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IN THE SCHOOLS; From History Teacher To Tutor in a Click

By MAREK FUCHS

The Internet may have transformed the way we exchange information, but so far its effects on the student-teacher relationship have been fairly modest.

Most school-maintained Web sites tend to be bare-bones -- generally a collection of e-mail exchanges, contact numbers, directions, sports schedules and Board of Education minutes. Think school-handbook-meets-microchip.

Sites run by individual teachers are often not much more evolved, most commonly homemade-looking affairs listing homework assignments and the like. Some high school teachers or college professors have slightly more intricate sites -- but these are often available only to students armed with the right passwords.

Historyteacher.net, a site created and run by a teacher from Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua, is the exception that proves the rule: a chockablock online resource for history students and even their teachers. Part primer on historical events, part Advanced Placement test study center, a third part catalog of primary and secondary resources, Historyteacher.net serves as a one-stop shop for high school history students, and would probably be useful to some in college.

New items are constantly posted -- including, fairly recently, information on medieval Mediterranean and Islamic coins, as well as a link to EaseHistory.org, a newer site with political ads in streaming video.

Historyteacher.net's creator, Susan Pojer, says she doesn't restrict access, dutifully answering any reasonable question from any student from different places. And though it could attract plenty of advertising dollars and possibly become an acquisition candidate, Ms. Pojer takes a not-a-chance stance on both issues.

Ms. Pojer lives in Yonkers and grew up there. Her father spent four decades on the Yonkers police force. Though dedicated to his work, he had an abiding love of history. Ms. Pojer recalls a childhood spent holding her father's hand during countless museum tours.

Ms. Pojer (who is shown on the site's main page with a cartoon clover pasted onto her head) said her childhood playtime consisted of coming home from school to play school with friends. "And we did it on my back porch," she said, "so I always got to play principal."

She became a history teacher, working at Maria Regina in Hartsdale for 21 years. This is her fourth year at Horace Greeley.

In the 1980's she developed a fascination with computers. She figured it would fizzle out because she thought her lack of math aptitude would stop any programming ambitions in their tracks. But she pleasantly surprised herself, finding a capacity to program and even teach some rudimentary classes.

In the late 1990's, when the public grew fascinated with all things Internet, Ms. Pojer had an epiphany: If she started to put items online, it would mean less photocopying.

Before long, up went student work, primary resources, past Advanced Placement exams and, eventually, any live link that might help a history student, organized neatly into categories. The site has had millions of hits since its inception in 1998, and there are testimonials on it from far-flung locations. Ms. Pojer recently posted a photograph of a University of Wisconsin-Platteville professor wearing a T-shirt reading "I love HistoryTeacher.net."

Ms. Pojer, who is teaching Advanced Placement American and European history this year, says the only strategic complication to her open-door policy is that in the lead-up to the A.P. exams, online foot traffic can become heavy enough to shut her Greeley students out.

Technology may seem too fast-paced for history, but as Ms. Pojer sees it, history can no longer exist without technology, because research is the major component of historical study.

When not busy reading biographies like "Team of Rivals," Doris Kearns Goodwin's recent work on Abraham Lincoln, Ms. Pojer spends much of her spare time tending to the site, keeping links fresh and answering e-mail messages from other people's history students -- though she is careful, she said, not to do anyone's homework.

She sees the future of education, in part, in teleconferencing -- with great professors and historians using broadband phone access to address students. The only thing technology won't be able to do, she added, is what she most needs it for.

"I wish that there was software to help you grade papers," she said.