering many services to areas and students who would otherwise have access. As a child the radio and television opened to me new vistas of learning. I first became professionally involved in distance learning while working at the University of the Virgin Islands. While there I participated in the Eastern Caribbean Center Telecommunications Project which was to bring educational opportunities to island communities through distance learning technology which has been described elsewhere (Clarken, 1989; Clarken, Rosenthal, & Lewit, 1988; Clarken, Lewit, & Rosenthal, 1987).

When I came to Northern Michigan University (NMU) in 1989, I saw the possibility to develop distance learning possibilities here as well. The work at the University of the Virgin Islands has been described in another paper (Clarken, 1993). NMU is located in a rural region with a large service area covering about four hours driving distance east, west and south of its campus in Marquette. Its Department of Education services teachers and places student teachers throughout the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and Northern Wisconsin. As a result many of these teachers and students are large distances from the University campus and each other (over six hours by car). In 1992 the NMU Department of Education obtained three external modems for Macintosh computers and 14 IBM personal computers with internal modems. This equipment allows our students and area educators to link to Northern's mainframe computer to bring a number of services to the schools with whom we work in teacher education such as time sharing to support interactive computing and batch operations with a number of options, such as e-mail, BITNET, on-line inter-library card catalog, electronic conferencing, statistical programs and varied information, facilities, and utilities (called MUSIC/SP). Training on use of the computer and MUSIC is available to schools.

The participating schools are required to pick up the telephone expenses. A major problem to overcome is making the first connection. This requires mastering the communications software and the problems associated with telephone connections. Count on it taking more time and having more problems than expected. CRISTAL, an online library catalog that connects a number of libraries in the region to one another and makes available to participants the resources of the combined libraries, can access MUSIC through that system. This established computer connection can be used to access other services through NMU's mainframe computer. Those who are interested in participating in this project using computers to communicate with teachers should log on a weekly basis.
References


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