Communicating with Groups

There are many ways in which teachers can use the Internet to share information and discuss ideas with other teachers. The "conversation" in these areas takes place via a computer with an Internet connection.

A **listserv** is an automated e-mail mailing list related to a specific subject. New users usually join by sending an e-mail with the word *subscribe* in it. Then they are part of the mailing list and receive all new postings made to the list automatically. To stop participating in the listserv, the user sends a message with the word *unsubscribe.*

A **newsgroup** is a publicly posted discussion forum on the Internet, organized around a topic or theme. Also known as an Internet discussion group or discussion board, each starts with a person posting an inquiry or comment. Other members reply and the messages are presented in a list. A set of related messages, known as a **thread,** shows the original message, the responses to the message, and the responses to the responses. Some newsgroups have a moderator who keeps track of things and filters out crude messages and **spam;** others do not. Some newsgroups can be viewed as vast databases of useful information on a subject. News reader software is required.

Chat rooms are the Internet communication mode closest to face-to-face conversation. Chat rooms are sites where individuals can take part in "**real-time** discussions," using their keyboard and computer screen to type and read messages. Real time means happening instantaneously—in other words, as you type, others are reading your message and can respond immediately.

Most chat rooms are organized around a specific topic. For example, teachers interested in talking about reading instruction can come together in a chat room and carry on a discussion, using their computers to share ideas. Chat rooms can be found through your Web browser, using an IRC (Internet Relay Chat) program, or in America Online if you use AOL as your ISP.

Listserv
An electronic mailing list of subscribers who have chosen to receive information about a specific topic.

Newsgroup
An electronic bulletin board providing the ability to view and post messages without an e-mail account—usually related to a specific topic.

Thread
A series of messages including an original message and its replies.

Spam
Electronic junk mail.

Chat room
A location on the Internet where people exchange text messages in "real time."

Real time
Happening instantaneously—on the Internet, it means that as you type (for example, in a chat room), others are reading your message and can respond immediately.

Kids love to chat because of the real-time feedback—but class time is usually not an appropriate venue for this kind of Internet use. Help parents be aware of authorized, kid-friendly chat rooms. Many of the keypal sites listed on page 28 also have chat rooms just for kids. However, warn parents that there is still a chance that an adult posing as a child could be using the chat area. Another problem is **flaming,** or writing crude messages to provoke responses. Middle-school-age children especially like to experiment with this kind of behavior. Tell students that netiquette rules (pages 31–33) apply to chat rooms as well as to e-mail.

People sometimes confuse chat rooms with newsgroups. The main difference is that chats take place in real time, while newsgroup conversations do not.

Here are some suggested sites for teachers:

Connected Teacher from Classroom Connect
www.connectedteacher.com/messageBoard/messageboard.asp
Includes many education-specific discussion threads.

Educational Mailing Lists for Teachers
www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/resources/listserv.html
A list of over 100 educational mailing lists to which educators can subscribe.

Reading Teacher Listserv
web.syr.edu/~djleu/RTEACHER/directions.html
Conversations about literacy and technology, run by Dr. Donald Leu.

TalkCity
www.talkcity.com
Includes several education-specific chat areas.

Flaming
Writing crude messages to provoke responses, especially in e-mail, listserv, and chat room messages.

Things to Know
Instant Messaging is a combination of e-mail and chat room, often called simply IM. The user has a "buddy list" of online correspondents. He or she clicks on a listed name and types a message. The message pops up in a window on the buddy's screen. Other people on the list can join in, much like a telephone conference call.