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and e-Learning

**Internationalisation and Social Justice: the role of
Open, Distance and e-Learning**

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Distance learning, e-learning and the digital divide

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Abstract

This paper outlines a research project that investigated ODL students' levels of access to, use of and preferences for new technologies for learning. The study was based in the Department of Information Studies at Aberystwyth University, UK. A questionnaire including both quantitative and open-ended questions was utilised, allowing a mixture of statistical and qualitative data to emerge. This paper focuses on selected aspects of the qualitative data, addressing themes around barriers to ICT, use of learning materials and preferences around online and paper-based learning. A mixed picture of access, use and preference is evident. Key themes include sharing and negotiating use of ICT with family members; issues around reading online and print-based material; amount of time spent on the computer for other reasons; and the demands of busy working/family lives. A clear preference for a mixture of online and printed materials was evident, implying a continuing need for a variety of access points to learning materials for ODL students.

1. Introduction

This paper reports on a research project undertaken in the Department of Information Studies (DIS) at Aberystwyth University, UK, investigating open and distance learning (ODL) students' access to and use of information and communications technology (ICT) for their studies. DIS delivers courses in Information and Library Studies, and Archive Administration at both postgraduate and undergraduate level. It is a dual mode department offering both full time, campus-based study, as well as self paced, flexible open learning for students who wish to combine employment with studying towards a professional qualification. The current DIS approach to ODL is one of blended learning, including a virtual learning environment (VLE) for support, student interaction and some delivery of learning materials since 1995.

The research sought to investigate access but also preferences and study choices, which it will be seen are implicated to some extent with barriers to ICT and the online environment. In fact discussion about what students actually do

may be more revealing of the complexities relating to access to ICT, than statistics alone. For instance is it straightforward to find out that some 73% of UK households had access to the Internet in 2010 (Office for National Statistics 2010) – but this tells us nothing about use within the household which is likely to be negotiated amongst various family members. Similarly, an Internet connection at work does not necessarily imply access for personal use or study during or outside of work hours. Access to the Internet is a prerequisite for course entry at Aberystwyth, but actual information about individual levels of access and context of use have been limited in depth. Further investigation is needed to understand the contexts of use.

There is ongoing discussion as to the impact of ICT on learning, especially on ODL. For example, availability and reliability of ICT is still an issue in many parts of the world (Gaskell 2006), and is relevant when considering the needs of international students. Out of nearly 1000 ODL students registered at DIS, 32% are based outside the UK, with 12% from outside Europe, including 34 from the Caribbean and nine located in Africa. Developments in mobile technologies may offer a way to overcome issues around access to educational resources in some parts of the world, although we are at the early stages of understanding their value and impact.

Structural characteristics such as age, gender and ethnicity may still be a factor in accessing ICT, for instance women may have more complex access issues not only relating to financial and/ or educational circumstances but also because of their role in the family (Bushan 2008). There are also issues for those who live in rural or disadvantaged areas (globally and locally), or who wish to combine their studies with full time or part time employment (Enoch & Soker 2006). Current Higher Education (HE) learning and teaching strategies aim to encourage and engage just this type of non-traditional student, therefore it is crucial to understand their access to and attitudes towards new technologies.

Although access to the Internet increases yearly, this also increases the importance and timeliness of research that focuses on how it is embedded in students' daily lives (Rye & Zubaidah 2008) and the implications of this for progression and successful completion of study. The element of choice is emphasised in much research (Enoch & Soker 2006, Rye & Zubaidah 2008), i.e. that alternative ways of accessing material still need to be available and that making ICT access obligatory for all aspects of a course may create problems.

One of the key areas of scholarly and professional debate for the discipline of Information Studies (the academic context of this project) is that of access to, use of and exclusion from ICT (Feather 2008). These issues, and in particular the concept of the 'digital divide' as understood in relation to the delivery of learning materials, provide a clear point of intersection with research into ODL. It is with these contexts in mind, that this project aimed to further understand students' attitudes to e-learning, through an investigation of the following issues:

- The level of ICT to which Aberystwyth ODL students currently have access
- Difficulties or barriers faced in accessing online learning materials

- How online materials are currently used (e.g. in situ, on the screen; or printed off and read elsewhere)
- How, where and when individual study occurs (including preferences as well as fixed factors such as availability of ICT)

2. Methodology

A survey was designed with both quantitative and qualitative elements. It was distributed (in paper form and as an online survey) to all students who had been enrolled on their degree course for at least a year (to ensure familiarity with the learning materials as currently available) in June 2010. Participants were asked questions about their levels of ICT access, including ease of access, reliability and speed of internet connection; about their current activity regarding online and hard copy learning materials; and their preferences regarding online and offline learning. The rest of this paper considers the qualitative aspects of the data (framed by statistics as appropriate), drawing out key themes around access, use and finally preference, based on a grounded analysis of the answers to a series of open-ended questions.

3. Computer and Internet access

The response rate to the survey was 60% (337 completed). The early parts of the questionnaire asked students about age, gender, course studied and the nature of their access to computers and the Internet.

The majority of students considered themselves to have good access ('I can use a computer/the internet whenever I want') to a computer (88%) and the internet (84%); a much smaller group considered themselves to have adequate ('limited but sufficient') or inadequate levels of access. These respondents were given the opportunity to describe the factors affecting this.

A key issue that quickly became evident was the need to share ICT facilities with family or friends which restricted the time when it was possible to study:

"Other family members using the same PC. Time limitations at work and home."

"Access to many websites is restricted on work PCs. Family commitments mean not being able to spend as much time on PC at home as would be ideal."

These examples illustrate two linked issues; the need to share and negotiate use of ICT can restrict opportunities for study; and the demands of everyday life, family life and consequent limits to free time can also be constraining.

Technical problems, including age and unreliability of computer and/or software; and a slow, intermittent or unreliable internet connection were also cited as issues in terms of access to learning materials. A very small minority of those who chose to comment (9 comments) said that they had no access to a computer, or more commonly, to the internet at home. These numbers are

small, but remain of interest in an HE community which appears to assume fast, reliable and nearly constant connectivity. This may be an issue in parts of the world where Internet (and electric) connections are less reliable but it should not be assumed that limited access only occurs outside of the UK.

4. Reading and studying choices

Participants were asked about how they used essential course readings (fig. 1)

When directed to an essential online journal article or reading, do you:	
a) usually read it online?	16.7%
b) usually print it out?	39.1%
c) sometimes read online, sometimes print out?	44.2%

Figure 1: Reading and studying choices

Those who answered c) that they did both, were asked to provide further comment about their decisions to print or read onscreen. Three broad categories were evident within these open responses:

- length of article or other reading;
- usefulness / value of the reading;
- fatigue and time spent on computer for other reasons.

Length of reading material was by far the dominant factor in students' choices; primarily, if the article was considered to be long, it would be printed out. For a smaller subset of responses the opposite was the case – a very long piece would be read or scanned (visually) on the computer, often for considerations of economy and/or the environment; as noted elsewhere, both were matters of concern. Students felt guilty about printing large amounts of text, even where they would have preferred to do so:

“I ticked ‘online’ because I feel so guilty printing it out, but I’d prefer to read on paper and am always glad when the articles are part of the hardcopy module sent out”

Alongside considerations of length were those of the perceived usefulness of the material – participants stated that they would be more likely to print out articles or other readings that they felt would be of value to their understanding of the module and especially completion of the assignments – often a brief scan online aids this process, but if it is considered useful it is more likely to be printed:

“Always print it out – don’t like reading text from screen (just scan first to see its worth printing out)”

Linked to this is the ability to annotate, highlight or make other notes on paper which can be returned to later and is perceived as aiding the learning process:

“depending on length or article, or time, sometimes if the article has value then I would print it so that can make necessary notes on the article itself”

If a subject seems very complex, or appears to require deep or focussed reading, it is more likely to be printed out, which raises questions about how different types of learning take place: a study of students’ learning engagement in ‘online courses’ indicated that ‘deep’ learning mainly took place offline (Ke & Xie 2009). It also underlines the desirability of a flexible approach to designing learning materials that reflects both student preferences and the needs of the subject:

“I don’t read on screen for long periods unless I have absolutely no choice. I think, focus and understand much better when I read from print and that allows me to read and underline salient points.”

There was a clear difference between what might be termed ‘scholarly’ work such as research papers, and genuinely web-based material such as information on websites which are seen as more usefully read online. The ability to transfer between devices was also seen as valuable and helped to overcome some of the problems related to access. For example, some students downloaded readings at work to read on their home computer or laptop.

The relative ‘portability’ and reliability of paper was often referred to:

“It really depends on location. For instance, if I’m taking the train, I’ll print something so that I can read it there. Sometimes it’s also easier on the eyes to read from paper. The biggest benefit to reading online is the search facility.”

Fatigue, eyestrain and ‘spending all day on the computer’ were often cited as factors in the decision to print out materials, or indeed regarding preferences for module delivery (discussed below). But once again, it is more complex than simple ‘preference’:

“Being short sighted, I find reading online difficult, often due to small script, but mainly because half of my study time internet access is not available anyway. Paper is always reliable, despite bulk and weight.”

Cutting across all the themes outlined above is the need for flexibility in terms of the range of access points to learning materials. Students’ choices vary and are made according to a range of criteria around usefulness, length, ease of on-screen reading, mobility, printing costs and simple preferences.

5. Online or printed content: preferences

Students were asked about their study preferences for future modules:

Would you prefer to study modules which:	
a) Had more online content and less printed content than current modules?	
Yes	21.1% (69)
No	66.0% (215)
Don't know	12.9% (42)
b) Required you to spend more time online performing online activities such as contributing to a forum or commenting on an article?	
Yes	29.4% (93)
No	58.9% (186)
Don't know	11.7% (37)

Figure 2: Online or print preferences

In both cases, the majority response was 'No' as shown in the table above, although the negative response for a) regarding the delivery of content online, was stronger. Participants were able to expand on this with a follow up question, which provided a better understanding of the complexities behind the statistics. 126 participants provided such a response.

A dominant theme in this qualitative aspect of the data was satisfaction with the current balance of printed and online content (which as noted earlier, varies according to module but currently involves a printed module workbook complemented by some online activity, readings, or at minimum a forum for questions and discussion):

"I like the current balance of online and printed materials. I would not like the course to be more online than it is."

Or, from a more positive perspective:

"It's nice to have a mix!"

The reasons linked to this are not as simple as resistance to new technologies and in fact may be related to over-familiarity:

"I spend too much time on a PC at work and would prefer not to have to do the same for study purposes."

The preference to get away from the computer outside of the working day was a clear theme within the qualitative data. This may be particular to this subject area, of course: students are required to be working in the information and library profession in order to undertake the degree, and this is a profession that relies quite heavily on ICT in the workplace, and in which discussion about new technologies and the changing role of the librarian is dynamic and ongoing.

Nevertheless comments such as this should be given due consideration by institutions that take student satisfaction and retention seriously. This category relates to a theme introduced earlier and which was also evident in the data for this question: that reading online or too much activity online can be tiring and less than comfortable:

“I find reading things online can give me a headache and prefer to print them out, but this can be expensive.”

Several students stated explicitly that they liked and preferred the printed module workbook. Interestingly, the workbook and printed material in general were often referred to in terms of their flexibility and portability. Some of the responses in this category referred to limited access to ICT or an unreliable connection making paper more reliable (possibly due to geographic location); others that printed work is a more reliable travel companion:

“I like having a physical paper module that I can refer to and take with me to read on the train or at work during lunch”

This understanding of portability and ease of use is often linked to developing mobile technologies such as e-book readers, netbooks, smartphones and other mobile devices; however it may be wise not to make assumptions about students' access to and use of these.

There was considerable positive feedback regarding the introduction of audio files of lectures, which may indicate a preference for what we might call a more 'traditional' (or familiar) structure of teaching and learning (lectures and note taking) as a complement to the bespoke ODL materials:

“A mixture of learning materials is helpful – the audio files from lectures...was an excellent addition to the learning package.”

However there was a positive attitude towards many of the existing online activities, in particular those that enabled students to contribute to a discussion. This has both a 'learning' aspect and a social one:

“I think structured activity online is good for introducing people to interacting in virtual spaces. Breaks down barriers & perception that one must be a technical whizz-kid to do anything online.”

Many students commented that the experience of distance learning can be lonely and potentially demoralising and that online activity and discussion helped considerably in overcoming this. It needs to be balanced, however, as some students commented that they felt under pressure to contribute, or were shy about using forums. The complexity of the issues - and to some extent the ambivalence inherent in many of these discussions – can be seen here:

“I'm quite happy with high levels of online content – the interactivity aspect I find very helpful when learning new things. However, I would be very disappointed if I had to spend vastly more time in front of the PC, as I have

to do a lot of my working hours in front of a PC, and I really hate reading long chunks of text online!”

Similarly, provision of online content brings with it responsibility – participants commented that online activities and resources were only valuable if up to date, well maintained and regularly used by both staff and students.

Regarding the dominant theme in this section – satisfaction with the current mix of printed and online materials/activities, issues around time and the busy lives of individuals were once again evident. Many students felt that they were just too busy with their everyday lives, work and families to spend any more time on the computer or online.

6. Conclusion

Preference and issues of access are clearly complex and interlinked. Access issues may lead to preferences, based on experience. It is important to avoid making assumptions about students' levels of access to ICT, even if the problems only affect a minority:

“As we saw in our first module, the information society is as full of information “have-nots” as information “haves”. Many of the have-nots are library workers, believe it or not. Access to technology depends on finances, and “information technicians” at the bottom of the ladder are not usually paid a whole lot.”

As noted earlier, students' levels of access to ICT are not always 'ideal' or at the levels that might be expected. Some students with limited connectivity at home may need to turn to the workplace out of hours, to get access to some resources (although many are constrained as to what they can do in this context, and local authority internet connections in particular are subject to significant filtering and restrictions); many students had some problems connecting to the University's VPN, or stated that access to e-journals was overly complex; connectivity may be limited for geographical or financial reasons and even printing is seen as a considerable extra cost (which increasingly moves to the student as online delivery increases). The need to share a computer with family members; and in turn the need to balance study with the demands of family and working life makes flexibility in terms of when and where to study paramount and this flexibility does not only, or even primarily – at the moment, at least – seem to lie in the availability of online content or the use of mobile devices. It is clear that individual students' experience of electronic delivery and the online world (simply in terms of access and ease of use) varies considerably. Access problems must be overcome for all before genuine, long term understandings of preferences and study styles (and hence the value of e-learning itself) can be achieved.

These findings must be considered in the context of the very real and ongoing move towards more and increasingly sophisticated online delivery in both distance and campus-based learning; and it is evident in this research and elsewhere that great benefits accrue from the ability to search, access and

utilise learning materials online. In particular, institutional VLEs, forums, social networks, and other forms of online discussion are seen as invaluable in overcoming isolation and helping students to feel part of a learning community. However it is important to ensure that, while taking best advantage of developing technologies for learning, we do not contribute to a 'digital divide' by leaving behind those with limited or less sophisticated connectivity or other problems with access to ICT, be they geographical, socio-economic, personal or even preferential.

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Social justice and a distance education business education curriculum: unlikely bedfellows?

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Abstract

Business schools have been accused of being the ‘academy of the apocalypse’, serving and perpetuating greed and ‘rapacious capitalism’. There are increasing calls for business schools to redefine the purpose of business and to empower students to serve broader society whilst being profitable. Social justice is not considered to be high on the agenda of the curricula of many business schools, on the contrary. While the debate rages on regarding the complicity of business schools in pursuing a capitalist path, an important question is whether students and (potential) employers care about social justice as an essential element of the MBA curriculum?

This paper shares the findings of a study undertaken to establish the expectations of various stakeholders including students, faculty and employers on the curriculum and pedagogy of the MBA curriculum in an open and distance learning institution. The study indicates that social justice issues are very low on the ‘wish list’ of students and employers, while representatives from the faculty had differing views regarding the value of including social justice issues in the MBA curriculum.

Introduction

While this paper specifically focuses on the role of business schools in open, distance and e-learning (ODEL) in serving social justice, the functions of business schools are embedded in the broader discourses regarding the increasing influence of neo-liberalism on higher education (see for example Giroux, 2003; Lynch, 2006). Business schools are perhaps more guilty than higher education in general of providing ‘pedagogy of the privileged’ (Nurenberg, 2011; Schumpeter, 2009) or ‘pedagogy *for* the privileged (Curry-Stevens, 2005; emphasis added). These pedagogies stand in stark contrast to the work of Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator who originally coined and explored the notion of ‘pedagogy of the oppressed’ (1972).

Though higher education as a whole is accused of having sold out to 'rapacious capitalism' (Giroux, 2003, p.181; see also Blackmore, 2001; Lynch, 2006); business schools in particular have been called upon to 'make room for people who are willing to bite the hands that feed them' (Schumpeter, 2009, p.85). While there is vast disagreement regarding the extent to which business schools can be held accountable for the economic collapse since 2009 (see, for example, the report published by the Global Foundation for Management Education, 2010), there is general agreement that ethical conduct, corporate citizenship, social justice and 'planetary citizenship' should receive urgent attention in business school curricula (eg Mintzberg, 2002; Mintzberg, Simons & Basu, 2002; Prinsloo, Beukes & De Jongh, 2006).

Distance education or cross-border education is also increasingly accused of being imperialistic (see for example Blackmore, 2001). Not only is ODEL seen as a viable and highly profitable market (Giroux, 2003, p.190), there is increasing pressure from the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to liberalise all sectors of the economy globally, and redefine education as a tradable service rather than a public one (Lynch, 2006, p.4).

Higher education in general, and business schools in particular, are therefore caught up in a 'maelstrom' where these different discursive currents 'continue to widen, and ... become more turbulent' (Barnett, 2004, p.70). This leads to a 'cluster of fragility' which can (and should) result in self-understanding (Barnett, 2004, p.71). An essential element of higher education, ODEL, and business schools' self-understanding is to clarify the perceptions of a range of stakeholders regarding the 'what' should be taught and 'how' it should be taught. And social justice does not appear to be high on the list...

Student, faculty and employers play a crucial role in the design, development and delivery of the curriculum – and their views and perceptions crucially influence the curriculum and its realisation. What do key stakeholders 'want' from a qualification such as an MBA? Do they have or perceive a need for a curriculum that addresses social justice and human rights?

This paper shares empirical research on the perceptions of students, faculty and sponsors linked to one business school on the challenges facing managers and on the skills and values that should inform MBA curricula and pedagogy.

Literature review

As stated above, the question regarding the extent to which higher education in general, and, more specifically, ODEL serve social justice essentially confronts the central mandate of business schools. While there are several initiatives to teach ethics, social justice and corporate social responsibility in business school curricula, there are also concerns that these efforts are simply 're-arranging the deckchairs on the Titanic (Prinsloo & Beukes, 2005) and not changing the face behind the 'mask' of corporate citizenship (Matten, Crane & Chapple, 2003). Andrews and Tyson (2004) share their analysis and findings of a survey sent to more than 100 executives in over 20 countries to identify the knowledge, skills and attributes which young business leaders need to succeed. From their

context at the London Business School, the researchers define their objective as follows: 'We needed to understand whether we were offering what they, and other employers throughout the world, needed' (Andrews & Tyson, 2004, p.1). The research questions were phrased as follows: 'What are the skills executives require? How might they change in the future? What must your people be able to do for your company to remain successful? And how can we help you meet these needs' (Andrews & Tyson, 2004, pp.3-5).

Andrews and Tyson (2004, p.3) express their surprise at the responses... 'The corporate leaders we interviewed indeed produced an extensive list of qualities they desired in future recruits, but almost none involved functional or technical knowledge. Rather, virtually all their requirements could be summed up as follows: the need for more thoughtful, more aware, more sensitive, more flexible, more adaptive managers, capable of being molded and developed into global executives'. This, according to Andrews and Tyson, is in stark contrast to the 'content specialisation' offered by business schools over the last four decades. Instead of furnishing students with knowledge, business schools need to equip students with 'skills and attributes, the means by which knowledge is acted upon'.

They go on to state further that business education has changed dramatically since the 1950's when business schools were accused of not being 'academic enough' to more recent years where business schools have been accused of not setting an ethical tone. Andrews and Tyson (2004, p.4) also discuss the accusation that business schools do not do enough to 'set an ethical tone' and have allowed the 'quantitative ... to have driven out the moral, and the scientific... to have overwhelmed the human'. They quote Professor Ghoshal, previously professor of strategic and international management at the London Business School as saying 'Business schools do not need to do a great deal more to help prevent future Enrons; they need only to stop doing a lot that they currently do' (Andrews & Tyson, 2004, p.4). The need, then, is not to develop new courses, but to stop teaching some old ones (Andrews & Tyson, 2004, p.4).

With the above as background, Andrews and Tyson continue to discuss 'what companies want'. They feel that a primary requirement is to provide executive education which is 'global in its outlook and content ... to prepare business leaders with global business capabilities.' The responses of the surveyed companies regarding the knowledge, skills and attributes do not include any reference to 'social justice', 'equity', 'human rights', 'corporate citizenship', or 'sustainability' (Andrews & Tyson, 2004, p.5).

Despite initiatives such as those from the European Foundation for Management Development (EFMD) to redefine the purpose of business (see Prinsloo et al, 2006), and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC)'s drive to get business schools and business to embrace principles such as human rights, eliminating all forms of child, forced and compulsory labour, contributing to more sustainable and responsible environmental practices and to fighting corruption, only a few international business schools and higher education institutions have committed to these principles (see an updated list of academic institutions at

<http://www.unglobalcompact.org/ParticipantsAndStakeholders/academic-participation.html>, viewed 28 April, 2011).

This literature review found very little evidence to show that social justice has moved to be of central concern in higher education, and more particular, in business school curricula.

Research context

This study was undertaken in the context of two modules comprising the first Stage of the MBA programme at the Open University Business School. This MBA is available via a distance learning route to students from countries around the world. The research focused on surveying students, tutors, faculty, administrators and employer sponsors involved with these modules regarding their perceptions and expectations of the content and delivery of an MBA programme.

MBA students could study one of two modules at Stage 1 – one provided a direct entry route onto the MBA for graduates with some middle/senior management experience. The other module provided an entry route for students who had worked through a previous entry qualification and were assumed to be aspiring managers. Both modules were also available for delivery in two formats: one provided direct tuition contact time via an online medium, the other provided direct tuition face-to-face.

Methodology

The survey was sent to over 2000 recipients. Questions were largely identical across all stakeholder groups, with simple rephrasing as appropriate, with the aim of obtaining comparable data for analysis. The survey sought to identify, from a range of perspectives, reasons why students would register for an MBA; the challenges that managers face; the knowledge, skills and values which managers need to face these challenges, the advantages and disadvantages of working in multicultural and international groups and the challenges in working in such groups. Each stakeholder group was also asked to list topics which they felt should be included in an MBA and their perceptions regarding the meaning of an 'international' degree.

The student survey was tested on a small pilot group. It was then sent to all students registered within a single year across both Stage 1 MBA modules (direct graduate route and non-graduate entry route) and for both face to face and online tuition versions of the modules. Tutor and relevant faculty and administrator contact details were provided by the Business School. Employers were selected as those having sponsored students on the modules for whom clear contact details were available.

The surveys were sent via a URL link in an explanatory email invitation to all stakeholder groups between 13 and 20 September, 2010 with a prompt sent after two weeks to those who had not responded, or who had started and not yet completed the survey. The survey was live for four weeks. The response

rate from students was 23.9%, from faculty (academics, tutors and administrators) almost 58% and from employers 19.1%.

The researchers undertook a thematic analysis, as described by Braun and Clark (2006, p.79). We agreed what might constitute a theme and whether to focus on a rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of any one particular aspect. In choosing between semantic or latent meanings, we opted for semantic meanings as described by Braun and Clark (2006, p.84), identifying themes within the text at face value, that is, we did not attempt to interpret further the possible meanings of the entries. We followed their guided process and became familiar with the data before generating initial codes. These were cross-checked between the three researchers and agreement sought, before being used to generate themes. Themes were subsequently cross-checked between the researchers and consensus sought on the scope of each.

Analysis and discussion of findings

Due to the volume of the dataset, we have not attempted to describe the outputs from our analysis of all of the survey questions here. For the purposes of this paper, we have presented our findings with regard to stakeholder perceptions on the reasons for study and the challenges and skills required by managers today, as well as those regarding stakeholder preferences of 'content' to be included in the MBA curriculum. It is important to note that the sample of sponsors was very small compared to the other stakeholder groups and therefore no generalisations can be made from the percentages of the sponsor stakeholder group.

Reasons for studying an MBA

Mintzberg (2004) and others have suggested that one of the most important reasons why students register for an MBA is to realise salary increases and promotion. In the survey, we asked respondees to provide their own suggestions as to why students register for an MBA (registered students from their own perspectives and the other stakeholders responding in general). A total of 1,492 responses from students (n=506) were coded and classified into themes given as: career progression; sponsored by employer; personal development; the status of the MBA; to improve management skills; increase in knowledge; for the qualification; adding value to their organisations; networking and 'other'. 'career progression' included all responses referring to aspiring for promotion after completion of the MBA; job security; changing jobs; increasing chances of finding a different job; and/or seeking more responsibilities based on studying for an MBA. The category 'personal development' included responses referring to self-improvement; personal fulfilment; improving personal skills, etc. The 'other' category included responses such as 'Boredom while on maternity leave'; 'Interested in learning'; 'I wanted to spend my spare time constructively' and 'understanding of the world'.

The most provided reasons by *students* were clustered under career progression (28%); personal development and self-improvement (17%);

increase in knowledge/expertise (15%) and improving management skills (9%). In fact, all stakeholders listed career progression most frequently. However, tutors, faculty, administrators and sponsors differed from students in their second choices, listing 'Improve management skills/acquiring specific skills' next. There was no significant difference between the different student responses registered on the different modules/versions, nor when the dataset was reviewed regarding gender, race, educational background or occupation.

Challenges faced by managers

The survey asked each of the stakeholder groups to list three main challenges faced by managers today. In asking this, we sought to understand the context for studying an MBA presented as, or at least perceived as, 'global' or 'international'. What were the issues that the various stakeholders assumed that (future) managers would face, and how might the MBA prepare them for those issues? We were curious to see whether 'social justice', 'environmental issues' and 'corruption' (as listed by the principles of the UNGC) would be mentioned. Stakeholders ranked their answers in order of significance. The reasons provided by the student groups were analysed and thematically clustered. This resulted in 13 categories including: the changing context; people management; stakeholder/shareholder and network management; resource management; project and operation management; developing as manager and/or leader; information and knowledge management and ICTs; sustaining growth/strategic management/providing organisational leadership amidst complexity; ethics and environmental issues; personal; relationship with seniors/hierarchy; multicultural and diversity issues and 'other'.

As a whole group, students ranked the 'changing context' as the 4th most important challenge that managers face, while the other stakeholder groups considered it to be the most important. This is crucial for our exploration (and understanding) of the impact of internationalisation on curriculum design and delivery. It would seem that students were either unaware of the impact of the changing context on managers, or tend perhaps to focus on more immediate issues such as people management (e.g., conflict resolution; staffing issues; performance management, etc) and strategic planning in their day-to-day operational function as managers. It may be that dealing with the changing context is possibly the prerogative of senior and executive management, while Stage 1 MBA students are currently working at a more operational level.

Challenges that managers locating to a different country might face

Respondents were asked to imagine they were a manager transferred to a different country but working in the same role, and to list three challenges that they might face in the new location as a manager. The most frequently cited were those related to language issues and adapting to cultural change. The challenges mentioned were very varied and included: 'Understanding the cultural/social/ political/ economic milieu in which a company operates', 'Understanding local religion and the law', 'Overcoming language barriers – learning new business terminology as well as the local language', 'Cultural

sensitivity', 'Legislative differences', 'Dealing with corruption' and 'Gender role differences'.

It was heartening to see that issues such as 'corruption' and 'gender role differences' were mentioned, although these were largely overshadowed by practical concerns such as communication and cultural differences.

Topics of interest for inclusion in a MBA curriculum

Stakeholders were given a list of possible topics that MBAs often include and asked to select all the topics that were of interest to them. Though 'social justice', and 'human rights' as topics were not specifically mentioned, the list included 'ethics', 'corporate citizenship', 'environmental issues' and 'intercultural issues'. 'Ethics' as a subject area was highly regarded by faculty with sponsors and students rating 'ethics' approximately 20 percentage points lower. 'Corporate citizenship' was rated highest by faculty, with sponsors rating 'corporate citizenship' 20 points lower than faculty, and students about 50 points lower than faculty.

Faculty rated 'environmental issues' highest of all of the stakeholder groups, while students and sponsors rated 'environmental issues' respectively 40 and 50 points lower than faculty. 'Intercultural issues' were rated very high by faculty, with students and sponsors rating it around 40 points lower than faculty.

Conclusions

This research has shown that initial claims that business schools may be regarded as 'uncritically supporting 'rapacious capitalism' (Giroux, 2003) are not true of all business schools. From our study, it was evident that faculty at least regarded 'ethics', 'corporate citizenship', 'environmental issues' and 'intercultural issues' as very important for inclusion into an MBA curriculum and so have an interest in promoting social justice in its broadest sense. What is evident from this research though is that students and employers are more concerned with the day-to-day challenges of being a manager in a highly complex world.

The research provides evidence that some business schools may be willing and ready to provide counter-narratives to greed and selfishness and to embrace social justice unreservedly.

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A comparison between three different online activities in developing social justice in a Teacher Education Program

(A case study)

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Abstract

This paper examines three different online activities in formal university education: forums, blogs, and wikis in developing social justice in a teacher education program. Web technologies, particularly, open source Web 2.0 technologies, in which a combination of mini-lectures, presentations and tutorials, class blogs, forums and wikis, are used provide a new approach to teaching. This study is based on the belief that the blogs have the potential to increase reflection, sense of community and collaboration in graduate classrooms. Also it is based on the belief that the dynamics of conversations in discussion forums lead to an understanding of the processes involved in the formation of virtual learning communities. It also suggests that wikis improve academic and professional activities. All these three different online activities could impact on the social justice of the learners, especially when we must learn to teach those persons, who are so susceptible to our influence, with equity and justice. We used several research techniques, including participant observation, text analysis and a self-report questionnaire.

The results indicate that there is a relationship between the texts of discussion forum and continuation of interpersonal exchanges. The results also indicate that using the wiki for curriculum activities made students pay close attention to accuracy. The survey revealed students' positive perceptions of the blended course design with online materials through wikis being the most favorable, followed by blogs and forums. Based upon survey results and written evaluations from the class blogs and wikis, students feel this new approach makes the course one of their most positive and valuable learning experiences. We believe that this approach can benefit both teaching and learning in a variety of web technology courses. This can achieve a type of social justice.

Recommendations and suggestions for further researches are stated.

Keywords: e-learning; forums; blogs; wikis; teacher education program; Open Education; social justice.

1. Introduction

In the last several years, there has been a rapid increase in the use of web-based applications, particularly wikis, blogs and podcasts, in online professional and educational services (Kamel Boulos, Maramba, & Wheeler, 2006). These applications are accessible and easy to use. They offer users the opportunity to

share information and collaborate. The strengths of web-based solutions also are applicable to qualitative research.

Becoming prepared to teach and to lead is a task fraught with importance. Surely that task increases in intensity when we are responsible for the education of the youngest children. And surely that task becomes even greater when we must learn to teach those persons, who are so susceptible to our influence, with equity and justice.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO (1997), recognizes the magnitude of this task: This early stage in life is not only crucial to a child's future development—it can also be a time for children to discover differences in a positive light, learning to live, to play and to learn together. These “first steps” are extremely important in facilitating inclusion throughout schooling.

This article presents a case study about how to use the online activities and realize the social justice including in the Teacher Education Program at Kuwait University. Covered first in this article will be the theoretical guidelines about forums, wikis, blogs, social justice and mission of this program. Finally we will introduce methodology, participants, findings, as well as discussion and recommendations in teacher education program on which this assessment is based, and implications that this study has for educational preparation programs interested in enhancing their ability to inculcate social justice in their students.

2: Theoretical guidelines

2.1 What is a Forum

One of the most widely used asynchronous communication tools in online courses is discussion forums in which students and teachers post to threaded asynchronous discussions. Currently, the asynchronous online discussion forums are contemporary tools that can save, arrange and present the messages into various discussion threads. Participation in asynchronous discussions, such as discussion forums, can be identified as an indicator to evaluate the progress of interaction and collaboration in online courses (Hammond, 1999; Prinsen, Volman & Terwel, 2007).

There are several studies examining factors affecting the participation in online asynchronous discussion.

Learner participation has been discussed widely as a key part of online learning recently and it has been conceptualized differently in several studies. For example, Hrastinski (2008, p.1761) proposed following definition of online learner participation: “Online learner participation is a process of learning by taking part and maintaining relations with others. It is a complex process comprising doing, communicating, thinking, feeling and belonging, which occurs both online and offline”.

Teacher education programs suggest that learner participation, measuring interaction with peers and teachers in online environments, can enhance learning outcomes. Such participation enhances learning, the quality of assignments, student satisfaction and retention rates (Hrastinski, 2008) and can lead to social justice. Woods (2002) stated that both quality and quantity of interaction with the instructor and peers are much more crucial to the success of online courses and student satisfaction than to success and satisfaction in traditional courses. Davies and Graff (2005) concluded that students achieving high or medium passing grades engaged more actively than students achieving low passing grades and also students achieving low passing grades were more active than students who failed in the several modules of courses even though greater online interaction did not lead to significantly higher performance. Picciano (2002) who found that students perceived greater quality and quantity of learning as a result of participating in the discussions. Cheung and Hew (2008) discussed factors that fall into three different categories: attributes of the asynchronous online discussion, the role of the facilitator and the design of discussion activities. Vonderwell and Zachariah (2005) found that online learner participation are influenced by technology and interface characteristics, content area experience, student roles, instructional tasks, and information overload. Also Vrasidas and Mclsaac (1999) concluded that the structure of course, class size, feedback, and prior knowledge of computer-mediated communication all affected the interaction during the discussion.

Godwin, Thorpe and Richardson (2008) suggest that students taking online courses with a high level of interaction tended to be different from the students taking the courses with a low level of interaction in regard to age, gender and previous qualifications. Although the results were not statistically significant (McLean & Morrison, 2000), highly interactive students were generally younger, male and had higher educational qualifications.

Analyzing the relationships between learner participation and six socio demographic variables (i.e. sex, age, educational level, occupation, residence in urban or rural areas, and region of residence) they found two variables (holding a university degree and living in an urban area) to be the strongest predictors of participation. Another study by Prinsen, Volman, and Terwel (2007) stated that females send more messages to the discussions than males and are more dependent on their computer skills. Students who are good at comprehensive reading also send more messages. Another variable that influences the degree of participation is popularity among classmates.

2.2 What is a Blog?

According to Assmann (2005, p. 19), “the information and communication technologies have become a constituent element of our way of seeing and organizing the world”.

The blog, as a means of deploying the concept of “on-line interaction” is, according to Granieri (2006, p. 31), “The most accessible and natural of the tools meant to the sharing and publication aside from text, images, films and sounds, that progressively, with the increase in the speed of data transmission,

will spread growingly”. This means complementarity amongst the diverse communication formats, based on the Web 2.0 applications, allows a greater effectiveness in the creation and diffusion of the message. It is therefore natural that the use of the blog is a more frequent resource, as a pedagogical strategy or in other competences in all levels of teaching (Gomes, 2005). Pombo (2007,p3) considering the viewpoints of several authors, found that the use of the blog allows the development of innovative and transforming the students activities and the ability of making decisions and defining personal and group objectives, the sense of belonging and responsibility, originality, creativity, communication and socialization, construction of knowledge and their own identity.

Efimova and Fiedler (2004, p. 493) called attention to the fact that one of the most interesting characteristics of learning in a blog is the “support for the development of meta-learning skills”. Public exposure is inherent to the fact that we are dealing with an on-line resource, which increases the responsibility and the effort to improve students’ thinking in terms of expansion, deepening, reformulation and even creation of new topics. The comments and the answers to many proposed challenges allow the development of different forms of cognitive skills, the development of high-level thinking skills, amid the reflexive, critical and creative thinking, and social justice.

2.3 What is a Wiki?

In 1994, Ward Cunningham developed a collaborative tool on the Internet called wiki, a Hawaiian word meaning “quick” (Augar, Ratmar, & Zhou, 2004). A wiki is an online database that allows users to create, edit, and/or reflect on the content of a web page. Wikis are used to create collaborative websites where users can write documents in collaboration with one another. Wikis can be open to the general public or made private. Wikipedia is a good example of an online collaborative encyclopedia where anybody can edit and update the site content.

All participants may edit, delete or modify comments that have been written and, depending on the level of access, may modify the web page.

There are at least two ways of writing wikis. The first, the document mode, is used is to collaborate with others to write a document. The document is usually written in the third person and authors add their edits or additions to the wiki document anonymously. The result is a document that reflects shared knowledge or beliefs (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001).

The second way of writing a wiki is carrying out discussions by posting their comments either anonymously or signed. Participants respond to the posted comments leaving the original messages intact (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001). Eventually a group of threaded messages is developed, enabling the team members to share knowledge in a simple and quick way. The collective knowledge base of the group can be easily navigated and managed (Sauer, Bialek, Efimova, Schwartlander, Pless, & Neuhaus, 2005).

It is this second type of wiki that we see as having particular promise in developing social justice.

2.4 Social Justice in Teacher Education Program

The framework for social justice in educational programs is made up of four essential components: (a) selection of students, (b) critical consciousness in teaching and learning, (c) proactive systems of support and inclusive structures, and (d) induction /praxis (Christman, 2010):

- a. selection of students: Despite opinions to the contrary, we recommend that students selected for educational preparation programs come to these programs with social justice. Although some might recommend that open access to our program is an act of social justice, the work needed for equitable system in our schools is too important to leave it to the hope that students will gain a social justice lens while in educational preparation programs.
- b. critical consciousness in teaching and learning: These programs are enhanced when critical consciousness becomes embedded in our students' practice so that through their instructional leadership, they can assist teachers in developing their own equitable pedagogy. And through our practice of social justice, we are able to provide assignments that are reflective of real practice in our schools, rather than cover a range of textbook skills.
- c. proactive systems of support and inclusive structures : We posit that proactive systems of support and inclusive structures are necessary for successful, socially-just educational programs. Students must be able to discern the types of structures that bar elementary/secondary students from learning and progressing in schools.
- d. induction/praxis: Generally speaking, most programs provide only short-term induction for their students once they are practising in the field. The time for support and renewal must be longer and must provide for a feedback loop between the program faculty and the student. During that longer time, students receive and provide continuous feedback, take additional coursework, and develop a network of other principals with whom they can seek advice and critique. This can develop the social justice.

2.5 Mission of the Teacher Education Program

Teachers must be prepared to teach for social justice as well as for change in societies in which standardization and prescription are often mistakenly accepted as higher standards (Cochran-Smith, 2001). The Master of Education degree with a specialization in curriculum and instruction requires that students take a total of 36 credit hours. Of those credit hours, 15 must be in the Curriculum and Instruction core, 12 in graduate courses, and 9 of electives in a focus area.

The mission of the teacher program is to:

- provide optimal professional teaching and learning experiences at the bachelors, and masters level ;
- provide quality care, and education support programs for children at public schools and the student teachers, faculty and staff.
- provide opportunities for faculty and graduate students for research, teaching, and community service.

3. Methodology

A qualitative research design and case-study approach were chosen to investigate the teacher education program at the University of Kuwait. Data were collected through interviews using an open-ended, semi-structured questionnaire. The interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim. The written text, together with the recording and observations taken during the discussion, aided in the triangulation and interpretation of meaning. Triangulation was also accomplished through member checks (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, & Allen, 1993) and audit trails (Creswell, 1998). Data from the interviews were analyzed in three stages: first by open coding, then by axial coding and, finally, selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Coding involved working with data by organizing it and breaking it down into manageable units, synthesizing them, looking for patterns within the data, and discerning what was important and what was to be learned (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Open coding involved breaking down, examining, comparing, categorizing, and conceptualizing the data. The process continued into axial coding, which involved sorting and defining data into categories and themes. Selective coding involved developing the story, revisiting the categories and discovering the interrelationships among categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In addition, selective coding guided both interpretation and meaning, and helped in explanations, conclusions, inferences and linkages, and dealing with rival explanations. The data were then cast against the a priori framework for assessing socially just educational teacher programs.

4. Participants

The participants in this study were all affiliated with the Teacher Education Program at Kuwait University. Eight women and a man were interviewed. All of them are Kuwaitian. They ranged in age from 25 to 30 years old and they averaged 5.5 years in the academy. All had been teachers and administrators in public education previously. Their ranks varied from teacher to director or principal. Interested in how the participants made meaning of their experiences in the program, I approached them to participate in the study, assuring them confidentiality and gaining their permission to audio-tape and use transcripts from the interviews.

5. Findings, discussion and recommendations

Definition of Social Justice: All participants were asked to provide a personal definition or concept of social justice. A variety of responses were given: social justice was seen as listening to students, parents, the community, and others, and learning to be part of that community. While practising social justice as a listener, one participant said, 'one respondent felt that all of the instructors would agree that they still believe they can make a difference and that they must pass this belief to their students and that this was a form of social justice, too'. Yet another participant indicated that he saw social justice as "research as praxis". That is, "using the power of dialogue and democratic participation". He believed that the instructors should be conduits to bring about change, that they should be the ones to move students from rhetoric to practice. So important is the concept of research as praxis that doctoral students have the option of using it as their research method for their dissertations. He also felt that the mission of the institution, that of outreach and service to the people of the state, forces the program instructors to redefine themselves as an academic community because the separation between the community and the institution is nonexistent. This situation, deliberately created, promotes, even forces, social justice to be at the forefront of all program decisions.

6. Recommendations

According to the above considerations, we suggest the following recommendations:

1. With regard to student selection for teacher programs, we recommend that students who are accepted into these programs should have a predisposition toward social justice before they actually enter the programs.
2. Data can be gathered by having students write about and discuss their beliefs, ethics, goals, and objectives about their field of study. These data can be cast against missions, NCATE dispositions, or other forms that encapsulate social justice.
3. Faculty must also agree about the value and weight of social justice in selecting students.
4. Equity issues should be taken into consideration during the selection of participants in which they are challenged to stretch beyond their initial comfort zones in viewing diverse issues and in looking into their own beliefs.
5. By introducing students to the language of critique, they learn to question current practice. Questioning current practice creates tension in the students, but it also causes the students to consider whether change is necessary.
6. The faculty in the teacher program further believe in the importance of intentionally hiring faculty who are already committed to social justice through action and scholarship. They believe that doing so increases the critical consciousness not only of their students, but also that of the faculty members themselves. They have built their program around a thorough commitment in teaching, research, and service to social justice. Because of their experience prior to working in the program, faculty know which

- structures exist that enable inequities and which can serve as scaffolds to promote a student's learning and progressing toward social justice.
7. To become a program exemplar for social justice takes lots of planning, dedication, reflection and hard work.

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Social media and digital dialogue as enzymes for promoting international leadership and educational meta-strategies for creativity and intercultural awareness

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Abstract

This paper addresses e-learning, technology enhanced communication and social media as vehicles for working towards educational leadership and internationalisation, inclusion and social justice. The paper provides an insight into the communicative and ethical needs of a global citizen including issues of *awareness, empowerment, citizenship and creativity*. It investigates and discusses the prerequisites of a global citizen and introduces the rationale behind a particular e-learning strategy/model, utilizing a broad range of social media and open educational resources. The paper draws on a recent case study of social media in distributed practice (Sorensen, 2008), using an open strategy in terms of processes and resources for supporting intercultural communicative awareness and situated communicative creativity through the teaching/learning method itself in the midst of learning the subject in question.

1. Introduction

The promise of digital technology in education is not to be contradicted. Numerous approaches to uncover and utilize this potential have been tried out and with varying degrees of success. While within education for some time focus and attention has been given to explore the general technological wonders and communicative features of social media, it is essential for prosperity and growth of our global society that we orient our research questions towards exploring how we may use technology to educate for *methods of inclusion*, instead of furthering the digital divide. In other words, how we - despite the immediate risk of promoting cultural imperialism – may improve, not only teaching and learning on a given subject and in a smaller context, but also – as a second effect and on an ethical note – may, through educational approaches, may influence the lives and learning of global citizens and, thus, promote global citizenship.

This paper addresses e-learning, technology enhanced communication and social media as vehicles for working towards educational leadership and internationalisation, inclusion and social justice. The paper provides an insight into the communicative and ethical needs of a global citizen including issues of *awareness, empowerment, and creativity*. It investigates and discusses the prerequisites of a global citizen and introduces the rationale behind a particular e-learning strategy/model, utilizing a broad range of social media and open educational resources.

The paper draws on a recent case study of social media in distributed practice (Sorensen, 2008), using an open strategy in terms of processes and resources for supporting intercultural communicative awareness and situated communicative creativity through the teaching/learning method itself in the midst of learning the subject in question.

2. The promise of digital technology

The general empowering interactive/dialogic potential of networked communication technology for educational purposes is widely recognized (e.g. Conner, 2004; Miyake & Koschmann, 2002, Bang & Dalsgaard, 2008). The educational usage includes communication technologies as e.g. so-called Virtual Learning Environment (VLEs) and Virtual Meeting Environments (VMEs) (Sorensen et al., 2008). Less sustained is the recognition of a similar educational potential of Web 2.0 technologies. While Web 2.0 technologies (also known as Social Software) over the last years have conquered the digital arena in many use contexts, a similar conviction of a potential for education remains to be seen. Nevertheless, according to Dalsgaard & Sorensen (2008) a powerful potential for two main areas of an educational process seems indisputable: 1) *Participation* (dialoging and stimulating the creation of communicative networks and awareness); 2) *Production* of digital resources (creating and sharing products).

Wegerif (2006a & 2006b) adds a final affordance to the educational visions related to digital technologies when he emphasizes the essential fit between digital technology and education in stating that digital networks offer the possibility for designing environments for teaching and learning in which the facilities of the technology contribute to promoting basic democratic skills, such as learning how to listen to other voices – a basic intercultural skill, essential to develop for communication and learning in a global society.

3. Intercultural awareness, empowerment and citizenship: a strategic model

Empowerment of learners may be viewed as an essential feature enabling citizens to become active participants in a 21st century global intercultural society (Brown & Davis, 2004; Holzl, 1999). Empowerment may be defined as the power to control and ability to control ones own life in a manner that makes space for understanding, influence, and meaningfulness in a way that promotes insight, transparency and ability to act as an active citizen. Empowerment is both a process and a goal in itself (Hoskins et al., 2006; Mayer et al., 2007). Both sense and actions of citizenship may be very subtle and personal issues, and becoming an active citizen is likely to be the result of a continuous lifelong process formed by history and relations with others.

A sustainable teaching and learning approach for educating citizens in such a society must feature digitally enhanced pedagogic architectures, which rest on at least two empowering pillars: dialogic participation / negotiation and meta-learning / awareness. The specific characteristics of the competencies cultivated by the two pillars are (figure 1):

A. Dialogic participation/negotiation

- Cultivation of competencies to initiate and participate in digital discussion and shared generation of knowledge (one is active to achieve a common goal) (Stahl, 1999; Sorensen & Takle, 2004; Sorensen, 2008)
- Cultivation of ability to listen to other peoples' opinions and apply *democratic attitudes* and *Ethos* in the negotiation of meaning accompanied by a resulting *intercultural insight*.
- Promotion of a global, *co-existential Ethos* (Sorensen & Ó Murchú, 2006)

B. Meta-learning/awareness

- Creation of *awareness* of own learning processes (personal and collaborative e-learning methods)
- *Personalization* in terms of promoting process independence and ownership (Gibson, 2006; Sorensen & Ó Murchú, 2004 & 2005) – in a perspective, which is “true” for you (Colaizzi, 1978).
- *Awareness* that you construct your own theories/hypotheses and test them continually in your own life, both in empirical experiments (practice) and in theoretical “experiments” (thinking and thought).
- Meaningful demonstration that whatever you learn is relevant to you, as it is connected to your prior knowledge on the issue.
- Digital meta-learning creates *awareness* of the nature of ones learning processes (Bateson, 1976)

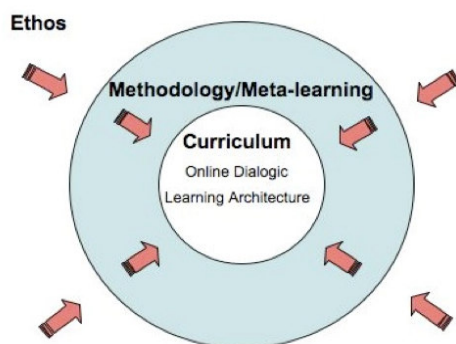


Figure 1: A Meta-Dialogic Approach (Sorensen, 2009)

A digital technology combined with a dialogic teaching/learning strategy is likely to support the education of citizens through conceiving some essential democratic attitudes and intercultural skills of a global citizen, simply because it is likely to leave significant indirect “imprints” (meta-learning) on learners in terms of their self-perceptions and radius of action in their process of becoming global democratic citizens.

Less in focus of dialogic learning is its possible evolvement at the meta-learning level (Bateson, 1976), if invited by the methodology of the curriculum. The

learning that is acquired from the methodological level, i.e. “the way things are learned”; only in the very rare case is it consciously employed (and its value envisioned) in the design of e-Learning curriculum. In other words, the *meta-dialogic level* seems a neglected space of learning.

4. Approaching Practice: A case study

The case study reported on was a master course (15 ECTS) at the graduate level. There were 18 participants, all of which were people working full-time in industry and public service areas.

The goal of the course is to provide insight into the challenges related to pedagogic design and facilitation of processes of eCommunication & eLearning in various use contexts. The overall course objectives are that students acquire the skills and competencies to: 1) reflect on and to build and share insights gained through collaborative dialogue, 2) arrange and organize pedagogically appropriate learning environments across physical and digital spaces, and 3) design, facilitate and moderate (collaborative) processes of eCommunication and eLearning.

To indicate the importance of dialogue, the overall proposed understanding of the course was “dialogue as curriculum” (Sorensen & Ó Murchú, 2006). The traditional 12 3-hour face-to-face lectures were broken down to only 3 full-day face-to-face meetings, while the remaining teaching and learning took place using a variety of *digital media*:

- AULA (the basic course space)
- CONNECT (a desktop conferencing system, with whiteboard, used for presentations and mediated face-to-face dialogue)
- AULA-plenary text fora and meta-for a (for both involved and meta-level dialoging and debate)
- AULA-small group fora and spaces (for managing process and for creating and preparing “items”)
- AULA-chat (a real time text-chat feature of AULA, used for summaries)
- Weblogs (for personalization and reflection)
- Skype (for supervision)

The *resources* of the course included all kinds of relevant digital material and research papers available online as well as other online applications and resources. It also incorporated through more formal presentations at the face-to-face meetings experiences and insights of the work contexts of participants. According to the assignment given, the participants, in the two-week preparation periods, had to, individually, make themselves familiar with the literature/resources given and prepare in their small groups plenum presentations to be presented mediated face-to-face using the desktop video conferencing system, CONNECT. They were asked to finalize their presentations with a set of related questions/problems for succeeding debate in the AULA forums.

Following the CONNECT presentations and based on these final problems raised, the groups continued the debate through text-based dialogue and negotiation in the AULA plenum fora. The small group members were asked to distribute a set of roles among their small group (on average consisting of 4 participants). The roles were supposed to form, support and guide their later discussion and to give the participants a concrete point of departure in the discussion. Some were presenters, some moderators, etc. The description of the roles was clarified in detail in the assignment. Both teacher and students agreed on committing themselves to attending the textbased discussions for a minimum of five times a week over the two weeks of debate. In the debate period each of the groups were asked to present, in the plenum forum, an identified problem related to literature, experience, etc. They were asked to initiate, conduct and wrap up the succeeding online plenum discussion that evolved from the problem of their group. In parallel with the discussions, the participants and the teacher were engaged in continuous individual reflections (using weblogs) and meta-reflections and meta-communication in a meta-forum (in AULA) to reflect and discuss the experiences and the observed processes of their own communicative behaviour, as it evolved.

To explore the AULA-chat feature, the groups presented their wrap-up summary dynamically in a text chat session. The next task in the delivery plan was to work on (in the small groups) and hand in an assignment, using AULA. Finally, the small groups prepared their feedback on each other's work to be presented at the next face-to-face meeting. The course went on with a second iteration of the described cycle, before finally starting to prepare the exam paper, while receiving, in parallel, supervision from the teacher.

The participants were graded, as described in terms of both quantity and quality of their contributions (Stahl, 1999; Sorensen & Takle, 2004). In this case, the teacher defined "active participation" (and succeeding pensum reduction for the final exam project) on the basis of the following participation criteria:

- Attending 2 of 3 face-to-face meetings
- Weblog contributions: minimum 5
- In 2 times 3 weeks of online discussion period: 5 contributions per period per person. 2 should be initiating and 3 responding
- Collaborate on group assignments A + B
- Attending 2 out of 3 Connect meetings.

The course was evaluated using a semi-structured questionnaire and free style comments in an online evaluation forum in AULA. The delivery process mirrored a student-centred, open process in which knowledge resources entered dynamically from outside (student's work contexts, student's experiences, student-identified resources from the internet, etc) via the participants as well as through the teacher. This process was driven and motivated by participants and their individual prior knowledge and engagements. The latter is an important fact in adult education, where all participants are "experts" in each their individual working context.

Viewed from a teacher perspective, the content of the discussions turned out to be of a rather good quality. The delivery of the course was characterised by a high degree of student participation, self-experience and self-reflective dialogic engagement. Interests in the experiences and engagement was driven by peers, as was operationalization of these in the shared dialogic process characterized by participant "ownership", equality in teacher and learner roles (dynamically interchanging roles), and assessment of dialogic process and product. The teacher occupied a role in the discussions equal to the students. Only in the meta-forum, the teacher shifted between the role of participant and the role of "the expert". The teacher's role became one of a cultivator to fertilize the ground for learning, a co-participant to co-experience co-interact and share, a weaver and a facilitator to sort out during the delivery process as-we-went-along.

The evaluating comments from the participants documented that, in general, the course had been perceived as a positive experience. Some participants initially found it to be a stressing experience, especially due to a too large amount of readings. A smaller part of the participants expressed some frustration that the course did not have the more traditional roles of a teacher (the one who knows) and a student (the one learns from the teacher). Nonetheless, most of the time the course delivery process produced dialogic presence and engaged communicative participation.

Some additional qualitative free style comments were:

- It was difficult to grasp the focus of the course, but it was exiting that the course construction itself was an integral part of the course
- Too much reading
- The learning achieved came especially through group work
- One part of the learning was disturbed by CONNECTs limitations. This was sometimes frustrating, when the participants had spent time on preparation, which was sabotaged technically. But – having second thought considerations – this is exactly the situation that we are likely to put people in.
- I have experienced great engagement and commitment in both the small group and large group activities
- I have been happy for both face-to-face and online activities, my study group has functioned very well. Lots of praises to the teacher for the handling of the group selection process.

Student responses from the questionnaire show some indication that this course and its combination of pedagogical design, digital learning architecture (including web 2.0) and (meta)dialogic collaborative knowledge building promotes development of learner empowerment and meta-dialogic learning and awareness. Dialogic meta-awareness and the resulting visibility to meta-inspect ones own competencies and communicative actions seemed to have created the personal initiative and the transparency needed to implement and maintain democratic forms and attitudes in intercultural participation, negotiation and dialogue.

To a certain degree the course seemed to have increased student empowerment through enhancing student initiative and incitement to express opinions and dialogue with peers. However, a remaining issue to investigate further and possibly to resolve is the more specific affordance of each technology in this respect, and to identify more the more specific correlations between each of the technologies and the activities implemented in the blended learning architecture across spaces and media.

Reflections on the strategic model

The model is a meta-dialogic model built fundamentally with a vision of learner empowerment. It is envisioned to serve as a methodological approach for implementing communication strategies which - through a meta-methodological communicative approach in an intercultural meta-dialogic “training-space” – first, “train” participants for global intercultural citizenship and ethical issues of communicative behaviour related to that, and second, makes space for the occurrence of situated, intercultural creativity through mediated dialogue.

The reflective and meta-reflective aspects of the learning architecture manifest themselves in a variety of ways. A prime emphasis on collaboration and dialogue, and on the dialogic process and methodology in learning, stimulates a style of learning, which implies a meta-reflective practice of democratic methods and techniques of negotiation. More precisely, this is implemented in the networked learning architecture using a structure of virtual fora for the collaborative dialogue, a meta-fora structure for the meta-discussions of the collaborative dialogue, and so forth. In the words of Wegerif:

*Understanding is an event within a dialogue between perspectives and is not reducible to a constructed representation. A focus on tools and construction cannot explain creative insights and is hard to convert into a pedagogy for teaching general thinking skills since tools are always specific to tasks. Teaching thinking is much easier to understand through a dialogic perspective which focuses on the opening, deepening and broadening of reflective spaces.
(Wegerif, 2006b, np.)*

The Ethos underlying the model contains a wish to stimulate learning processes and produce global citizens that are able to further, practice and enhance collaborative learning across diversities of different kinds (geographical, cultural, political. etc.). These are typically learning processes that are based on non-authoritarian and democratic values, where a critical listening to the opinion of others’ in taking a stand is a vital meta-learning element – also referred to as “deutero-learning” (Bateson, 1976) denoting learning about how to learn (i.e. learning about one self and learning). The online collaborative, dialogic request and emphasis of the approach stimulates such reflective meta-learning – or self-inspection and awareness at different reflective levels. This happens on the basis of the characteristic dimension of distance, which is an inherent valuable characteristic of a networked stage inviting a duality of dialogic and reflective thinking independently of time and space (Sorensen, 2004a).

Concluding Remarks

The model presented is a dialogic model built fundamentally with a vision of learner empowerment, and with the intent of serving as a methodological approach for implementing communication strategies in relation to intercultural education. The intention (at a second level) is - through a meta-methodological communicative approach in an intercultural meta-dialogic "training-space" - to "train" participants for global intercultural citizenship and ethical issues of communicative behaviour related to that, and to make space for the occurrence of situated, intercultural creativity through mediated dialogue.

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Enhancing quality in distance learning: reflections on a Nigerian initiative

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Abstract

This case study describes an initiative which set out to enhance the quality of distance learning in Nigeria, involving six universities who have collaborated in the production of a number of pilot modules. The case study describes the aims and implementation of the project. It goes on to consider participants' reflections on the experience of taking part in the initiative, on the potential of quality distance learning and their views on collaborating across institutions. Participants were positive about the benefits of quality distance learning which could engage students and provide a realistic alternative to lectures and face to face contact. At the same time they were conscious of the challenges of implementation. The collaborative approach to module design and delivery was well received and many felt it had the potential to deliver quality and cost effective distance learning, although the process of collaborating across institutions proved difficult at times. The level of operational success of the project in terms of student experience will emerge over the next few years.

DL developments in Africa

Distance learning can provide significant contributions to social justice, because of its cost effective potential to reach students who would otherwise not receive a post- secondary education. In Africa, distance learning has been introduced in response to pressing needs to extend post-secondary education to large numbers of potential students who are unable to attend campus university and to meet the growing demand for education and a limited capacity to provide the necessary staff and buildings required by traditional delivery. Aderinoye et al (2010) provide an overview of relevant developments.

For example, in Uganda where more than half the population are under 15 years old, Basaza et al (2010) describe how the country faces major challenges including a lack of infrastructure in terms of roads, buildings, electrical and telecommunications networks. Many students find the cost of campus study prohibitive.

At the same time, distance learning presents challenges to the need to maintain quality. Basaza et al (2010) describe a lack of student support, lack of quality instruction and lack of quality distance learning materials. Added to which they

find that distance students have difficulties in learning from print rather than more familiar verbal instruction.

A similar picture is given by Olakulehin (2008) who gives an account of distance learning provision in Nigeria, which includes distance learning centres at dual mode institutions, together with the National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), where the author works. He describes the limited resources which are available to meet the very considerable demand.

There are good arguments for collaborating across institutions in order to provide quality distance provision at scale and at affordable cost, and some countries have turned to cross border higher education to achieve this. Graber and Bolt (2011) describe the delivery of business courses via the African Virtual University, working in partnership between Curtin University Australia and universities in Ethiopia, Rwanda, Kenya and Tanzania. They encountered the common issues of a lack of staff training, difficulty in working in staff teams, limited IT skills on the part of both staff and students, and fluctuating electricity supplies. Factors identified as critical to success were having clear goals, flexible delivery alternatives and resourcing in terms of trained staff, hardware, software and infrastructure.

Beaudoin (2009) gives an excellent discussion of the potential and challenges involved in collaborating across institutions, drawing on a case study of a consortium between 64 public and private institutions in Mexico. He comments:

“Consortia represent a way for organisations to extend their activities without incurring costs involved in expanding their own operations and a means of cooperating in a more cost effective manner by pooling resources” (p115)

Beyond practical issues of infrastructure and staff training there are also problems associated with accommodating differences in culture and expectations when collaborating across institutions. Parrish (2010) identifies those dimensions of culture which are most likely to have an impact on teaching and learning. Such issues are particularly of relevance in DL where students could be anywhere, and often come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, see for example the experience of using open courseware with the UN university (Barrett et al, 2009). While this may be particularly acute when developing content in collaboration with countries in different parts of the world, the same issues can also apply to cultural differences within countries.

This case study describes a collaborative initiative between the Nigeria Universities Commission, which is the statutory quality assurance agency for Nigerian universities, the Open University (UK) and the British Council. The initiative set out to enhance the quality of distance learning, working with six universities in Nigeria. The case study describes the aims and implementation of the project. It goes on to consider participants' reflections on the experience of taking part in the initiative, on the potential of quality distance learning and their views on collaborating across institutions.

Refocusing Open and Distance Learning in Nigerian Universities

The Higher Education landscape in Nigeria follows the general pattern described above, of large numbers of potential students and a system which is inadequately resourced to cope, either by provision of campus based education or through quality distance learning. Each year there are over 1 million qualified students for around 220,000 university places. The aim of the project described in this case study was to 'train the trainers'. These were drawn from the key staff at existing dual mode institutions on whom capacity building would focus. These staff would enhance the quality and capacity of distance learning and would adopt online and mobile technologies within an open and collaborative approach to course delivery.

The project was framed within the context of a set of guidelines for distance learning that were developed by the Nigerian Universities Commission NUC (2009), which set out standards for revalidation or accreditation to support quality in course design and assessment; use of technology; learner support; staffing and finally information, advice and guidance. The participating universities were federal universities of high reputation with existing dual mode delivery.

The Open University (UK) was asked to act as change agent by running an integrated programme of five three-day workshops on distance learning, and by supporting on-going communication between workshops. There was a concern that Nigerian universities should develop ownership of the project and ensure that any generic lessons on effective distance learning were effectively contextualised to the Nigerian environment. An Executive Group was therefore established with membership of senior academics from the six universities concerned, in order to guide the direction of the project. A website was developed, <http://nigeriauniversitiesdistancelearningnetwork.org/> containing project resources and links to the distance learning units of participating universities.

It was planned that workshop participants would themselves act as trainers for staff in their respective institutions. In order to gain the status of accredited National Trainer, delegates were expected to attend three out of five workshops which covered an introduction to course design and the use of appropriate technologies. Participants were required to work together with colleagues on the development of five level one distance modules which could be delivered across all institutions, and to develop strategies for making best use of these modules in different institutions. In this way they were effectively modelling the process of collaborative course design and delivery.

In addition to agreeing on course content to a prescribed format, they were required to develop a study guide and calendar, to decide on a strategy for formative and summative assessment and feedback, and to consider an appropriate strategy for learner support. In all aspects they were expected to make use of appropriate online or mobile technologies where they were relevant. They were introduced to a range of possibilities using online tools, but also encouraged to provide for access for students in a range of contexts. This

might include online content with an option for paper copy, or a radio broadcast which was also available as a podcast. The following modules were developed.

Lead Institution(s)	Modules
Universities of Lagos and Abuja	Entrepreneurial studies
University of Maiduguri	Nigerian Peoples and Culture
University of Ibadan	Use of English
Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile- Ife	Philosophy and Logic
Federal University of Technology, Yola	History and Philosophy of Science

These modules were part of the General Studies requirement for Nigerian students and therefore were relevant to a wide range of institutions and students. In addition to these 'required' modules, a number of universities volunteered additional modules. The final workshop considered how the consortium would build on the shared development of general studies modules to create a wider range of shared modules that would feed into popular programmes.

At the final workshop, delegates were required to complete a brief reflection on their experience of the training and the challenges which lay ahead. A total of 40 delegates completed the training, from whom we have been able to access 22 reflections: they represent a reasonable cross section of institutions and interests.

These reflections were anonymised and analysed using the principles of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By iterative reading of the transcripts it was possible to identify a number of common trends in the participants' perceptions. The account below describes these trends and illustrates them with quotes from participant responses.

Participant reflections

This section describes participant reflections on what they had learnt about quality in distance learning, followed by a consideration of the possible benefits and limitations for students, and the challenges for implementation. Finally it covers their reflections on the process of collaborating in cross-institutional teams.

When asked what they had learnt about the achievement of quality in distance education, most participants referred to the development of appropriate module content, in terms of clear unambiguous writing, and clearly defined goals, which could be an effective replacement for lectures on campus.

“The language of communication must be such that learners can readily understand and follow without much explanation or contact with the tutor.”

“Student learning is centred on interactive learning resources that do not require immediate and direct contact with teachers”

“...in the design of the modules it should be borne in mind that the learners should be able to learn with ease”

Many also referred to the significance of a study guide as a way of establishing timelines, and imposing structure for the learners, together with an assessment and feedback strategy which ensured that students were making progress.

“Setting clearly defined goals [...] this would include a time line with key events such as assignments, projects and examinations”

For students, most participants anticipated significant benefits arising from the improved design of materials and a well-designed study guide. In addition, the quality distance approach could open new options for students who were otherwise unable to study at university and would also widen the possibilities for specialist support from a choice of universities.

“[...] prior to this training programme the reading material was just another textbook and was not student centred [...] These changes are important because students have better materials and can tap from the expertise of staff from other institutions and the internet.”

“..it will assist the people that cannot attend the conventional university the opportunity to acquire education at ease without leaving their job and at the same time improving themselves on the job.”

At the same time, many acknowledged the challenges associated with access to technology and online systems, together with the need to acquire the necessary skills to become competent online, both of which are associated with a new and more independent approach to study.

“Inequality of access to technology exists. A digital divide exists among the students, some of them cannot afford computers due to the relative cost to the average income of workers in the country. More so the cost of accessing the internet in Nigeria is still on the high side. Hence some students find it a challenge to afford. In addition, irregular and frequent interrupted power supply in Nigeria is a perennial problem affecting almost every aspect of the economy, including education.”

“To change of attitude of students from the face-to-face and little individual study orientation to an approach of more self study and consistent follow-up of study materials.”

In reflecting on the challenges to implementing quality distance learning in dual mode institutions where face to face was seen as the norm, most referred to the need to change attitudes amongst management and teaching staff. They also referred to the need for funding to develop infrastructure, and to train staff at all

levels. These issues are common to those described by Graber & Bolt (2011), or Basaza et al (2010).

“Lack of sufficient institutional support from the authorities, who still do not seem to have bought into the idea that distance learning is as qualitative and efficient a system of learning as the face to face mode [...] constant training and capacity building in IT deployment, content delivery and new modes of teaching and assessment.”

“The dual mode nature of my institution has not allowed majority of the policy makers to appreciate the peculiar nature of distance education hence limitation is placed on the number of students that can be admitted.”

“The issue of training the instructors on the use of ICT to facilitate e-learning.[...] The challenge of online testing and suitable software that will enable easy assessment of large population of students, especially in essay tests.”

Development of the pilot modules required collaboration across institutions, and participants were asked to reflect on the positive experiences of collaboration as well as the challenges. Most commented on the potential to develop quality module content by drawing on a pool of expertise which could cross cultural and geographical boundaries and ensured uniformity of output. By working across institutions there was added value in the potential to be recognised in different universities, as well as cost savings to be made. Others noted the value of developing a working community where innovations and problems could be shared.

“It gives legitimacy to the resource material since it is peer produced and assumes a national status instead of an individual university material. By sharing costs it brings down the cost of resources materials thereby making it more affordable to students.”

The criticism and input strengthened the effort to produce quality instructional material. [...] The modules would be easily acceptable by other universities knowing it was a joint effort and this reduces cost of production.”

“...it enabled increasing solidarity among stakeholders in distance education.”

“Provision of open resources which could be readily adapted in other institutions and consequent overall reduction in prices of producing these resources, especially the electronic contents and the use of a single virtual learning environment platform.”

When considering the drawbacks of collaborating, many participants commented on the difficulty of negotiating with colleagues who had a range of differing perspectives, and the frustration in coping with people's differing

priorities and their lack of time for developing the module. There were also problems with lengthy journeys, and a few were concerned with the loss of intellectual property associated with creating modules which would be open access across institutions.

“People and institutions differ in ideas and background, it was difficult agreeing on what should constitute a unit or module or the entire layout of the module.”

“People have a lot of commitment or situation that make them unable to meet deadlines. This can put a stress in your relationship with them especially when you press them to meet their obligations.”

Collaborative working amongst academics across institutions has always been difficult and these issues have been observed elsewhere (Beaudoin, 2009; Parrish et al 2010). While cross border Higher Education brings acknowledged challenges in terms of differences in cultural approach, these challenges may also be apparent in collaborative ventures which take place within a country.

Discussion and conclusions

The views expressed in these reflections accord with previous observations on the introduction of distance learning and collaborative teaching. As a result of this initiative a network of Nigerian DL enthusiasts has formed, who have an understanding of quality in distance learning and its potential to address issues of social justice. At the same time they are realists about the future of its implementation in their respective institutions. Crucially, they now have the support of a network of national colleagues who are operating in similar situations and access to external networks that can provide on-going personal and institutional development. They have experienced the tribulations of collaborative working, but have also recognised the benefits. As Beaudoin (2009) comments:

“There is some evidence that various consortia, including many in developing areas with resource challenged institutions, can indeed introduce and infuse new opportunity, energy and excitement into a setting with underserved student populations... Ultimately ...this is likely to be realised only with the presence and perseverance of forceful leadership in those institutions, who recognise the potential of DE, who are willing to take certain risks and who engage in transformative leadership that not only changes their respective institutions, but also reforms education practice and thus moves a bit closer to improving access to education for more of its citizens.” (p125)

We can only hope that the participants in this programme achieve the institutional support to transform distance educational practice, and the opportunity to benefit from collegiate contact regardless of geographical distances which modern technologies can support.

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Globalizing on-line: foreign language education, internationalization and social justice

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Abstract

Internationalization plays an important role in shaping the philosophy and practice of adult education. Taking my cue from works by such distinct authors as David Held, Michael Apple and Jane Knight, and drawing on our own teaching experience, I contend that distance foreign language education offers unique opportunities for the development of targeted instructional strategies conducive to internationalization. This can be achieved via engaging learners in debates on controversial topics, the interest to which can be stimulated through the research via 'non-educational' websites, which may appeal to students' emotions, as well as by the encouraging of learning through social spaces. These activities can be instrumental for the purpose of dismantling of global racism through the questioning and reconsidering of the self/other dichotomy, exercising critical thinking and fostering learners to take responsibility for their views. An analysis of the results of my study permits me to suggest that at this time of pressure by the neoliberal discourses for market-oriented pedagogy, the tasks of both bringing the equality of opportunities and promoting intercultural dialogue remain priorities for education. Online language classroom which enhances the development of cosmopolitan views and sensibilities exemplifies a constructive approach to the fulfillment of these tasks.

Internationalization plays an important role in shaping the philosophy and practice of adult education. (I use the term "internationalization" along the lines of Phillip G. Altbach and Jane Knight, as primarily policies and practices within higher education systems that are used to address the global environment.) It becomes especially important at the time of global cross-mingling of people. This dynamics permits one to re-conceptualize the relations among identity, community and place; and determines the need for complex and nuanced understanding of cultures. I contend that foreign language education, with its increasing emphasis on intercultural exploration, the deepening of the understanding of one's own culture and the development of cultural sensitivity can be instrumental in addressing this need. Celebrating fluidity, and being intrinsically eclectic, online foreign language education at its best offers creative ways to foster cross-cultural understanding and acceptance. As I will further demonstrate, this can be achieved, for example, via engaging students in online activities, which appeal to their emotions, allow one to broach difficult questions, and have a room for a variety of well reasoned responses. These activities enhance the development of cosmopolitan views and sensibilities, which internationalization celebrates, and which is indispensable, in my view, for the success of globalization and for the life of democracy in the

contemporary world, with its historically cherished values of tolerance, solidarity and social justice.

Language learning opens multiple opportunities for self-examination, identity renewal and for the exploration of the phenomenon of 'foreignness,' inherently bound to the education in democracy and citizenship. My goal has been to make these opportunities available to adult students who enrolled in the online courses Introductory Spanish: Language and Culture and Spanish for Health Care Professionals. In my view, in addition to the development of four basic skills associated with language acquisition, such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening, it is my responsibility as educator in world languages to foster cross-national and cross-cultural understanding and acceptance. One of the activities, which I designed in order to achieve this goal, focused on the examining of the issue of immigration. This activity allowed students to question/reassert their previous views about immigrants, to become engaged in national political debate on this topic, as well as to explore complex relationships between this debate and the international phenomenon of globalization.

Immigration has been one of the most widely debated issues in the United States from its birth and it continues to be 'a heated matter' in media and press today. The dramatic increase in the number of undocumented aliens, to some 12 million illegal immigrants, according to the Pew Hispanic Center, their presence and their possible competition for scarce jobs are sources of ongoing political and ethnic controversy and tension. The signing of the Arizona Law of Immigration by the governor Jen Brewer in April 2010, which makes the failure to carry immigration papers a state crime and gives police officers the right to detain under "the lawful stop" anyone suspected of being in the country illegally, exemplifies this tension and controversy par excellence. On July 28th a federal judge in Arizona blocked this requirement. This decision is currently being appealed by the state to the Ninth Circuit Court.

The potential enactment of this law can be also seen as a voice in the continuing struggle to define America's cultural understandings of itself. This voice seeks to define and virulently defend the borders of identity: American citizen or other, or a certain type of American citizen or other; views that correspond to an understanding of the concept of 'nation,' which is tied to an imagined reading of what defines America and Americanism. Thus one can ask, are we White Christians of English and Scots-Irish stock? Are we the embodiment of our civic religious symbols such as the Constitution or the office of the President? Or are we our multi-cultural "other" as defined by such ethnic hyphens as Chinese-American, Jewish-American, African-American, or Mexican-American?

As Benedict Anderson has pointed out in his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, a nation is "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (1991, p.6). For the purposes of his definition, a nation is limited by the fact of its boundaries, is made sovereign by its having cast itself in its bid for freedom, and as an *imagined community* in its "deep, horizontal comradeship," that makes blood sacrifice possible in defense

of it (1991, p.7). One is left to ask, however, who gets to chose? Why is one depiction more valid than another? And what happens over time?

I suggest that a closer look at personal experiences can shed light on the complexity of these questions. Given the setting of the online Spanish language courses and being inspired by Michael Apple's rhetorical question, "How do we enable the histories and cultures of different groups, who are in every community of population to be taught in responsible and responsive ways?" (p.39), I have chosen to focus on Spanish speaking immigrants. (Per US Census (2010), 46.9 million of people of Hispanic origin are currently living in the US.

http://search.census.gov/search?entqr=0&ud=1&output=xml_no_dtd&oe=UTF-8&ie=UTF-8&client=2010prod&proxystylesheet=2010prod&site=2010&q=Hispanic) The activity, "Understanding Personal Experience" was created with 4 purposes in mind: (1) to expand students' knowledge about culture(s) of the Spanish – speaking world and the life of Latinos in the US; (2) to enhance students' critical thinking by engaging them in implicit debates on most controversial topics, including "natives"/"foreigners" dichotomy and immigration in its relationship to both American politics and globalization; (3) to develop respect for diverse members of world population, indispensable for the democratic citizenship in the era of globalization; (4) to foster appreciation of life-long learning as a life-style, which empowers people of different ages to become independent thinkers and responsible "doers," to form their own opinions, and plan their actions in a responsible way. This project has four parts.

Recognizing the importance of interpersonal communication in informal settings as a source of learning, in the first part, I asked students to interview a native of a Spanish-speaking country, an immigrant who lives in the US. Biographical stories can be an efficient and personalized way to challenge people to confront complex human issues. With this assumption in mind, I required students to read personal stories from the website "Undocumented American Dream," and express their own reflections on immigrants' experiences. The first two parts prepared learners to complete the third part of the assignment, where they offered their opinion about Arizona's new immigration law and explored its relation to globalization. In the final part, students we asked to reflect on the impact of this learning activity on their views on immigration and their own identity development. In designing this activity, I worked under the assumption that democratic transformative education can have an impact on learners' views and beliefs. I see it as instrumental in the development of cosmopolitan outlooks and sensibilities, which in my opinion is a highly desirable goal in advancing learners' growth as democratic citizens who are eager to explore and appreciate the diversity, which surrounds them.

When I designed this project, I knew that according to the Rasmussen Poll 70% of Arizonians and 60% of Americans were in favor of the new Arizona Law. In my view, this data exemplifies the growing sense of insecurity and the renewed emphasis on territorial principle, in response to globalization. I also suggest that this reaction was influenced by ignorance and apathy, which are results of the acceptance of both the supremacy of the marketplace and the nation-state's

need to protect and to regenerate itself. In my opinion, such views impede cross-cultural and cross national understanding and acceptance. My hypothesis has been that learning experiences which foster critical thinking, empower students to form their own educated opinions, and enhance the development of a cosmopolitan identity position may have an impact on students' perception of the new law. This proved to indeed be the case.

My findings are based on the review of 42 students' projects. 39 students indicated that this activity changed their views on immigration, immigrants and the Arizona Law, and 12 stated that it has been an "eye-opening learning experience." As Jack Mezirow (2000) points out, transformation implies a deep shift in frame of reference. From the review of students' responses, it became clear that one of the shifts, which took place in 31 cases, is the change in the negative perception of immigrants. As one student, for instance, notices, this activity allowed her to distance herself from the commonly accepted attitude in the area, where she lives,

In the area where I live, there is much debate, stigma and even hatred surrounding Hispanics and the issues of illegal immigration...Although I never had a very strong opinion on immigration one way or the other, but I experienced many of the same feelings ... However after interviewing X and getting to know more about his life and culture, and in reading through many of the profiles for the purpose of this project, my attitude towards illegal immigration has began to significantly change... I now am more empathetic towards those who choose to come here illegally, and better understand the challenges that they faced, both in their countries of origin and in to trying to live a "hidden existence" here in America.

Another student refers to overgeneralization and the lack of information as major reasons for his negative approach to immigrants that has been changed,

Had it not been for this essay, I honestly can say that I had a rather negative viewpoint of illegal immigrants in general. That generality generated some negative stereotypes that regrettably I carried over to prejudice. I had a preconception of immigrants that was unfair and based on personal ignorance. I cannot blame someone for wanting a better life for them and their families.

Developing empathy with people different from themselves is one of the important steps for building cross-cultural connections and it is necessary for the formation of cosmopolitan views. Several students indicated that this activity allowed them to view parallels between themselves and immigrants. They discovered that people across the globe have "common dreams: the better lives for themselves and their families" and that "people in North America and South America are not that different." Thus, an interaction with immigrants as well as the reading of biographical and autobiographical stories allowed students to recognize the universal nature of humanity. Further, discussions of immigrant experiences lead to in depth thinking about ethical way of relating to 'the other,' which is a part of the human family as 'myself.' As a student points out,

This activity inspired me not to think just about immigration and the race, but about humanity and the fair treatment of people.

The ability to interconnect with people of different backgrounds illustrates cross-cultural understanding and is an important condition for fostering solidarity. According to the British political theorist David Held solidarity goes further than empathy, “[solidarity is] not just empathetic recognition of another’s plight, but the willingness to stand side-by-side with others in the creation of solutions to pressing collective problems” (2007, p.241). Students’ growing understanding of the necessity to act in order to resolve burning immigration issues, demonstrates solidarity. As 28 of them noticed, the newly gained understanding of the complexity of the issues related to immigration, made learners active advocates for change in immigration policies in the US and critics of the current system.

Displaying civil engagement and solidarity as well as distancing themselves from the previous position and opinions, 22 students stress the need to “*fight for the right laws,*” for the new reform. 31 students connected the necessity for action, critique and revision of US immigration policy with the fight for social justice. In this way, learning about ‘the other’ deepened students’ understanding of themselves and their country. The exploration of the topic of immigration became a point of departure for the formation of cosmopolitan thinking through the exploration of such notions as identity, democracy, and social justice.

Furthermore, the discussion of immigrants’ experiences unraveled the complexity of the concept of citizenship as a form of a group identity, previously taken for granted. This became evident when students began asking themselves who real Americans are, what it means to be a citizen and who does deserve this right? As one student questions,

Does being born and raised in a place give one more right to belong or does taking an enormous risk and fighting for entry into one’s desired place of residence deem one more worthy of being a citizen? I have to say neither carries more weight than the other.

Another student notices that immigrants’ motivation to contribute to the country of their choice should be taken in consideration when a right to citizenship is in question and that overgeneralization may lead to erroneous decisions. For another student, the concept of citizenship is intertwined with the appreciation of the American multicultural openness:

This activity reinforced the concept that the US has a rich heritage of ethnic inclusion and cultural variety.

Thus, meeting with another culture enhanced internationalization through the process of learning, including self-learning, which causes one to rethink things which were previously taken for granted, including one’s own culture and system of beliefs.

This learning has also been a key for the transformation of students' perception of the Arizona Law. As one student states,

After learning the details of Arizona law and considering the potential pros and cons, I too disagree with it and feel that it is a form of discrimination... I also agree that this law would lead to many people being unjustly profiled and harassed, perhaps simply because like this is allowed to take effect, knowing that this is largely based on public opinion, it might lead the way to other unfair laws to be enacted.

6 Students answered in favor of the law, and their responses revealed fear and desire for security to be a major motivation for support. As one student states,

I try to be a neutral person I am a type of person that gets nervous for hurting peoples' feelings, although I do think, and I only think this way due to the facts of terror on the USA, that having stricter laws on immigration is only right.

Several students indicated that the activity allowed them to test their views and to confirm them. Most students agree that the law has some relations with globalization, and 32 point out that "it takes us back." As one student notices,

In order to accomplish globalization there needs to be more a mixture of races and cultures intertwined in different areas and this law is promoting the exact opposite.

There is also evidence that students developed an appreciation for life-long learning, instrumental for the development of critical thinking through research and interpersonal interaction, both of which in the case of this activity enhanced independent thinking, engaged citizenship, and facilitated the formation of cosmopolitan views and perceptions. Students developed an understanding of the need not to take any opinion and information for granted and to form their own opinion in a responsible way. As one of the students notices,

What stuck me as I researched for this essay was the diametric viewpoints on immigration people have. I too must admit that I am guilty of carrying certain prejudices and preconceptions of what, and more importantly who, illegal immigrants are. It was not until reading the viewpoints of both sides of the argument and approaching the topic with an open mind that I was able to formulate an opinion on immigration.

While working on their projects, students were invited to share their questions, observations or concerns with their peers or with the instructor, which allowed for the embodied, emotional dialogue to flourish in an online environment. This dialogue allowed all participants to broach emotional issues without becoming counterproductive to the goal of enhancing mutual understanding and acceptance of a plurality of viewpoints.

This online activity, with its infusion of "heated" topics and dialogue with dominant discourses, real people, and oneself into the online courses,

exemplifies foreign language education as an engaging and productive way to promote internationalization, which goes hand in hand with the formation of cosmopolitan views and sensibilities, and with the fostering of a democracy-engaged citizenship in a globalized world.

To conclude, an analysis of the results of this study permits me to suggest that at this time of pressure by the neoliberal discourses for market-oriented pedagogy/education, the tasks of both bringing the equality of opportunities and promoting intercultural dialogue remain to be priorities for education, whose major objective and obligation is an expansion of the freedoms of human beings. In the era of globalization, its fulfillment more than ever depends on fostering cosmopolitan citizenship and enhancing solidarity, developing an ability to interconnect with people of different backgrounds, and making it possible for them to participate in intercultural dialogue on equal terms. Online classroom offers unique opportunities for the development of targeted instructional strategies conducive to internationalization, which deserve a place at the forefront of the agendas of education policy-makers as well as in the work by researchers and practitioners of education in the 21st century.

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Digital inclusion in those “other” learning spaces: mapping Web2.0 practices

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Abstract

Although many adults engage in open and distance education programs, most learning ecologies reflect a mix of formal and informal learning activities. Discussions of internationalization and digital divides must also take these “other” sites of learning into account, especially given the proclivity of web technologies to blur boundaries between learning spaces and facilitate spatial re-orderings of global and local relations. Examining educational possibilities, especially with an interest in equity, inclusion, and processes that criss-cross collective relationships, brings social justice concerns to the fore. I will present findings from a study of how Web2.0 technologies are being integrated into learning knowing, and working practices of young adults, primarily in the global south. Connectivity in any cyberspace entails a mishmash of entanglements between technology and (non)human actants. Actor Network Theory (ANT) makes it possible to explore the associations that ensue when technologies become actors within networks. Because performing a practice requires knowing how to align humans and artifacts within a sociotechnical ensemble (Gherardi 2009), there is a need to better understand how this is occurring. Findings from this research project draw on ANT to explore the creator-consumer conundrum, meshing of work and learning practices, and global-local intertwining within e-learning practices.

Introduction

It is not merely a question of what Web2.0 technologies can do. Rather, it is how people use new Internet-based technologies: sharing information, using and reworking this information to create and mobilize new knowledge, and interacting with others (locally, regionally and globally) about all of this. Fluid online configurations shake up notions of expertise, beliefs about who is able to produce and consume information, and how one locates themselves in order to build e-learning practices. Web technologies can be used to create innovative learning possibilities that foster digital inclusion. Yet, Introna (2007, p. 15) writes that folded into the “nexus of human and technology relationships are (un)intentions, (im)possibilities, (dis)functions, affordances/prohibitions that renders possible some ways of being and not others, that serves the (il)legitimate interests of some and not others”. Given this ambiguity, it is important to explore how online spaces may—or may not—create new locations of educational possibilities for adult learners.

Although many adults engage in open and distance education programs, the workplace and work itself are also vital learning contexts. Indeed, most learning

ecologies of adult worker-learners reflect a mix of formal and informal learning activities. Discussions of internationalization and digital divides must also take these sites of learning into account, especially given the proclivity of web technologies to blur boundaries between work and learning spaces and facilitate spatial re-orderings of global and local relations.

Examining educational possibilities, especially with an interest in equity, inclusion, and processes that criss-cross both one-to-one and collective relationships, brings social justice concerns to the fore. I will present findings from a study of how young adults, in six countries, use Web2.0 technologies and social media applications in their work and personal lives and how these technologies are integrated into , learning, knowing, working, and communication practices. These findings explore how web enabled learning practices, unfolding *outside* formal educational programs, are implicated in creator-consumer conundrums, the meshing of work and learning practices, and global-local intertwining. Such a discussion moves beyond traditional notions of the digital divide.

Labelled the participatory web, Web2.0 ostensibly creates openings for people to produce and mobilize content and ideas: in essence, build knowledge. Knowledge thus becomes “decentred, multiple and less hierarchical” (Edwards & Usher 2008, p. 120). Some argue that Web2.0 is not just a set of technologies, but a set of new *practices* (Bonderup Dohn, 2008). McLoughlin and Lee (2007, p. 665) affirm that social software tools have a flexibility which “enables collaborative remixability”: through this transformative process information can be recombined, built upon, organized, and shared. But despite these possibilities, some e-learners may struggle. In her study of adults engaging in online communities for work-related learning, Thompson (in-press) found differences in the way people were able to access and leverage e-learning opportunities. Discontinuities included uneven distributions of: pre-existing knowledge and networks, ease grasping and working within online norms, capacity to connect with the right people, skill in framing learning needs, and ability to participate online (and take it offline) in ways that enhance learning. Beer (2009, p. 999) asserts that the “complex underweave of power at play in the digital mundane” may lead to new digital divides.

Connectivity in any cyberspace entails a mishmash of entanglements, alliances, and resistances between technology and (non)human actants. Actor Network Theory (ANT) provides theoretical impetus to explore these entanglements by bringing technologies, and related objects, out of the background and into critical inquiry. ANT makes it possible to explore the associations that ensue when technologies become actors within networks and the effect of these entanglements on learning practices. Performing a practice requires knowing how to align humans and artifacts within a sociotechnical ensemble (Gherardi 2009). There is a need to better understand how this is occurring, or not. It may be helpful for educators and adult learners to get a better sense of how the presence or absence of certain actor-networks and different juxtapositions of actors enact rich or more impoverished learning practices.

Methodology

This project was designed to provide a forum for young adults in the global south to articulate their experiences with new web technologies. The site for this research project was an international NGO, Digital Opportunity Trust (DOT). DOT focuses on creating community-based entrepreneurial and educational opportunity through the development of digital literacies tied either to livelihood projects or formal educational initiatives. DOT has implemented programming in Africa (Rwanda, Kenya, and Ethiopia), Mexico, China, and southern USA (Mississippi and Louisiana) based on a model of local ownership and youth leadership. Leaders are DOT “Interns” (local young adults with post-secondary credentials) who develop leadership capabilities in order to help other members of their community.

An 89-question survey was developed using both original questions as well as existing survey instruments. These questions probed: (a) demographics: competency, access and barriers, ownership and use of various digital devices, overall Internet use; (b) online activities: what they are doing online, how they are doing it, and how often; and (c) issues: how ICT use is changing, online experiences, and perceptions of online presence and new forms of connectivity. The survey was designed to be completed either online (through SurveyMonkey) or offline (a Word form sent via e-mail) depending on respondents’ Internet connectivity. We encourage other researchers to use and adapt this survey instrument (<http://www.dotrust.org/research>).

420 DOT Interns were invited to participate in the survey. Participation was both voluntary and anonymous and a survey completion rate of 48% was realized. The inclusion of young adults from the USA, even if living in areas characterized by marked socio-economic challenges, could lead some to question whether these findings represent the “south”. However, the activities, experiences, and perceptions of the USA participants were not always notably distinct when compared to the rest of the sample. Indeed, there were often a range of responses evident *within* each country. Just as the notion of the “digital native” is increasingly called into question as inaccurately limiting the diversity of digital engagement, the richness of different patterns of engagement in this study suggests the performance of multiple digital practices; practices not solely delineated by geographical boundaries.

Online Engagement

Although complete findings are in the process of publication, an initial synthesis report is available (see Thompson & Hudson 2011). The three African countries (Kenya, Ethiopia, and Rwanda) comprised 41.3% of the global dataset, the USA encompassed 32.3%, and Mexico and China accounted for 26.3%. 54.7% of the respondents were female. 81.6% of the Interns were 20-26 years old.

The survey data suggests that the respondents were generally positive about their online connectivity and activities. For some (but not all), the Internet is increasingly intertwined into their lives: for learning, work, and entertainment. However, web technologies were not ubiquitous across this population and

respondents in every country reported an array of obstacles preventing Internet access and engagement in a wider range of online possibilities. These obstacles shifted in importance geographically. Although Interns seemed to maintain an online presence despite such obstacles, there appeared to be a threshold effect at four obstacles; at this point a marked decrease in hours spent online is observed. The results also show a mix of analyses in which there were no significant gender differences and others in which either females or males were more prevalent. The absence of data suggesting that females were extremely disadvantaged with respect to web presence is noteworthy.

Online Activities

93% of respondents indicated that they used the Internet more than they did last year. When asked in open-ended questions about the online activities they would do more or less compared to last year, there was a sense of increased purposefulness. The dominant online activity that they were doing less compared to last year was “fun/entertainment”.

To examine current ways of engaging, 53 online activities, consistent with Web2.0 practices, were examined. Multiple analyses were conducted on this data. One interesting finding is that in 45% of these online activities at least 25% of Interns indicated that they had “never” engaged in that activity. It is not clear why these Interns had not tried some of these activities. Although it is not necessarily problematic because someone does not engage in a particular online activity, understanding “why” they have not would help to tease apart digital inclusion/exclusion issues.

Learning

93.1% of respondents indicated that when they needed to learn something important, using the Internet was effective. 78% believed that the Internet had improved their ability “a lot” to learn new things. Moreover, 89.2% optimistically agreed that they could re-purpose the online applications used for fun or entertainment for learning purposes.

Analysis of the 53 online activities illustrated that someone somewhere within the DOT Intern population was doing something that would be of interest or benefit to someone else. Globally, these respondents have much to offer and share with other Interns, which bodes well for a movement towards a co-learning pedagogy characterized by peer-to-peer interaction as well as knowledge aggregation and remixability.

In an open-ended question respondents were asked: What kinds of learning activities do you do online now that you did not do five years ago? Informal learning activities were prevalent. The largest cluster of responses focused on finding resources that assisted in their personal and professional development and searching for information online. This was followed closely by reaching out to others and then drawing on online resources with a more specific learning focus, such as online courses and e-learning, as well as tutorials, self-study, educational resources, and reading eBooks. Participation in online courses seemed to reflect a mix of taking part in more formal online courses (as part of their post-secondary studies) as well as online courses offered outside formal

educational institutions. Participating in online courses was noted most by respondents from the USA and China, followed by Mexico. Changes in how these young adults were using the Internet for learning activities was striking. The data suggests these respondents were active online learners and collectively, tapped into an array of online learning opportunities. However, the richness of individual repertoires seemed to vary considerably.

Findings and Discussion

In this section I expand upon three findings with implications for global inclusion in e-learning.

The Creator-Consumer Conundrum

I was interested in how respondents' patterns of online engagement reflected knowledge *creator* or *consumer* propensities. A creator was defined as someone who generates a larger digital footprint by creating visible public contributions which are persistent; attempting to share and mobilize things they create (texts, images, music, mash-ups, presence); and leaving traces of their presence online.

A scale of 19 items was constructed by selecting those descriptors, from among the 53, which best demonstrated creator tendencies. The Cronbach's Alpha for the creator scale was .884. The survey also asked respondents two direct questions about their role in knowledge creation. Regression analysis suggests that survey respondents were more likely to view themselves as consumers of information rather than producers. This was most striking in Ethiopia and the USA where the split between consumer-creator was approximately 70-30%. Female respondents globally were more likely to indicate they were consumers rather than creators of new knowledge. However, both male and female respondents (78.2%) indicated that they created content and shared it with others online. It is possible these findings are highlighting different perceptions of what it means to create or produce information and knowledge and indeed, the difference between creating and consuming, online and offline.

The perception of oneself as a consumer of information on the Internet rather than a knowledge creator is contrary to much of the Web2.0 discourse and warrants further study. Knorr Cetina (2001, pp. 176-177) argues that the transition to knowledge societies involves more than the presence of experts or technological gadgets. Rather, it is the "presence of knowledge processes themselves", which she refers to as *epistemic practices*: "knowledge-creating or -validating" practices. Therefore, attention should be directed to how knowledge building practices are enacted, and indeed, what opportunities are available to nurture such practices. Mere access to social media will not transform someone into a producer of knowledge. It is only when these new technologies become aligned with other objects and people in networked assemblages that there is potential for these networks to generate new forms of knowledge (re)creation.

Uneven Integration of Web2.0 Practice into Work Practices

66.8% of respondents agreed that they used more online technologies when at work compared to elsewhere. Because respondents were current DOT Interns it

is reasonable to assume they were taking their DOT work into account. This work seemed to provide meaningful opportunities for young adults to engage with an array of technologies. However, the open-ended data responses, in particular, suggest that Web2.0 technologies are far more integrated into the work activities of some Interns than others.

Survey respondents in Africa work in the entrepreneurial programs (ReachUp!); elsewhere they are involved in educational programs (TeachUp!). Not only are Web2.0 technologies integrated into *what* work respondents do as a TeachUp! Intern (i.e., coaching teachers), Web2.0 practices seem to be more tightly intertwined into *how* they work as a DOT Intern. Similar commentary is not as pronounced in the responses from the ReachUp! Interns. An array of technologies is explored by those Interns working within the educational programs, including blogs, wikis, collaborative conferencing, pod/vodcasting, and production and re-mixing tools. In contrast, the focus of the entrepreneurial programs is on basic digital literacies (i.e., word processing and e-mail). The attention to different digital literacies in these two programs could be creating unequal opportunities for work-related interactions with web technologies.

These findings support current workplace learning theorizing. As Mulcahy (2005, p. 9) writes, “far from being a simple distinction, ‘work’ and ‘learning’ are dependent on one another. Each carries the other’s possibilities within itself.” Bratton et al. (2004) articulate how the design of paid work is one form of informal “pedagogy”, while Billett (2002) has long argued that the pathway of activities and goals in a workplace structure the workplace curriculum and learning experiences. These findings point to the need to attend to the nature of work and affordances of a workspace to foster digital inclusion. Further consideration of how these young adults learn, and could be learning, within their day-to-day work activities would be valuable.

Global-Local Tensions

Survey respondents are perhaps best described as “glocal” workers—belonging to both local and global networks—thus requiring the ability to be knowledge creators in an interconnected world. However, there was little evidence of how respondents used the Internet to foster an increased sense of global citizenship or belonging to regional or global communities, including the NGO’s network. Because there were no direct questions in the survey about this dimension, it is difficult to make conclusive remarks. However, some respondents made these types of comments in the open-ended questions, opening a door for further exploration. New critical digital literacies are required to leverage and enact global learning practices. Preece (2009, p. 596) underlines the importance of educating for new literacies: “building on the local but using technology to promote that knowledge and understanding in international forums and using an approach to literacy that connects critical thinking to politics, economics, and wider social relations”.

Conclusion

Internationalization brings a new intensity to human interconnectedness that often transcends geo-political boundaries and evokes spatial re-orderings.

Although social well-being and economic success is increasingly linked with knowledge and more sophisticated use of technology, digital inclusiveness and avoiding amplification of digital inequities is a pressing matter. It is important to probe how international adult education can respond to growing educational and social development pressures brought about by an interconnected, expansive, and intricate world system (Abdi & Kapoor, 2009).

Operating outside the sphere of formal education, programs such of those offered by this NGO create potentially potent opportunities to foster sustainable inclusive digital practices. Through the provision of work opportunities, the NGO provides purpose for many of these young people to engage in new online practices and build more sophisticated digital literacies. However, this can be an uncertain process and several factors need to be considered: the nature of the work, emphasis placed on knowledge creation, enactment of a sense of global citizenship, and strategies to build robust digital literacies. For example, in the analysis, a Work Scale was constructed to identify a cluster of online activities that best describe the NGO's current expectations of web technology usage for work purposes. Comparing the Work scale to the Creator scale reveals an overlap of only 7/18 items (39%) suggesting that current online work expectations reflect more consumer than creator types of activities.

Certainly, adopting a more networked view of learning, drawing on ANT, helps to explicate how knowledge is re-created through constantly shifting networked connections. And so, learning is never just the result of individual cognitive activity but rather the effect of interactions within a network; networks which include people, objects (including technologies) and ideas. It is the richness of the networks in which people become enmeshed that determine the kind of learning and ways of knowing that ensue. Addressing equity and inclusion, therefore, entails attending to what actors end up in those assemblages (what is connected and what is not; what is absent and what is present) and the power of human and non-human actors to influence the configuration of those assemblages including the circulations (of ideas, practices, knowledge, beliefs, etc.) within them.

Highlighted in this paper is the need to attend to the "other" e-learning opportunities outside formal educational programs. Such knowledge spaces are diverse, diffuse, distributed, and often more ephemeral and messy. Yet, they too also invoke questions about equity and inclusion.

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The Language Plaza: online habitat and network to promote language skills and increase equity

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Language and dialogue are the key underpinnings of social behaviour and learning (Ravenscroft, 2011, p. 142).

Technology for community use has become an important area of practice and one that needs to be developed and nurtured to yield its full potential. (Wenger, White, & Smith, 2009, p. 4).

Abstract

In this paper we will introduce a project and a new web called the Language Plaza (Tungumálatorg in Icelandic). The Language Plaza is an online community supporting teaching and learning of languages in Iceland where the number of migrants with different language backgrounds has been growing fast. This development has created a challenge for many communities and schools, especially for smaller schools in rural districts and municipalities which often lack funding and expertise to accommodate the needs of the children involved. The Language Plaza has the potential to increase equity between schools and school districts as well as between individuals of different language groups. It can become a good model that could be well worth reproducing in many other countries.

Introduction

Most if not all countries of the world have within their borders people of different origin and language backgrounds. Iceland used to have a very homogeneous population with Icelandic as the native language but there has been a large influx of immigrants for the past decades. Currently people of foreign origin comprise ca. 8% of the total population and come from over 170 countries¹. Of 42,539 pupils in compulsory schools having another mother tongue (about 40 different languages) than Icelandic in 2010 there were 5.4% or 2,318 pupils (the

¹ Statistics used and presented in this article regarding the population in Iceland and pupils in schools (countries and language background) are based on publicly available information on the Statistics Iceland web site (<http://www.statice.is/>)

number had more than tripled from 1998 whereas there was little change in the total number of pupils between those years). At the same time there are many thousand Icelandic children who live abroad who could benefit from support to learn Icelandic. Many of those children live temporarily abroad with their parents, learn a new language and adapt to a new culture – but often lose their knowledge of Icelandic while abroad and/or lose knowledge of the language they learned while abroad when/if they move back to Iceland.

To accommodate the needs of these children is a challenge for teachers and schools, especially for smaller schools in rural districts and municipalities. These schools tend to have a low number of educated language teachers, cannot offer many elective subjects and have a low budget for learning resources. In some schools there may be considerable experience in teaching students of a particular language background but that experience and knowledge may not have been accessible for other schools.

The Language Plaza

With the support of the Ministry of Education, Science & Culture in Iceland and funding from various Icelandic and Danish and Nordic agencies, a Language Plaza (Icelandic: Tungumálatorg) has been developed (site: <http://www.tungumalatorg.is/>) and was formally opened on November 16, 2010.

The project is based on public policy in Iceland and a vision for the needs and future of education. The project was originally planned in 2008 in the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture in Iceland and received funding based on government policy for the information society 2008-2012. Following the financial crash in 2008 the project suffered some funding cuts but was still launched with the support and collaboration of many individuals and entities.

The project started late 2009 with interviews with stakeholders and analysis of public policy, reports were written and the project designed. Applications for funding were submitted and an important network was initiated. From 2009 to 2010 more work was done on the ideology, organization and the web developed. Needs analysis was conducted on and potential technological solutions and possibilities explored. Learning resources were collected.

The Language Plaza is an online community supporting teaching and learning languages in Iceland. Its first phase includes teaching of second language Icelandic, support for teachers of Icelandic children living abroad, and for those teaching English, Danish, Norwegian or Swedish within the Icelandic school system. English and Danish (or Norwegian/Swedish) are a part of the mandatory national curriculum at the primary to lower secondary level. Many Icelanders have lived in countries with these languages, with their children then having different needs and language skills than children who have not lived abroad. The Language Plaza also provides information and support for Polish parents who have children in Icelandic schools, the largest group of migrating

children in Iceland². Emphasis has also been on supporting teaching in the mother tongue of other foreign languages, the first ones to be included are Spanish and Italian due the interest and background of the developers currently involved in the project. Spanish has also been taught at the upper secondary level in Iceland and plans are underway to develop language resources for that purpose. The Plaza has been growing both in bottom-up and top-down fashion.

The website provides useful, relevant information for teachers and parents and strives to facilitate the formation of a community of teachers and parents to exchange ideas, opinions and experience to learn from each other. One section of Tungumálatorg is a multilingual, multicultural, school-focused digital meeting place for parents of immigrant and migrant children. Each language has been allotted its own on-line niche supplying the necessary information in that language regarding the lives of children and youth in the schools in Iceland, making the information accessible for parents, teachers and school personnel when needed. The material is published in the form of text, pictures, videos and screen recordings. Links to relevant and useful material from other websites created around the mother tongues of immigrants and materials for Icelandic as second language are also included. The intellectual properties are published under the licenses of Creative Commons and the community is open to everyone.

Current status

In November 2010, 18 webs opened connected with 8 languages on the plaza and there are currently ca. 30. They can be grouped in the following way:
Information and resources:

- For language teachers of compulsory languages at the lower secondary level: English and Nordic languages (Danish/Norwegian/Swedish).
- For multicultural education (from learning counsellors).
- Information about Icelandic schools and recreational opportunities for children (in Polish).
- For migrating families - resources for first language teaching (Spanish, Italian, two other large language groups).
- Educational resources (Icelandic – TV shows and online books).
- Examples of useful teaching methods – all languages.
- Professional communities of teachers – in collaboration with associations of language teachers.
- Environment for Q&A's and collaboration online.
- Accessible guidelines about development of materials and online mediation – for users of the plaza.
- Course for language teachers and resources for professional development – “Spuni (“Spinning”) 2011 – a course about online tools suitable for language teaching.

² In 2011 there were over 25.000 migrants in Iceland from over 170 countries, about 37% of those are of Polish origin), and about 33% of the pupils in Icelandic compulsory schools with <http://www.statice.is/>(Statistics Iceland, 2011, other mother tongue than Icelandic have Polish as their mother tongue.

Figure 1 gives a visual overview of the web options:



Figure 1: Web links to the first webs on the Language Plaza.

The Future

Negotiations are underway to host the Language Plaza project at the University of Iceland – School of Education (UI-SE). Funding for the project is a big issue and applications have been submitted to various agencies. There has been collaboration with Research centres at the UI-SE for research and development in relation to the project with an application to the Icelandic Centre for Research (<http://www.rannis.is/english/rannis/>) for ca. 120.000 euros. Researchers and graduate students associated with five research centres³ and the Language Plaza have planned a project called NETTORG (literally means Net-plaza or online square)⁴ comprising seven studies: one study explores community building online more generally with ten cases. The other six studies focus on the Language Plaza. The first of those involves community building on the Language Plaza specifically. Another one takes a critical look at language teaching and learning on the Language Plaza. Three studies focus on migrant children and/or children and Icelandic as a second language (ISL) including community building among educators of ISL, and a study on vocabulary intervention). Finally a development project has the main aim to build digital

RANNUM - The Centre for Educational Research on ICT and Media. Provides project leadership, leaders³ of 2 studies, 10 researchers (6 graduate students).

RFSL - Centre for Research in Foreign and Second Language Learning. Co-applicant, leaders in 2 studies, 4 researchers (2 graduate students).

RCDLL - Research Centre for Children and Youth Development, Language and Literacy. Co-applicant, leaders 2 studies, 3 researchers (2 graduate students).


RMCS - Centre for Multi-Cultural Studies. Leader in 1 study, 2 researchers (1 graduate student).

RISIL - Centre for Research in Icelandic Studies and Icelandic Language Teaching. Supporting role.

⁴ NETTORG is also an acronym for Networking – Education – Teachers – Technology Stewards – Online/open – Research – Growth.

resources and design guidelines and methods for their uses on the Language Plaza.

Figure 2 gives an overview of the studies planned in 2012-2014.



TORG1. Action research on networking and community building Dr. Sólveig Jakobsdóttir, with 11 researchers (9 RANNUM, 1 RFSL, 1 RCDLL). Sponsor: RANNUM		
Teaching & Learning (4 cases)	Language (3 cases)	Research & Development (3 cases)
Sponsor: RANNUM	Torg2-LP Language Plaza – Design Based Research LP1 Impact of the Language Plaza on language teaching and learning LP2-4 Immigrant children and their families – Icelandic as a second language (ISL) LP2 Community building for educators in ISL LP3 Vocabulary intervention – ISL LP4 Effects of the Language Plaza on Immigrant Children and their Families LP5 Spanish teaching, multimedia development project	Þorbjörg Þorsteinsdóttir, (M.A. thesis)
Sponsor: RFSL		Samúel LeFever Brynhildur Anna Ragnarsdóttir NN (M.Ed.thesis)
Sponsor: RCDLL Advising role: RMCS&RISIL		Anna Guðrún Júlíusdóttir (M.A. thesis)
		Sigríður Ólafsdóttir (Ed.D. thesis)
		NN (M.Ed. thesis)
Sponsors: RFSL and RANNUM		Ida M. Semey (M.Ed. thesis)

Figure 2: Overview of studies and sponsors of the NETTORG project posed/planned for 2012-2014.

Red, white and blue are the colours of many flags of the world including the Icelandic flag in which case they may refer to the colour of ice, fire and sea. But these colours have also stood for equity, freedom and brotherhood which the NETTORG project also stands for. The project team wants to increase equity of access to open and free resources and encourage the use of social networking and community building.

There is interest in working with European partners (and/or from other countries) to do research and develop this model further with participation of more countries to promote greater cultural exchange and sharing of digital resources and methods in teaching and learning languages with new technologies (second language acquisition/SLA, L2). The project has the potential to accommodate to a greater extent the needs of immigrant children all over Europe to learn and maintain their mother tongue and learn the language

of their new country; as well as of those children that live abroad temporarily with their parents but plan to move back and need to keep their cultural roots and language.

The Language Plaza can become a good model that can be well worth reproducing in many other countries. It is already having effects to help link language teaching practice with teacher education, research and development. It can offer cross-border education online to support social justice whether such borders need to be crossed culturally within or between countries.

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Enhancing social justice in e-learning by servant-leadership

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Abstract

E-learning is part of our everyday life at work and in education. E-learning comprises all forms of computer-enabled learning activities, like web-based learning, virtual team collaboration and content exchange via the Internet. Very often learners will not meet face-to-face anymore and some suffer from social injustice and are denied access to e-learning opportunities.

This calls for a more compassionate kind of leader, able to reconcile the dilemma of high-tech versus hi-touch in the online classroom. An online servant-leader will be more focused on the social justice and community nature of organizations. Servant-leadership is a leadership principle, geared towards enabling the talent development of others both online and offline. First, this paper will highlight one of the ten attributes of servant-leadership, closely connected with the 21st Century virtual world of social justice and learning, namely community building. What makes community building so relevant for e-learners' inspiration and motivation, or in other words their engagement to learn? Finally, some future research issues will be discussed, concluding that servant-leadership creates many opportunities for the well-being and social justice of learners in the 21st century online classroom.

Keywords: e-learning; community building; social justice; talent development.

Servant-leadership attributes

Before looking at the specifics of e-learning and the supportive role of servant-leadership in the online learning environment, we will first introduce and discuss servant-leadership attributes in general. In recent decades, an international knowledge network on servant-leadership has developed. In the 1970s Robert K. Greenleaf (1977) helped a great deal in the enhancement of the servant-leadership movement and strengthened connections with the world of business and academia. Nowadays servant-leadership in its various dimensions is a growing movement across cultures and national borders. At the same time, in the business world, public organizations and academia, a number of leadership developments or perceptions occurred that are not explicitly labelled "servant-leadership" but have a lot in common with the principles of servant-leadership e.g., authentic leadership, natural leadership, responsible leadership, and intercultural leadership. However, so far, less attention has been paid to servant-leadership and e-learning. This is remarkable because, especially in virtual learning organizations where you do not meet face-to-face, the meaning of trust, talent nurturing and commitment are very much at stake.

So, what is servant-leadership? Servant-leadership is multi-dimensional and enhances more than ever before the human, ethical and talent factors in organizations. Traditional leaders tend to be focused on tasks, control and processes in organizations. Servant-leaders are connected with people, reconciling dilemmas and empowering them as team members, employees, customers, students or citizens. The servant-leader is keen to contribute value to others (e.g., pupils, students, trainees) in order to let their talents grow. Those served become healthier and more autonomous. They are more likely to develop a sense of responsibility to others. Major attributes of servant-leadership are listening, empathy, healing relationships, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of others, and building community (see Nuijten, 2009; Trompenaars and Voerman, 2009; Sarayrah, 2004; Vargas and Hanlon, 2007 and Spears, 2000).

The concept of servant-leadership includes astonishing dilemmas. Servant-leaders serve their followers with compassion. At the same time servant-leaders are accountable for the performance of their organization, e.g., a company, school (in our case an e-learning environment), church, or even a nation. Each investment of the servant-leader in the well-being of others is at the same time an investment for the benefit of the common good. The leader's skills can be found in bridging the contrasting dilemmas of leading and serving, control and compassion, high-tech and high touch, power over and trust/commitment to others (Trompenaars, 2007). This article will explore how servant-leaders in the e-learning environment are able to reconcile these dilemmas, and can provide the inspiration and motivation for cultural change in 21st century educational organizations.

Community building

With the rise of the internet, the impact of leaders on followers on communication and community building can be enormous. In the 21st Century followers may be linked primarily in an informal way to their leaders. Thus, for example, in January 2011 the opinion of an informal leader trebled the price per share of H&H Imports on the Stock Exchange. Rapper Curtis James Jackson III, alias 50 Cent, recommended his 3.8 million followers on Twitter to buy shares of a headphone company H&H Imports (Het Financieele Dagblad, 2011). Opinion leaders in other branches e.g. Barack Obama during the presidential elections, or DJs influence the communities of 21st C generations. What lessons can be learned for community building in e-learning where leaders (in our case the instructor, the e-teacher or the online facilitator) work on building a community among e-learners? Here we give some examples of community-building in the online classroom by creating a Charity Community Service course and encourage a sense of belonging through transformative learning. Finally, we demonstrate how better communication in online communities may enhance the inspiration and motivation of e-learners.

Community Service Learning

Levitt and Schreihans (2009) show how the instructional dimension of online community service learning (a pilot course in charity service learning) can help enhance the building of a strong e-learning community. The authors

investigated how a pilot course in service-learning to help people in need (in this case elderly people) impacts e-learning students. They developed a creative online learning program allowing community service and charity events to university stakeholders. They found that community service and serving people in need motivates online students to engage in more interactive communication within the online classroom. Students showed more interest in business ICT after their fundraising assignments and assisting elderly people. The community service course opened a window on real-world experience, a sense of belonging and a sense of social responsibility among the e-learners. This online community service course has provided an opportunity for students to look upon online courses in a different way. They were strongly engaged in active human participation by putting their skills, knowledge, and abilities to work for charity and the betterment of society. Students learned how their education can indeed benefit the lives of others, in this case elderly people. The pilot course in serving others brought people together. The e-learners became more aware of how to apply their academic skills to business and society. Last but not least, the charity community service organizations involved tended to be more engaged in the life of the university.

Sense of belonging through transformative learning

E-learning can be a very innovative and personally transformative experience when it occurs within an e-learning community (Ryman, Hardham and Roos, 2009; see also the aforementioned experience of the Charity Community Service project). An e-learning community can be characterized by a sense of connection, belonging, and comfort among its members. The sense of connectivity develops over time among its group members who share commitment to a common goal. Servant-leaders in an e-learning environment are challenged to help design a social community environment to inspire and motivate their followers and learners. Ideally, it is a learning environment of mutual trust that makes e-learners reflect and raises awareness of their daily practice. According to Ryman, Hardham and Roos (2009) transformative learning is where e-learners are critically aware of their own assumptions. E-learners are enabled to assess the relevance of their assumptions about the other members of the e-learning community. All participants are -through dialogue in their community- part of building new knowledge. This knowledge, or content (see also the servant-leader's attribute of 'awareness' in this article), creates a solid foundation of shared meaning and values. Transformative learning includes environmental factors such as social presence, authentic learning and interdependency. Such a social environment is necessary for real learning. It is a social network community through which knowledge will flow, and inspiration and motivation is enhanced. Social interaction among the e-learners needs to be nurtured by good leadership. Learning engagement is accelerated by interdependency and reciprocity in the learning community, according to Ryman, Hardham and Roos (2009). But what does interdependency and reciprocity mean in e-learning practice? E-learners are enabled to identify their knowledge gaps and are motivated to ask for help from the other community members. The teacher's role is less of an expert and more often happens to be that of a servant, an empowering peer/coach in the learning process. This interdependent learning dialogue is characterized by reciprocity in communication. Reciprocity binds e-learners together, in both

process and spirit. In this dialogue personal goals become interrelated around a common purpose. Servant-leaders are challenged to design such an e-learning community. Community members are enabled to share knowledge, content and experiences in weblogs and/or social networks.

Online communication

The communication culture in the e-learning environment influences the level of motivation and inspiration of the e-learners. Technical tools that are appropriate and culture-proof for various international groups of e-learners are not yet available. For example, communication software to enable cross-cultural communication is not yet available and implemented, or it may still be at an early experimental stage of development, see Intercultural-crosscultural-communication.com. Groupware technologies and the Internet may help to over-bridge cross-cultural differences along dimensions of values, language, and behaviour, as illustrated in the US-China case, (see Jin, Mason and Yim). Reeder, Macfadyen, Roche and Chase (2004) identify some of the hidden barriers inherent in intercultural communication, which can adversely and negatively affect digital competence and subsequently the motivation of e-learners. Technical features such as different power supplies, varying keyboards or non-matching plugs are often considered major barriers to online communication. However, these are relatively minor problems compared to the cultural barriers. Stahl (2004, p.160) argues that “e-teaching supposes a certain kind of metaphysics, usually an objectivist world-view, which is a particular view and cannot claim impartiality”. Cultural barriers touch on the very essence of the way e-learners construct their worlds and the level of professionalism and motivation they can reach. Thus, for example, the ‘bulletin board’ in the virtual classroom is built on the basic assumption that e-learners like to publish their thoughts or initial ideas. However, this e-tool for communication is not popular among some cultural groups on the virtual campus. For example, in Asian countries the fear of loss of face may influence the online behaviour of learners. Furthermore, talent development platforms such as WebCT and Blackboard, which are based on a western style of efficiency, may not necessarily be appropriate serving tools for all intercultural e-learners across the universe. Some tools lack crucial communication elements that may hinder, for example, more senior e-learners in their professionalism from engaging and performing well. Chat, for instance, is of a distinctly oral nature. At the same time, chat lacks important features of verbal communication, and is predominantly rooted in literacy. Reeder, Macfadyen, Roche and Chase (2004) found missing elements in electronically- mediated communication such as context perception, parallel visual channels, and direct eye contact. All kinds of gestural information, side talk, dynamic real-time repair mechanisms and avoidance mechanisms may be more important for some e-learners than others. In general the dynamics and flexibility evident in face-to-face conversational partners is missing in online communication. These factors may hinder the level of motivation and professionalism of e-learners with various cultural backgrounds.

User-generated content communities

Wikipedia is one of the largest reference websites, a web-based content encyclopaedia built by a large community of Internet volunteers. Since its creation in 2001 Wikipedia has grown rapidly and attracts nearly 78 million

visitors monthly as of January 2010. There are more than 91,000 active contributors of all ages, cultures and backgrounds working collectively on more than 17 million articles in more than 270 languages (source: Wikipedia.org). Another user-generated content (UGC) initiative specifically relevant for open educational resources is one developed by the University of Plymouth where a community of e-learners is building content online. Steve Wheeler, from the University of Plymouth, is project leader of the Concede Project (<http://www.concede.cc>) who is exploring the nature and direction of UGC. According to Wheeler (2010), UGC is created and shared freely by students and/or teachers. In an EDEN workshop (Wheeler, 2010) he questions what happens to UGC once it is being (re)used by others. But what about the informal nature of UGC? Does UGC lose its informal nature when components of it are incorporated into, e.g., a peer-reviewed journal article? According to Wheeler it does not. The wiki page, or blog content, or whatever the UGC format is, remains informal in nature, regardless of how elements of it are being used or repurposed. Concede aims to enhance the quality of UGC so that it can be incorporated into higher education. According to Wheeler (see his blog) it could be argued that any UGC that has been incorporated into a formalised peer-reviewed piece of work (e.g., as a citation) is an indicator of high quality. Although UGC is not formally peer-reviewed, it is constantly being informally peer-reviewed. For example, blogs are open for comments from all, e.g., novices, enthusiasts and experts. These comments can provide valuable feedback, suggestions, even refutations, via the comments box under each post. This is one of the most instant forms of peer review available. It is hard to predict how the flows of formal and informal content (filtering) will contribute to the ongoing creation of online knowledge. This formal and informal process is key for learners, and again possesses great challenges for the servant leader in virtual education.

Online communities and social justice

What can be done to help learners in poor circumstances? Still more than 4.5 billion people worldwide do not have access to the Web. The following two projects illustrate how servant-leaders can help to build online communities in health (Senegal) and agriculture (Mali). The Web alliance for Regreening in Africa (W4RA, www.w4ra.org) is an initiative to help extend the Web benefits of the knowledge society and economy to people in rural communities in Africa. To do so serious challenges must be addressed, in content, access, and language. At present information on the Web is not relevant for farmers in the Sahel. But, mobile telephony is now in the reach of many poor people. This trend opens up great opportunities. Most African farmers do not have fancy smart phones with internet access. They use simple old fashioned mobile phones, only for chatting and don't even use their phones for sending or receiving SMS. W4RA will therefore focus on access and interaction with the Web, based on voice. In line with W4RA and also co-coordinated by the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam is the VOICES project (www.mvoices.eu) investigating voice-based services in a rural African context. The major objectives are to improve voice-based access to content and mobile ICT services through the development of a free and open source toolbox for local developers. Also to integrate local community radios and ICT to leverage the quality and the volume of radio content broadcast and sharing. For educational purposes it is important that VOICES wants to support

local languages in voice-based services through the development of appropriate speech elements (text-to-speech and speech recognition) for local language communities such as Wolof.

Eight steps towards community building

In enhancing e-learner engagement, trust is key. Servant-leaders can help to build a trustful community (Joseph, E.E. & Winston, B.E. 2005). Wojnar and Uden (2005) show different benefits of a trustful e-learning community and discussion. The teachers' servant role is crucial to achieve successful group discussion on a virtual campus. The teacher should create an online learning environment that promotes trust and group empowerment. Teachers can create a trustful environment by, for example, taking the time to explain the rules of online communication. The e-learners are motivated and empowered by the teacher. They learn the skills and procedures to conduct an online discussion. Subsequently teachers increase the probability of the online discussion being content-rich, productive and meeting the assignment tasks. Trust building can take place when students no longer (primarily) depend on their teacher, but when they also depend upon each other. Students are empowered and inspired by their teacher and peer-students to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning. Once the students achieve their first joint successes, their willingness to share their thoughts in a public forum and online dialogue will increase. According to Wojnar and Uden (2005) the teacher's role in a trustful online learning environment is primarily a facilitator (a reminder of a servant-leader's role). Facilitating successful online learning begins by leading, then supporting and fostering group empowerment. Finally the teacher steps aside and intervenes only when appropriate. Wojnar and Uden (2005, p.61) designed eight steps towards successful online discussion and building trust in an e-learning community:

1. facilitator learns about the students and sets everyone up (motivation/inspiration) for successful dialogue.
2. facilitator links content to the context and culture of the individual students.
3. facilitator establishes a risk-taking environment for the student-group to respect each other's thoughts.
4. facilitator leads the group discussion.
5. Student-group begins the dialogue and sharing of thoughts. The students begin to formulate thoughts about the trustworthiness of the group; learners are less vulnerable and conversations may begin with the word "They".
6. Student group leads the dialogue; the group increases trust slowly by taking one risk at a time (trust builds on small successes) and tests the trustworthiness of the group by taking more risks; learners are more vulnerable, i.e., conversation may begin with the word "We".
7. Student group sustains the dialogue; encouraging deeper sharing of thoughts. Members of the group depend upon each other to drive the dialogue. Learners are most vulnerable and conversations may begin with the word "I".
8. Student group sustains the dialogue; learners speak with a unified voice and understand each other. Highest levels of trust are evident. The group speaks openly, honestly, and avoids groupthink.

Conclusion

As well as acknowledging the merits of utilising the new digital innovations in aiding learning, this paper has also highlighted the usefulness of employing the concept of servant-leadership to the e-learning context. The need for servant-leadership and social justice in the present online classroom is vastly increasing. The issue should have a significant place in the agendas of educational institutions to ensure that high quality online learning is not only a privilege for the happy few. E-learners need to acquire digital, multilingual and cultural awareness competences in order to participate with success in our complex global world. Servant-leaders (online instructor, e-teacher or the facilitator online) can assist in making this talent growth happen. Both digital and cultural horizons need to be explored further in an inclusive manner. This will enable younger generations to fully integrate online social network communities in their everyday learning and life. The future question is not if but how servant-leaders can support e-learners and build awareness about social justice, credibility of online content, etc. This paper demonstrated how new technological innovations can facilitate online knowledge exchange in e-learning. Servant-leaders will try to select best practices and enhance social justice for their talented followers on the virtual campus.

There is an ethical responsibility for servant-leaders in their roles as educationalists on the virtual campus that requires them to enforce the competences, motivation and inspiration of e-learners. In terms of social justice, any e-learner - regardless of his/her economic or cultural background - should have the civic right to gain access to a good quality online learning environment and to be engaged in a process of lifelong learning. It is vital that e-learners are served with and afforded the necessary tools to engage effectively with other e-learners on the virtual campus. E-learners need to be enabled with critical and creative reflection and constructive participation in their learning community and encouraged to be the future online servant-leaders.

Note

Some aspects of this article originated from a literature review and cross-cultural field research on servant-leadership. The author was coordinator of FILTER, a large-scale European ICT research project on the credibility and integrity of online content. With thanks to Dr Nabil Sultan of Liverpool Hope University for his comments on an earlier version of this paper.

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Initial teacher education in the online mode: An opportunity for indigenous peoples to access the teaching profession?

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Abstract

In New Zealand there is strong demand for Māori¹ teachers, so much so that in 2011 the New Zealand government offered 115 scholarships to Māori to train as secondary school teachers. This study investigates the ability of an online initial teacher education (ITE) programme to help meet this demand for Māori teachers and to provide for Māori educational aspirations.

Qualitative data were collected using a multiple case study of four Māori participants who graduated from online ITE. Participants completed two written surveys and a face-to-face interview over the first six months of their beginning teaching. This is supported by statistical data on Māori participation in ITE.

Findings suggest that an online programme of ITE can provide for Māori student teachers in a way campus-based courses cannot. All participants claimed other commitments precluded their attending campus, and without an online option they would not have become teachers. Positive aspects included opportunities for face-to-face contact with other students and support from staff. Disadvantages for some were a lack of Māori education values and practices.

In New Zealand online programmes should meet the needs of Māori learners and encourage their participation in tertiary education. Further research needs to establish the success and needs of Māori learners in the Graduate Diploma of Teaching (Secondary) online.

Background

According to the Ministry of Education (2011a) there is strong demand for Māori teachers whether or not they are speakers of te reo Māori². Young New Zealand Māori need Māori role models and many positions for Māori teachers exist in rural areas throughout the country.

This claim is supported by statistics (Ministry of Education 2011b) where in 2009 nine percent of students enrolled in Graduate Diplomas of Teaching were Māori students compared with Pākeha³ students comprising 75% of the total enrolled. This is disproportionate with total populations where Māori are 15% of the total population while Pākeha comprise 75%. This study investigates the ability of an online ITE programme to help meet this demand for Māori teachers.

New Zealand has a long tradition of distance education from preschool to tertiary, with institutions such as the New Zealand Correspondence School and the Open Polytechnic of New Zealand solely devoted to providing distance

education since 1922 and 1946 respectively. However, online ITE is a relatively recent phenomenon beginning in the 1990s after a major restructure of the New Zealand education system (Simpson 2003). Major (2005) noted that some teacher education providers moved to develop distance programmes to reach an untapped market of students who were unable or unwilling to move to access teacher education.

Literature review

A core value of the ICDE (International Council for Distance Education), of which New Zealand was a founding member, is distance learning provides access to education for all learners, particularly those who would otherwise be excluded (Moore 2007). In 2002, the e-Learning Advisory Group claimed New Zealand should focus e-learning to provide Māori with opportunities to participate in tertiary education. In light of the demographic profile of Māori learners involved in tertiary education, e-learning can provide improved access. According to the New Zealand Council for Educational Research (2004), 60% of Māori students are studying part time, and women make up 68% of the Māori tertiary student population, which is greater than the comparable non-Māori figures. There is also a difference in the age profile for Māori tertiary students; Māori are younger in the general population but older in the student population and tend to participate in tertiary education at a later age. Accordingly, Māori may have their educational needs more appropriately met through e-learning given flexibility and financial advantages.

While Tiakiwai and Tiakiwai (2010) lament a dearth of research on e-learning and indigenous peoples they did conclude e-learning was able to overcome barriers such as work or family commitments and allowed indigenous students to remain in familiar cultural and social environments while pursuing tertiary study. Ham and Wenmoth (2007 p.60) specifically stated that “e-learning within the Māori community is seen as a ‘leveller’ and, in particular, a way to enable learning to take place for Māori communities in remote areas”.

The possibilities of e-learning to meet the needs of indigenous populations has been acknowledged by Wall (2007) whereby e-learning allowed Canadian Aboriginal students to continue studying in the familiar context of home while at the same time communities did not lose students to larger centres. Grant (1996) described a mixed-mode programme developed in 1989, in part, to overcome the shortage of Aboriginal teachers. The mixed-mode course was an outcome of negotiations with Aboriginal communities and was intended to provide maximum opportunity for the students to sustain their family, work, and other responsibilities. This theme is also noted by Porima (2005) where the participants in her study cited the flexibility of working from home at suitable times rather than attending prescribed classes was a major reason for taking online classes.

There is some concern that e-learning may have a negative impact on the preservation of indigenous cultures (Bowers, Vasquez & Raof 2000; Carr-Chellman 2005; Hodson, 2004). However, in New Zealand the e-Learning Advisory Group (2002) suggested e-learning can not only improve Māori

participation, but also offer a Māori pedagogy within an e-learning framework. Selby (2006) found there is potential for e-learning to make a significant contribution to the teaching of te reo Māori, but cautioned the “e-learning space must be identifiably Māori in its appearance and behaviour” (p.85). Using Māori pedagogy to develop the e-learning space could actually enhance the preservation of Maori culture.

Access to the appropriate technology to engage in e-learning has been cited as a barrier to Māori participation in e-learning (ITPNZ 2004; NZCER 2004; Porima 2005). However, figures (Research New Zealand 2009) suggested this is becoming less of a problem with 78% of Māori having access to a computer and internet, compared with 86% of non-Māori. The penetration of technology for Māori was greater in younger age groups with 83% of 15-24 year-olds and 87% of 25-39 year-olds having access to the internet. And as Monte Ohia (ITPNZ 2004) noted, Māori use technology readily, and if Māori turn their back on e-learning they are turning their back on the future.

Methodology

This paper focuses on a selection of data collected from a larger scale project which aimed to discover how an online course of study prepares student teachers for the classroom. Data from four participants who identified ethnically as Māori are reported. The methodological approach was a multiple case study underpinned by a constructivist paradigm. This is supported by statistical data from the faculty database on Māori participation in ITE.

Data collection

Following ethical approval from the Faculty of Education Ethics committee (ethics approval no. AARP SPSTE/2007/46) all recent graduates of an online ITE programme were invited to volunteer. Four who identified ethnically as Māori agreed to complete two surveys and three agreed to be interviewed. The surveys contained closed and open-ended questions which yielded qualitative and quantitative data. Semi-structured interviews yielded qualitative data only. This multi-faceted approach was adopted to enhance the validity of findings through informant triangulation.

The statistical data on Māori participation in ITE has been collected from the faculty data base.

Participants

Table 1 summarises the participants. Although all four agreed to complete both surveys, ultimately both were only completed by two participants. However, three agreed to be interviewed as well as completing surveys.

Table 1: Participants

Participant	Completed	School	Subjects
Tahi* Male Age 27	Survey 1 Survey 2	State Co-ed.	Phys Ed, Yrs 9, 10, 11, 12, Health, Yr 9 & 10
Rua Female Age 40	Survey 1 Interview	State Co-ed, Kura Kaupapa ⁴	Māori Performing Arts, Music, Technology – all levels
Toru Female Age 35	Survey 1 Survey 2 Interview	State Co-ed.	Te Reo Māori, Yrs 9-13, Māori Performing Arts
Wha Male Age 33	Survey 1 Interview	State Co-ed. Kura Kaupapa.	Phys Ed, Māori Performing Arts - all levels

*Tahi, Rua, Toru, Wha – te reo Māori for one, two, three, four

Findings

Qualitative data from the surveys and the interviews are reported. Each participant is reported as a separate case.

Tahi

Tahi chose online study as he was teaching in a school. Over both surveys Tahi agreed the online ITE programme prepared him well for a range of teaching strategies. When asked about strengths of the programme he singled out the four day residency, stating:

“A strength was the block course at the university as it gave us a face to face opportunity to work with those who were lecturing us and studying beside us.”

For him, the major weakness was a lack of teaching on assessment. He commented in both surveys this was a weakness and he needed more knowledge on giving students effective feedback.

Rua

Rua worked part-time while studying online and revealed that an online option was the only way she could become a teacher. She agreed that online ITE prepared her well for a range of teaching strategies. She singled out organisational and time management skills learnt online as being particularly useful in her job as a teacher, and valued her improvement in ICT skills, making the comment:

“Computer skills that would be a definite. I reckon if I’d come in here without them – e hika⁵!”

She also commented that supportive staff contributed to her perseverance with the programme. A major weakness was the lack of kaupapa⁶ Māori in the programme, and the one paper that did relate to Māori education should have been more intense.

Toru

Toru chose online study as she was employed as a te reo Māori and Māori performing arts teacher. Toru's previous teaching experience led her to believe she had substantial teacher knowledge, but she did find the information on the curriculum and the 'big picture' unit and annual planning valuable. She also developed a better appreciation of student diversity. She found the online programme filled many gaps in knowledge, but struggled to keep motivated believing she would have coped better in a face-to-face situation.

"If I didn't already have teaching experience I would have really struggled. I would have done better in a classroom environment where I have physical contact with people."

However, she did concede the online programme was the only way she could continue working while studying.

"It worked to my advantage, it was convenient and it was a way for me to study and keep teaching, and it was with a well known provider."

Wha

Wha worked full-time while completing the Graduate Diploma of Teaching. He, too, revealed online study was the only way he could become a secondary school teacher, as family commitments meant he could not forgo an income. In contrast to Toru, Wha felt that online learning worked well for him:

"If this had been a class situation I would have thrown it away."

Wha commented the content on planning was particularly valuable, he enjoyed the independence online learning offered and delving deeper into the research. While Wha enjoyed his time as an online student, he did comment that following the residency the students seem to 'click' better online. He also appreciated the support afforded by faculty staff.

Similar to Rua, he felt the programme lacked kaupapa Māori and went as far to say this was hindering others from enrolling. As he found employment in a Kura Kaupapa the lack of focus on Māori curriculum documents was a weakness.

Māori enrolments VUW Graduate Diploma of Teaching, Secondary

Figures from the VUW database corroborate the use of online learning by Māori teachers. Table 2 shows figures since 2006.

Table 2: Enrolments of Māori students in Graduate Diploma of Teaching

	Online programme Total/percentage	Campus programme Total/percentage
2011	4/22 = 18%	10/94 = 11%
2010	3/29 = 10%	6/102 = 5%
2009	2/47 = 4%	2/68 = 3%
2008	6/32 = 18%	5/62 = 8%
2007	9/ 75 = 12%	8/105 = 7%
2006	10/58 = 17%	9/114 = 7%
Total	34/263 = 13%	40/545 = 7%

This clearly shows that every year since 2006 Māori students as a percentage of total students have been greater in the online programme than the campus programme. Overall, 13% of online students since 2006 have been Māori, compared with 7% of campus students. While the raw numbers of Māori students over this time period have been greater in the campus programme (40 students as compared with 34 online) this is to be expected as the numbers attending campus are far greater than those studying online.

Discussion

While this is a relatively small study it is tentatively theorising that online ITE provides an opportunity for Māori graduates to become secondary school teachers. All four participants successfully completed an intense programme and gained employment immediately upon graduation. All considered the online programme prepared them well to begin teaching. Three graduated to teach te reo Māori and indicated this would not happen without the online option. Since 2006 the online ITE programme has graduated a further 31 Māori teachers. A key goal of the Ministry of Education (2010) is to increase the number of Māori teachers proficient in te reo Māori, and the e-Learning Advisory Group (2002) claims we should focus on the potential of e-learning to provide Māori with flexible learning options to enable participation in tertiary education. This study supports these policies.

Māori may have their educational needs more appropriately met through e-learning given the flexibility and financial advantages. All participants in this study noted these advantages. Indeed, the possibilities of e-learning to meet the needs of indigenous populations have been mooted by others (Grant 1996; Porima 2005; Tiakiwai & Tiakiwai 2010; Wall 2007) whereby e-learning was able to overcome barriers such as work or family commitments that hindered indigenous people from accessing higher education. E-learning in New Zealand can offer similar opportunities and may be an important mode of education provision to further Māori educational aspirations.

To ensure participation in e-learning by Māori learners, New Zealand should take the opportunity to develop e-learning environments based on Māori pedagogy. The ITPNZ (2004), Porima (2005) and Ferguson (2008) consider an e-learning model which would effectively teach Māori learners should be built. ITPNZ suggests this would include honour to the students, people and the subject. The model would establish appropriate kaupapa and build relationships

(whanaungatanga). The importance of whanaungatanga is also emphasised by Porima (2005) who found that caring (manaakitanga) is important to Māori learners. Ferguson (2008) emphasises manaakitanga in developing a Māori e-learning framework and the importance of lecturer visibility. Māori students need to know their contributions to forum are read and the teacher is supporting them. Selby (2006), too, describes an e-learning environment which is identifiably Māori and claims this is essential to engage and retain Māori students.

The participants in this study identified successful aspects of the online ITE programme that are congruent with these studies. These are that Māori students value opportunities for face-to-face contact, the ability to form learning communities and the importance of supportive staff to develop and maintain motivation. Two participants noted a lack of kaupapa Māori indicating e-learning would be more appropriate to them as Māori if this was incorporated.

E-learning in New Zealand has a unique opportunity to not only improve access to tertiary education for Māori students, but to also develop e-learning within a culturally appropriate pedagogy that provides for, and respects, Māori students.

Endnotes

1. *Māori* - New Zealand's indigenous people
2. *te reo Māori* - Language of New Zealand Māori
3. *Pākehā* – *te reo Māori* for New Zealand European
4. *Kura kaupapa* - Māori-language immersion schools where the practice reflects Māori cultural values aiming to revitalise Māori language.
5. *Hika* – Te Aka Dictionary gives among its definitions “Good heavens! For goodness sake! Mild exclamation of dismay”.
6. *kaupapa* - values, principles, plans

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Cross border education: quality vs. quantity

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Abstract

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are facing big challenges such as globalization, the shift to a knowledge economy, changing demographics, etc. (Leslie and Fretwell, 1996). The move from elite to mass higher education (Aziz, 2010; Schuetze and Slowey, 2002) as well as internationalization, have profoundly marked the higher education system, especially in terms of academic mobility (Knight, 2006). Cross border education and new delivery forms that have emerged (web based, e-learning, virtual education) are setting a new problem for institutional capacities as well as new boundaries for existing national and regional policy frameworks. Previously, national quality assurance agencies have not focused their efforts on assessing the quality of “imported” and “exported” programmes. The question that arises in this regard is how to deal with such an increasing trend of cross border education especially by new private commercial providers who are not normally part of accreditation and quality assurance schemes. This paper will address the problems encountered with regard to cross border education and in relation to quality assurance by providing an explanation of these concepts while emphasizing actions that can be taken to prevent the negative effects of the poor quality that could emerge from cross border education and new delivery forms.

Keywords: Higher Education; Cross Border Education; Quality Assurance.

1) Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are facing big challenges such as globalization, the shift to a knowledge economy, changing demographics, etc. (Leslie and Fretwell, 1996). The move from elite to mass higher education (Aziz, 2010; Schuetze and Slowey, 2002), coupled with internationalization and open learning, has created new ground for policy makers. Internationalization is marking profoundly the higher education system especially in terms of academic mobility (Knight, 2006). New opportunities and possibilities (cross border delivery, virtual and web based educational services) have been created and new cross border providers have emerged given the massification of the system. The movements of educational programmes, students and faculty members of HEIs and new commercial providers have been regarded with great concern. This has led to the creation and development of new skills outside the conventional learning system, creating a new set of challenges with regard to the quality of new qualifications delivered by a diversity of providers (traditional universities, commercial companies, public/private, for profit/non-profit providers) (Knight, 2006; UNESCO, 2006). As such, cross border

education is setting a new problem for institutional capacities as well as new boundaries for existing national and regional policy frameworks. Previously, national quality assurance agencies have not focused their efforts on assessing the quality of “imported” and “exported” programmes. The question that arises in this regard is how to deal with such an increasing trend of cross border education especially by new private commercial providers who are not normally part of accreditation and quality assurance schemes. Thus, a crucial need emerges in regard to the creation of an appropriate quality culture enabling challenges to be addressed. This paper will address problems encountered with regard to cross border education by providing an explanation of the concepts of quality assurance and cross border education, the pros and cons of this delivery mode and actions that should be implemented to assure quality.

II) Quality Assurance and Accreditation

Quality Assurance (QA) in general is a dynamic process that requires continuous measurement and assessment. As for accreditation, it ensures QA and quality improvement. It does not guarantee access but it provides legitimacy (Eaton, 2011) that is a must within the labor market. The meaning however of QA and accreditation differs from one country to another. This paper will not focus on differences in meaning. It will just present an overview of the QA evolution specifically in the context of cross-border education.

QA mechanisms are being widely recognized and given a crucial importance nowadays at national and international levels. New QA mechanisms, national organizations and regional networks have been established ensuring quality provision of educational services by public and private HEIs. In order to understand QA not only on a national but international level, many challenges have to be identified such as the understanding and requirements of QA. QA is not quality control and its presence does not necessarily mean the existence of quality culture. In order to ensure a QA framework, especially when it comes to cross border education, a collective culture needs to exist. As such, a culture of collective information, productivity, accountability as well as transparency is a must (Salamé, 2011). Such culture cannot be created except by peer review of academic programmes, appropriate hiring and tenure, strategy, curriculum and programme development and general educational goals (Eaton, 2011). As such, HEIs need to adapt to changes within the international community. Yet, many challenges are to be taken into consideration:

- Public accountability for institutions (what do the students learn, level of transparency, etc.)
- Public confidence at the national level translated to a regional/international level (satisfaction may be achieved but not confidence)
- Expanding role of government in the academic arena (in a state controlled system access – cross border education is difficult) (OECD, 2004).
- Increasing demand for education and thus emergence of new forms of cross-border education.

Given the increased awareness and importance given to QA, new developments have been identified in this context. Some are considered as

creating a positive impact by helping the task of national and international recognition of qualifications while others are hindering the system by setting up self-appointed/self-serving accreditors providing accreditors mills. The challenge remains substantial in regard to the recognition of bona fide and rogue accreditors given that neither the cross border provider nor the accreditors are part of a national higher education system.

III) Cross Border Education and QA

a) Cross Border Education: General Overview

“Cross-border education refers to the movement of people, programmes, providers, [...] across national boundaries” (UNESCO, 2006). In regard to the cross-border mobility of programmes, it is described as the movement of individual education programmes across national borders through face to face or distance learning models or a combination of both. Different types of cross-border programme mobility do exist: franchise, double degree, virtual distance, etc. (Knight, 2005b; in Knight, 2006). As for cross-border mobility of providers, it refers to the physical or virtual movement of an education provider across a national border to establish a presence so as to offer an education programme to students. In this case, the learner is not necessarily located in a different country from the awarding institution which is the case for programme mobility. Cross-border providers can be represented by a branch campus, independent institution, study center, etc.

When it comes to cross-border education, the distinction between provider/exporting countries and receiving/importing countries should be highlighted in regard to differences in educational services outcomes:

- *Provider/Exporting countries* that are the source country of the programme/qualification that is delivered in another country (UNESCO APQN, 2006) should pay extreme attention to the academic programmes offered abroad so as not to jeopardize their academic reputation by providing low quality education, i.e. they need to have QA system when it comes to cross border education (Knight, 2006)
- *Receiving/Importing countries* that are the host country to which the programme is delivered (UNESCO APQN, 2006) will benefit from the increase of access to higher education realized by the prospect of having new providers and diversity of programmes. This will result in less brain drain of bright students to foreign institutions (Knight, 2006).

Cross border education is driven by many forces from the demand and supply sides (UNESCO, 2006). From the *demand side*, the attraction of an overseas qualification and diversity of programmes to students, the insufficient supply of appropriate-level education in the receiver country, the attraction to students of studying for an overseas qualification at a lower cost and without having to leave their home country, the attraction of a more flexible mode of study offered by cross-border programmes (part-time, distance learning, etc) encourage the increase of new cross-border ventures. As with the *supply side*, the features are mainly related to a commercial perspective (pressure on institutions to generate

additional sources of income, increased emphasis on entrepreneurship and seeking commercial opportunities, desire to pilot new programmes or new modes of delivery in a foreign market, etc.).

Cross-border education thus presents many opportunities (increased access to higher education, alliances between countries and regions, exchange of new knowledge, movement of graduates, professionals and human resources, income generation, etc., UNESCO, 2006). Yet, when the increased demand for overseas qualifications is combined with the priority of financial returns instead of academic standards and integrity, this may divert cross-border education from its essential objective to provide education to a wider population and produce problems related to students' protection and quality of education. As such, a clear fear does exist in regard to the openness of the system and the increase of "degree mills" (Garret, 2005; in Knight, 2006) providing low-quality education and qualifications with limited validity coupled with the presence of other risks as well such as the decrease in public funding (if foreign providers are given increased access), non sustainable foreign provision of higher education (if profit margins are low), non recognition of foreign qualifications by national employers, etc. (UNESCO, 2006). Thus, the need to set a framework for QA cross-border education and shared international principles (UNESCO, 2006; UNESCO APQN, 2006; Knight, 2006).

b) Cross-border education and quality:

Cross-border education enables the creation of new competencies and provides added value. Yet, new developments of education providers (e-learning, for profit providers, etc.), in addition to the traditional forms of cross border education, are jeopardizing the quality delivered given the greater possibility of students being victims of rogue providers (degree mills). As such, the credibility of higher education programmes is crucial for students, employers, the public and for the academic community itself. Legitimizing the educational services is a must given that students are not only interested in the qualification itself, but by its validity and accountability within the labor market. Receiving countries are the most challenged ones given concerns related to the quality of imported education especially if poor quality outweighs presumed benefits. As for the exporting countries, they gain from more student intake and fees and benefit from educational interchange (Sum, 2005).

As such, the key issue is about who awards the qualification and recognizes the provider and whether or not the provider has been recognized by a quality assured body and whether the qualification received is acknowledged for employment or further study in the receiving country and other countries as well. Taking this as a starting point, the common problems faced in regard to cross-border educational provision are related but not restricted to:

- Misleading/dishonest information (considered as an important source of market failure)
- Poor quality of courses (lower entry requirements, lower requirements for graduation, less choice of modules)
- Poor teaching resources

These may affect the choice of students and the national HEIs competing with low-quality imported services when there is insufficient student awareness. The result will thus be poor qualifications not validated by employers.

These problems, given less regulation by an external body, are induced by problems of quality at two levels: the institutional and the macro (Sum 2005; UNESCO APQN, 2006)

1) At the institutional level:

- Insufficient understanding of cross border education (underestimation of the complexity of the system in regard to planning, management, etc.)
- Inadequacy of institutional QA mechanisms
- Unfamiliarity with or lack of understanding of local educational systems leading to wrong academic decisions in regard to admission standards, offered courses, etc.
- Difficulty in obtaining local resources
- Overreliance upon inexperienced local partners compromising the quality

2) At the macro level:

- Inadequacy of QA systems at the national level to control the quality of cross border education putting students at risk of “degree mills”
- Inadequacy of information sources for students
- Increasing probability of gaining low quality credentials in the long run while employers search for high quality qualifications, affecting trust in the quality of professional labor
- Disrespect of cultural sensitivity (education is embedded in diverse national, ethnic, religious and linguistics settings)
- Lack of capacity and political will to recognize foreign institutions

Given the extent of effects that the value of these particular higher education degrees may have, and in order to ensure quality, HEIs need to be accredited by domestic and foreign regulators (when they exist) (Knight, 2006) like traditional teaching and learning mode are permitted to regulate operations within the education and labor markets. Yet, given the mixed trend of new delivery forms and when it comes specifically to web based delivery (e-learning and virtual universities), the absence of physical borders of the internet should be regarded with concern. Geographical control of electronic communication is very difficult and the “territorial principle” that governs the QA arrangements becomes irrelevant making this specific type vulnerable to fraud (OECD, 2004). As such, if foreign providers are not registered as part of the national system (Knight, 2006) and do not show willingness to abide by a certain level of provision of high quality qualifications (OECD, 2003), it is difficult to measure their performance.

c) How to monitor and implement quality standards?

What has been advanced challenges the national QA frameworks and agencies, given their inability to address cross border education (OECD, 2003)

especially web based providers. The presence of appropriate national and international frameworks of QA to protect the customer is a must. Codes of practice have been developed to guide the practice of delivering programmes across border and establishing partnerships with foreign providers (Knight, 2006). The most well known are the “Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross Border Higher Education” set jointly by the UNESCO and OECD encouraging international cooperation and enhancing understanding of the importance of quality provision in cross border education. These guidelines address six groups: the governments, HEIs, student bodies, QA and accreditation entities, academic recognition bodies and professional associations and enable the recognition of roles and responsibilities of each of them when it comes to assuring quality of cross-border education. Yet, a fundamental issue in this regard is the willingness of institutions to deliver programmes that are recognized by the receiving country given that they are not legally binding.

Creating international frameworks, guidelines and codes of practice is not by itself enough. Countries and especially receiving ones need to assure the development of a national system of QA to guarantee the protection of students and international cooperation. The government plays a critical role in this regard (especially in receiving countries). As such, it can:

- Adopt a “laissez-faire” policy that allows a free range for cross-border education in the market under the assumption that free trade and the market can distinguish between poor and good quality. Still, poor quality may persist given the irrational nature of students in terms of choice of programmes where quality is not always the “leader”. Thus, the market alone cannot play always a regulatory role
- Encourage HEIs to ensure quality and put in place monitoring systems. Yet in order to succeed institutions need to show their willingness to abide by a certain level of provision of qualifications at the highest quality possible (OECD, 2003; Sum, 2005).
- Establish a regulatory system: to gather information about cross-border providers (type of courses, institutions, national accreditation, accountability, etc.) and enable the government to regulate the supply of cross-border education with respect to national policies; to provide information to students and stakeholders; and to regulate and control the quality of cross-border education (which is the most important step) (Sum, 2005, UNESCO APQN, 2006). Such a framework imposes great challenges in terms of defining cross-border education and deciding the scope of regulation, specifying clearly what type and level of cross-border education to cover and choose between a mandatory or voluntary system (Sum, 2005). In addition, it has to take into consideration public policies and public opinion (attitudes towards cross border education, concerns in regard to quality provided, etc.), the development and scale of the market (existence of a large/small market for cross-border education, new/mature market, etc.), the existence of national framework for national providers and the nature of cross-border education that it is facing (face to face, virtual, e-learning, etc.. UNESCO APQN, 2006). It should be noted that in the case of the recognition of web based qualifications by the government, the latter needs to ensure that the review of the programme has been done

by a trustworthy external QA agency. New criteria and protocols are to be adapted to this type of delivery mode (outcome oriented, competency-based approach, etc.) (OECD, 2004).

Creating an international framework for assuring quality in cross-border education may not be easy but it is definitely a very sensitive step requiring acknowledgement and respect for the differences in context, cultures and regulatory systems despite the shared principles and procedures that national QA agencies may have⁵.

IV) Conclusion

The effects of cross-border education have not been restricted to the quality of education but it has as well a subsequent effect on employability within the labor market. The growth of cross-border education, especially new delivery modes has raised challenges for conventional modes and for QA arrangements. In the last years, several initiatives have been taken to adapt existing QA frameworks within the developments of cross-border education; developments that are questioning the traditional input-oriented approaches to QA and leading more attention to be placed on outcomes-oriented approaches. In order to make sure that “degree mills” do not solely identify and define cross-border education, governments and QA agencies are convinced that such delivery modes should be quality assured by the same procedures and agencies as traditional modes. To complement regional and national efforts addressing such growing trends, international initiatives are needed to enhance students’ protection while respecting countries authorities to regulate the QA of their own educational systems. The need to pay more attention to comparisons among systems and to create national standards and a Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (FHEQ) enabling the measurement of the achievement of outcomes and attainment rather than years of study (Yaghi, 2011) is becoming crucial. Cross-border cooperation between QA agencies and recognition and credential evaluation centers become a pressing need in order to be able to assess clearly the quality of an institution/programme/etc (OECD, 2003).

Finally, one cannot but reflect on whether the implementation of a national and international framework allowed to regulate and recognize cross border education, will be considered as a barrier to the educational services trade; at least from GATS point of view (UNESCO, 2006) and poses the following question: what outcome counts more - Quality or Quantity?

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⁵ All national QA systems share the following steps: they all stress the crucial importance of autonomy and independence of quality assessment and make use of external experts, start with the self evaluation done by the institution, conduct an external assessment by a peer review group and site visit and publish the report) (OECD, 2004).

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Rural Adult Education in the Open University of China

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Abstract

China is a developing country with a large population. As urbanization progresses, more and more people leave rural areas for cities; however, the rural population still numbers 670 million and this accounts for 50.32% of the total population. [Data: Major Figures of the Sixth National Population Census in 2010 released by the National Bureau of Statistics on 28th April, 2011 (No. 1)] The development of rural areas plays an important role in terms of whether China can or cannot progress from a developing economy to a rising economy. Since the end of the last century, the government of China has begun to exert itself through developing rural areas to increase their prosperity, endeavoring to improve economic development and the quality of life in rural areas through providing support for aspects of policy, funding, education, medicine, insurance, etc. The Open University of China (OUC), the largest university engaging in distance education, has a significant and historic mission to actively develop adult education in rural areas. Among all the forms of adult education within the OUC, the Ministry of Education’s project of “One College Student for Every Village” is particularly important.

Project Start

In February, 2004, the Ministry of Education decided to start the project of “one college student for every village” (hereafter called “one-for-one”). The “one-for-one” project, organized and implemented by OUC and supported by the system of national radio and TV universities, in the form of modern distance education, integrates relevant teaching resources from the entire nation to spread higher education into rural areas and to train a number of adults to be expert in technology and management for rural areas. This assists them to lead economic and production development, to gain from technological innovation, and to spread advanced developments into rural regions, so as to increase farmers’ income and improve rural development socially and economically.

The “One-for-one” project from the Ministry of Education was warmly received and prompted strong reactions. Major newspapers, radios, TV, and websites provided positive reports. Many organizations and individuals also expressed their opinions and proposed many suggestions. The peasants also had great expectations in terms of the implementation of the “one-for-one” project. Some people with insight believe that talent is the key to solving problems in rural areas (including villages, agriculture, and farmers), and the implementation of “one-for-one” has a far-reaching significance.

Project Enrolment

From autumn 2004, when the “one-for-one” project started, until the autumn of 2010, during the 6-year implementation, provincial pilot radio and TV universities and teaching sites were continuously extended and enrollment numbers increased. Teaching sites increased rapidly from 68 initially to 42 provincial radio and TV universities and 1171 teaching sites affiliated to them, affiliated colleges of OUC included.

This project recruits mainly young rural people who have graduated from senior middle school, vocational high school, technical school, or secondary specialized school. Graduates of junior middle school can enroll in some classes.

From autumn 2004 to autumn 2010, “one-for-one” had 13 recruitment periods, 280 thousand people had enrolled (as of autumn 2010) and 70 thousand students graduated (as of June 2010) on an accumulative basis. Currently, there are 200 thousand students studying.

At autumn 2010, the age distribution of students in the “one-for-one” project was: 20 thousand under 20, accounting for 10% of the total registered students; 70 thousand between 21 and 30, accounting for 35% of students and between 31 to 40 with the same figure; and 40 thousand above 41, accounting for 20%.

By autumn 2010, the project recruited 190 thousand male students and 90 thousand female students, accounting for 68% and 32% respectively on an accumulative basis. Male-female ratio is nearly 2:1.

Majors and Courses in the Project

Three categories of 18 majors are included in the OUC project, which combine characteristics of higher vocational education, especially for rural development. These majors are employment market oriented, and reflect the features of higher vocational education, with the aim of facilitating a closer combination between vocational education and employment & entrepreneurial education and adhering to the principle of focusing on career-oriented course development.

Current majors includes: 8 majors related to agricultural technology, i.e., installation agriculture technology, seed production and management, horticulture technology, crop production, tea production and processing technology, Chinese traditional medicine cultivation, tobacco cultivation, and tourism agriculture; 2 majors on forestry technology, forestry and landscape technology; 3 majors related to livestock veterinary, that is, special animal husbandry, livestock veterinary, and livestock; 4 majors on agriculture and forestry management, including rural administration, agricultural economic management, township enterprise management, and rural information management; and 1 major related to textile and foods: food proceeding technology.

Recruitment numbers on an accumulative basis in the 18 majors differs significantly between each other, the highest reaching nearly 100 thousand while the lowest having only hundreds of students. The ratio between the management category and the breeding and planting category is generally 8:1:1. Majors that rank at the top are: rural administration, township enterprise management, agricultural economic management, livestock veterinary, installation agriculture technology, and horticulture technology.

On the basis of several years' experience in agricultural education, OUC organized experts and professors from the China Agricultural University, Beijing Forestry University, Chinese Academic of Agricultural Sciences, Peking University, Nanjing Agricultural University, Northwest A&F University, South China Agricultural University, and Beijing University of Agriculture, to set up more than 110 distance education programs and various media teaching resources for rural higher vocational education, and launched the "one-for-one" education platform by using the rural-oriented and non-curricula educational TV resources of our university.

A curriculum platform was set up with planting, breeding and management as the main basis for majors, emphasizing the combination of non-curricula education and practical technology education and adopting credit systems for management. Students set up their own goals for gaining knowledge, capability and quality structures by self-selecting certain related courses within the regulations. When they successfully complete one course, students are given the relevant single course certificate, job-oriented training certificate and course completion certificate, and higher education junior college diploma.

To ensure that students are able to apply what they have learnt, we began to review the specialized training and certificate programmes for the one-for-one project in the spring of 2010, integrating degree and non-degree training programmes and laying stress on the improvement of students' vocational skills.

Our main measurements refer to the requirements stipulated in the National Occupational Standards and specify five courses that are related closely to vocational posts for the design of compulsory practical training courses. Through these courses, students' practical capability to solve real problems is strengthened, and they obtain both a diploma and a vocational qualification certificate that relates to the post required after they complete their courses. Now, a professional manager's certificate will be given to those who complete courses about rural administration, township enterprise management, agricultural economic management, and rural information management.

Project Organization

To take forward the implementation of the "one-for-one" project, The OUC and local radio and TV university together invested RMB24 million in the construction of modern teaching infrastructures in 120 counties, so as to facilitate their education. OUC also provided each county-level pilot radio and TV university with RMB20 thousand as start-up fund for the "one-for-one" project.

To meet the requirements of rural learners, the OUC developed curriculum learning packages that are low cost, convenient, practical and suitable for students' self-education. The prices of these packages are 30% lower than similar teaching materials. They comprise a study guide, text materials, videos that are compressed in DVD, course formative assessment manual, and assessment introduction. The study guide mainly focuses on teaching methods, organization, introduction of resources, arrangement of activities, and guidance about study methods.

Provincial radio and TV universities, combining closely with the requirements of social economic development with regard to the creation of more prosperous rural areas, actively appealed to local government for financial support, and in many areas, local government provides students with certain allowances for their education. Meanwhile, the partial remission of tuition fees is also given by the government so as to lighten the burden of rural students.

Project Teaching

The Cooperation between radio and TV systems validates the teaching process of "one-for-one" and guarantees its quality. TV courses are broadcasted by China Educational TV and the OUC "one-for-one" distance education website conducts the necessary online teaching activities and transmits online teaching resources. Until the spring of 2011, more than 4500 teachers and 290,000 students logged into the OUC "one-for-one" distance education website, which possesses more than 400 videos and more than 2900 resources in other formats (texts, HTML, hyperlinks, and attachments) with viewers of around 7,880,000 people.

Depending on agricultural production features and rural students' personal conditions, courses are provided mainly by TV teaching, online lessons, concentrated face-to-face tutorials, individual guidance, and study group help. According to the project's division of work, OUC is responsible for the general design of courses and the broadcast of lessons through various media. Provincial radio and TV universities, according to pilot implementation regulations, organize and direct the implementation of teaching plans in teaching sites of the province. Teaching sites organize concrete teaching activities, conduct course guidance, and complete practice.

Teaching sites generally provide face-to-face guidance in slack time or once or twice a week by playing videos, discussing, surfing online or practice. Face-to-face guidance is different from traditional systematical teaching; it is guidance, that is, to explain important and difficult points of the course and guide students to experiment and practice.

Project Achievement

After the implementation of "one college student for every village":

- Farmers who have left home and people who have difficulties in receiving education are provided with higher education opportunities; to some extent, this reflects the concept of fairness in education and is helpful in changing the poor state of villages, realizing the concepts of social justice, development and harmony.
- a number of new farmer undergraduates who have graduated are able to stay in rural areas and make a contribution towards its further development. Lots of the students have become skilled craftsmen and brought wealth for both themselves and the local people by enabling them to become pioneers in making fortunes from technology;
- a lot of rural officers and potential rural cadres participate in this programme, which prepares a leading backbone to make rural areas more prosperous than previously. Under the leadership of these officers who have learned modern agricultural operations and management, villagers develop markets, start undertakings and adopt scientific management; as a result, they replace an old poor village with a famous rich village. Political power in rural areas is strengthened and spiritual and material civilization develops, the project being highly praised by society, government and farmers.
- Because of its effectiveness in training rural talents, governments in some local areas have taken the “one-for-one” project as the key to developing a local talent-oriented strategy and to aid the poor with technology and education. The project plays an important role in constructing the new countryside.
- some valuable experience has been accumulated in training rural talents, and this paves the way for radio and TV universities to participate in the construction of the learning society as the entry point for higher education in rural areas, the construction of a rural learning society and a lifelong education system. It has a great significance for the spread of higher education into rural areas, to the improvement of rural labourers’ scientific and cultural qualities, and to the development of rural economy and society.
- in the process of teaching rural learners, a distinctive “one-for-one” curriculum platform has been formed and a series of teaching resources relevant to rural demands have been accumulated, which deepens education reform, increases the comprehensive coverage of radio and TV university for villages, boosts the construction of radio and TV university in counties, strengthens radio and TV university systems, and reflects brand features of the radio and TV university.

As the backbone of China’s modern distance education, the OUC plays an important role in constructing a learning society and a modern national education system. We will uphold the principle of “four orientations” and take serving “people in the rural areas” as the most important task of the OUC’s development, taking the initiative in the strategic readjustment of the agricultural and rural economic structure, and leading to the transformation of the mode of agricultural growth, the improvement of farmer’s quality and all-around social progress in rural places, and to the construction of a learning society in rural areas.

Workshop

Don't Stop Talking: Bringing the Conference to the University

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We come to conferences to talk, share experience and ideas, and learn from each other. But what happens after this conference finishes - is it possible to keep the conversation alive across borders, particularly for administrative, support or teaching staff who are not engaged directly in research? At the last Cambridge Conference, colleagues from Athabasca University in Canada and from the University of Leicester and the Open University in the UK found they had common interests, concerns, and problems - and have kept in touch regularly by video-conference.

During this session we'll talk briefly about how we've set up the video-conferences and the benefits we've gained from continuing the dialogue. This will lead to the core of the workshop, which takes the form of an activity designed to help colleagues meet others who have similar interests, and to start enduring conversations of their own.

Participants are encouraged to think about topics of interest to them (such as induction, retention, collaboration, use of social media, etc.) in advance; and to bring a supply of business cards for swapping with contacts developed during the session.

Workshop

Open Educational Resources: harnessing the gift horse... or not?

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Open Educational Resources (OERs) are learning resources that are freely available online, and licensed in such a way to enable them to be used and repurposed worldwide. Although many believe that the millions of OERs now available can help provide greater access to learning, the process of using and repurposing OERs brings its own issues and complexities - which this session will consider.

The participatory workshop will explore the relationship between OERs and open and distance learning, and the potential for using OERs in ODL, by considering case studies that raise policy, management and usage issues, and by recommending appropriate selection, planning, design and provision strategies to meet learners' needs most effectively.

By examining the policy and practical implications of using OERs in open and distance learning, the session should illuminate some key issues to consider and suggest principles for best use of OERs in ODL.

Related conference papers:

Lentell, Helen, Looking the gift horse in the mouth and harnessing it: Social Justice, distance learning and OER;
O'Rourke, Jennifer, Looking at the gift horse: how ODL principles and practice can guide appropriate use of OER

Workshop

Efficient course design in an international setting: using board games to quickly set contexts

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Designing any new academic course requires a wealth of knowledge about the subject matter and suitable pedagogic structures which will aid learning. Take that course into an international distance learning context, however, and the factors which need to be considered increase tenfold. Instructional designers have traditionally helped faculty staff to understand and design for this context, but often many weeks and even months of meetings are required to shift the mindset of faculty staff from a local context to that of an international distance course, before any real curriculum design can begin.

At the University of Leicester we used growing research into the use of games for setting authentic contexts (Shaffer, 2005; Moseley 2010) and developed a board game designed to quickly and efficiently set an international and distance-delivery context in faculty staff's minds; and generate rich and relevant discussion about curriculum choices in the process. This approach has been used successfully with two playtesting teams, and two actual course teams, to date.

This workshop will introduce participants to the design and benefits of the board game, and then allow them to play the board game itself as part of notional course teams. The game itself contains a number of points of discussion, which will allow participants to reflect on the usefulness of this approach in their own contexts. There will also be prizes for the 'winning' teams at the end of the activity.

Moseley, A. (2010), "Roll, Move Two Steps Back, and Admire the View: Using Games-Based Activities to Quickly Set Authentic Contexts". 4th European Conference on Games Based Learning, Copenhagen, Denmark, 20-21 October 2010.

Available: <https://ira.le.ac.uk/handle/2381/9103> [Accessed March 31, 2011]

Shaffer, D. (2005). Epistemic games. *Innovate* 1 (6).

Available: <http://www.innovateonline.info/index.php?view=article&id=79> [Accessed March 31, 2011]