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STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVES AND LEARNING FROM A CROSS-CULTURAL ONLINE COURSE: THE INFLUENCE OF A CRITICAL PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to learn about students’ learning through cross-cultural online education. The participants were students involved in the course “Teaching and Learning about Africa” at the University of Illinois and the University of Pretoria, South Africa. Students were able to participate in their native country while interacting with others abroad. The course explored various topics related to education in South Africa, the United States, and the world. The research questions were: What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment? and What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education? Data from the interviews were coded into categories, and later as broader themes emerged, these were linked to the two research questions. Online survey data were analyzed using statistical methods. The theoretical framework for the study included both sociocultural (Dewey, 1902, 1915, 1916) and critical pedagogy perspectives (Freire, 1970). The discussion explored how challenging the students’ worldviews through online chat sessions, assigned readings, and assignments cultivated a problem-posing and authentic educational atmosphere, which offered students the chance to think critically, learn, and grow both academically and personally. In addition, an interpretation of how the development of trust, openness, and textual communication influenced the students’ participation in this course was explored.
To Erin
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Overview

Technology\(^1\) has a wide variety of uses within educational environments. As the world continually changes, it is important to consider the potential of online education for those who are unable to attend a traditional university as well as those already studying in them. The $100 laptop project (Bender, 2007), along with other advances in technology, could carry online education to a new level, as more and more people around the world gain access to technology and the Internet. Education is a key component in both personal and social reform. Online education provides a tool for educators that may increase availability of education for those who have not had access as well as a different pedagogical tool and delivery system. For those in less developed areas, online education has the potential to increase access to education globally. It also provides a new delivery system for education in that instructors can now reach students far beyond their geographical area, and students can take classes from their home or in concert with students far from them geographically.

Online education is defined as using the Internet as the main medium for course instruction taking place between two or more individuals. It includes, but is not limited to, course management software packages (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard, Moodle, etc.), mobile communication devices (e.g., mobile phones, text capable pagers, etc.), as well as other related tools (e.g., instant textural and video messaging, short messaging service

\(^1\) The term *technology* is used loosely to represent any form of electronic system (i.e., computer, mobile phone, Internet, gaming device, etc.).
There are other definitions of online education; however, for the purposes of this study, the above definition and tools frames how online education typically occurs between individuals, in this case, between students in two different countries.

Studies have shown that educational experiences influence one’s worldview (Stevenson, 1982). As with the introduction of any new product or service, it is important to study its use and impact. At times the intended use of a technology may not actually be what the technology is used for by the recipients (Eglash, 2004). Winner (1986) and Pacey (1983) argue that technology often has seen and unseen political implications. It may be, for example, that good intentioned technologies or policies hurt marginalized and underrepresented groups. Thus, it is important that research be conducted to further our understanding of cross-cultural online education, and the benefits and hindrances it may bring to learning.

Purpose of the Study

This research was a case study of a cross-cultural online course; therefore, the course was the unit of analysis. The participants were students in the course “Teaching and Learning about Africa” at the University of Illinois and the University of Pretoria, South Africa (see appendix A for a copy of the syllabus). The course explored various topics related to education in South Africa, the United States, and other places in the world. Students in Illinois and Pretoria were able to participate in their native country while interacting with students in the other country. The purpose of this research was to study the students’ learning through cross-cultural online education. The research questions were: What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment? and What
does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education? These questions were investigated using qualitative and quantitative methods.

It is important to note that neither the particular instructor nor his instruction was evaluated. This is not to suggest that they were not important, but rather the study focused on how this text-based (content) interaction system influenced students’ learning.

Educational Context and Diverse Students

In any educational context students construct their own meanings which may vary. With the addition of diverse social interactions in cross-cultural education, students are even more likely to be exposed to a variety of worldviews from their online interactions. Sociocultural theory (Dewey, 1916; Vygotsky, 1986; Wenger, 2000; Gee, 1998) suggests that one’s development is not independently constructed, but rather it is interconnected with social experience to form meaning. Hence, it is possible that the more unique and diverse the social experiences one encounters, the more development may occur. Dewey argues:

Lack of the free and equitable intercourse which springs from a variety of shared interests makes intellectual stimulation unbalanced. Diversity of stimulation means novelty, and novelty means challenge to thought. The more activity is restricted to a few definite lines, as it is when there are rigid class lines preventing adequate interplay of experience--the more action tends to become routine . . . . (Dewey, 1916, p. 98)

Diversity of ideas and social experiences are likely to lead to more novelty and intellectual challenge, which help to promote new ideas. New ideas and critical thinking are difficult to teach directly, but learning is enriched by providing diverse class dynamics and perspectives.
In diverse educational contexts, students’ ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status vary and may influence the instructor and other students’ perceptions. It is important for teachers to recognize these effects in order to help address negative prejudices that may arise (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968). Students’ socioeconomic status, cultural background, and language influence their development (Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997; Rutter, 1985), and their worldview.

Research from Marsh, Koller, and Baumert (2001) found that educational policy influences one’s academic self-concept. Students’ educational experiences are shaped by national policies and influence what they learn and their perspective of society. Since national policies differ, students in those countries will have different kinds of learning experiences. For example, some countries track students into predetermined groups based on academic ability, while others support education for all. Such tracking influences students’ self-perception and expectations for how society operates. Within cross-cultural education, students may be exposed to other educational perspectives and worldviews, which in turn may lead them to new insights.

Rationale

Online education is increasing in popularity and allows for new possibilities within education (Harasim, 2000) and for cross-cultural educational contexts (Merryfield, 2003). For the purposes of this study, a distinction between multicultural education and cross-cultural education was established; the term multicultural education is used when referring to education within national borders, while cross-cultural education transcends national borders. Banks (1993) defined a goal of multicultural education as: “. . . to
reform the school and other educational institutions so that students from diverse racial, ethnic, and social-class groups will experience educational equality” (p. 3). Here he is referring to curriculum within a classroom or school where students learn about the cultures represented by the students in that context. Of course, this is an early definition of multicultural education but one that persists in the research studies in this area, so it is used here with the acknowledgement that multicultural education currently is more inclusive of aspects of differences (race, class, culture, sexual orientation, etc.) and that most multicultural authors would include global awareness and studies to be within the scope of multicultural education. In addition, informal multiculturalism has always been present in U.S. education, as student populations are diverse and represent many different cultures, some of which are actively advocating for educational equality.

Cross-cultural education, for the purposes of this study, is defined as education that reaches beyond national borders and cultural groups. Defined this way, cross-cultural education was relatively limited until the widespread adoption of the Internet. Before the Internet, one way cross-cultural education primarily took place through student exchange programs. Through these exchange programs, students from different areas of the world exchange a select number of students between schools. This process helps students learn about different cultures, politics, education, and aspects of the other cultures.

The invention of the World Wide Web in 1980 (Mowery & Simcoe, 2002; Harasim, 2000) brought new possibilities for cross-cultural education. Now students have the ability to interact with students and scholars from across the globe. Even in the beginning when connection speeds were slow and uncertain, online collaboration was still feasible through both synchronous and asynchronous communication. Within the last
10 years, online education has begun to flourish with schools offering online classes and even complete online degrees (e.g., University of Phoenix). Due to the rapid growth of Internet access and the lowering cost of computers, online education is a valuable alternative for those who may be unable to attend a traditional university. Online education also provides worldwide access as well as increasing the availability of cross-cultural interactions within courses.

While some argue that face-to-face education is better than online education, I find it more useful to study the process and environments in which online education can promote learning before arguing which one is best. It seems that online education is here to stay, and Harasim (2000) argues that educators have a unique opportunity to shape the future of online education and mold it into a positive alternative, or addition, to traditional education. Moreover, online education offers the unique advantage of authentically bringing multiple cultures into a single educational environment. Students and instructors are now able, in real-time, to interact with others from all over the world in a variety of ways. Many of the new online tools mimic traditional education and face-to-face communication because they provide video, audio, and hand-raise functions.

Even though online education utilizes similar methods to traditional education, it is injudicious to assume that traditional theory and pedagogy should simply be mimicked in online contexts. However, they do offer a base and starting point for developing online education. Researching and learning more about how online education and cross-cultural education influences learning is important to understanding and developing new pedagogies and theories to guide education.
Overview the Dissertation

This study contributes to the knowledge about online learning in cross-cultural contexts and explored how students from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and the University of Pretoria in South Africa utilized an online system to facilitate cross-cultural communication and education. The separate chapters are briefly described.

Chapter Two - Literature Review

Sociocultural theory (Dewey, 1902, 1915, 1916) and the theory of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) were used as a framework for this study. Dewey’s work argues that educative experiences are influential. In a cross-cultural online course, students had the opportunity to learn about others’ experiences. According to Dewey, social interactions impact learning. Participating in a course with students from a different culture cultivated unique social interactions. This course offered students the opportunity to learn about how culture impacts education and how their culture viewed education.

Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) theory promotes a critical mindset. The course encouraged critical thought through exposure to diverse viewpoints. Freire also argues that dialogue and learning should lead to social change, when cultural norms are oppressive. The cross-cultural nature of the course encouraged students to be critical of their personal worldviews. A third component of critical pedagogy is problem-posing education. The professor of the online course used this approach by beginning each class session with critical questions regarding the weekly readings. This use of problem-posing education encouraged students to identify oppressive themes.

Online education has progressed over its years. In its infancy, online education was relatively basic. However, with computer prices and the widespread availability of
the Internet, online education has rapidly grown. As with face-to-face education, online education has a variety of approaches--presentational, performance-tutoring, and epistemic-engagement. The effectiveness of online education has been promoted by many, and studies have shown that in some contexts online education can be more effective than face-to-face environments. Online education has the potential to dramatically influence learning. Nonetheless, there are challenges and potentially negative outcomes to be considered as well.

Cross-cultural education research was initially informed by cognitive developmental theories. For example, early research examined cognitive development in different cultures using Piaget’s stages of development. With the growth of the Internet, cross-cultural online education has evolved and offers unique benefits. For example, the lack of face-to-face communication has been shown to decrease visual discrimination, and provide some students with a safer environment within which to express their ideas.

*Chapter Three - Methodology*

This project was an empirical inquiry of a single cross-culture online course. Specifically, the course was studied as a descriptive case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The case was used to explain and describe the course in its natural environment, while illustrating and exploring the influence of both cross-cultural and online environments. The study design was based on Yin’s (2003) five design elements--research questions, propositions, unit(s) of analysis, logic linking, and criteria for interpreting results. As the researcher, I approached the case study from an interpretative theoretical paradigm, which includes the researcher’s ontology, epistemology and a naturalistic set of research methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).
Lincoln and Guba (1985) described four techniques that build credibility in research--prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, and referential adequacy. As the main researcher, I was actively involved throughout the entire course (prolonged engagement). In addition, I was present for all but one synchronous class session, and actively monitored the asynchronous communication within the course (persistent observation). Research data were gathered through multiple venues--semi-structured interviews, online surveys, and WebCT class discussions and other online areas (triangulation). In addition, the data were preserved in their original context (referential adequacy). Ethical concerns were addressed using informed consent statements, anonymity of the participants, and online ethics training. Throughout the study, I was attentive to my own personal biases and was mindful of differing perspectives as they arose. Eight US students and two South African students participated in the 16 week long study. However, the two South African students only participated in three class sessions. Data from the interviews were coded into categories, and later as themes emerged, linked to the two main research questions. Online survey data were analyzed using statistical methods. Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy theory was used in interpreting data from WebCT. Last, one negative participant emerged and was examined, as it offered a unique perspective.

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2 According to the instructor, the course did not have an established course number at the University of Pretoria in which students could enroll. The way the system operates, it would have involved a long process for a course number to be created. Since this was not anticipated when designing the course, the instructor sought and received permission from the Dean of Education at the University of Pretoria to award certificates of completion as opposed to a letter grade. This may account for the low participation at the University of Pretoria.
Chapter Four - Results

Six themes emerged within my two main research questions: What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment? and What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education? Diversity, similarities, and self-reflection and learning were the three themes associated with the first research questions. Data revealed that students learned in a variety of ways. Students described that they learned from the diverse experiences and ideas of others. For example, students described that being exposed to new ideas challenged their worldviews. A second way students described learning was through similarities. Unexpectedly, students found that both countries’ educational systems struggle in providing equal access to resources. Third, students expressed that components of the course were influential in promoting self-reflection and learning. For example, students described the benefit of participating in the synchronous chat sessions.

The three themes associated with the second research questions were trust and openness, flexibility, and disadvantages. Students described that trust and openness contributed to feeling more open in the course. Specifically, they explained that the way the professor framed the course cultivated an open and safe environment. The online class also provided flexibility—students could be in their home country and participate virtually any time or day. Students described that the course created a cross-cultural environment that they would not have experienced in a face-to-face course. Last, students described disadvantages of the course. For some the class was slower than that of a face-to-face course, as students were unable to type as quickly as they could speak. One participant was an anomaly and her interview responses are described separately. In the
course she was an active participant, but during the interview she gave negative responses to most of the questions. Components of critical pedagogy were important in the course, and were investigated.

**Chapter Five - Discussion**

Dewey’s (1902, 1915 1916) sociocultural theory and Freire’s (1970) theory of critical pedagogy provided a framework for interpreting the results. The first research question: What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment? For this question I explored the aspects of the course that influenced students’ learning. Freire argued that critical thinking involves analyzing and discussing diverse viewpoints. The online chat sessions provided an avenue for students to discuss diverse viewpoints. Second, students explained that the course assignments offered them an opportunity for critical thinking. Dewey (1926) theorized that ‘educative experiences’ require critical thinking. Third, the professor utilized weekly reading assignments that encouraged problem-posing education. Freire (1970) theorized that problem-posing education helps one critically evaluate the world that one lives in. In addition, recognizing oppression was one important component of Freire’s theory of critical pedagogy. Overall the framework of the course provided students with an opportunity for self-reflection that ultimately encouraged learning.

The second research question: What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education? For this question I focused on the online environment. Dewey (1916) argues that one’s environment influences what one learns. First, the way the professor framed the course supported an open environment, which students reported supported their learning. Second, students also described that the lack of face-to-face
communication also created a safe environment. Third, using textual communication
provided students the opportunity to think before “talking,” and was described as a
contributing factor in creating an open environment. Like Dewey’s theory suggests, the
online environment was an important factor that influenced students’ actions. The online
course provided unique cross-cultural diversity and experiences. Dewey argues that these
kinds of educative experiences shape students’ learning.

Freire’s theory of critical pedagogy, for example problem-posing education,
provided guidance when interpreting data from the online chat sessions. Some of the
disadvantages described, such as speed of the course, were limitations of WebCT and
student’s typing ability. When designing an online course, it is beneficial to recognize the
effects of specific aspects of online environments. Further, implementing a critical
pedagogical approach encourages authentic education. Last, a student example illustrates
the significance of cross-cultural online education, as she described how the course
contributed to her learning and personal growth.

Chapter Six - Reflection

Through reflection on the study, the results, and my interpretative stance, I
identified several tensions in the course. For example, the cross-cultural component was
in tension with the online component. Both can be seen as separate entities, but the data
showed that they were interwoven and interactive. Students described how they learned
from the cross-cultural component of the course, but that component would not have been
possible without the online environment. I explored the following tensions within the
course-- cross-cultural and online, cross-cultural and multicultural, reading and
experience, problem-posing education and banking education, quality dialogue and
quantity dialogue, synchronous and asynchronous, and a positive participant and a negative participant.
Overview

Dewey’s sociocultural (Dewey, 1902, 1915, 1916) theory and Freire’s critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) framed this study of cross-cultural online education. Sociocultural theory, in general, recognizes the importance of the environment in shaping one’s worldview and learning. Critical pedagogy theorists assert that members of a society should question the norms, and think and behave critically to improve the world. Within this case of cross-cultural online education, these two theories provided a framework to interpret how learning took place. I used sociocultural (Dewey) and critical pedagogy (Freire) to frame my study and to better understand cross-cultural interactions in online education.

Chapter two begins with an overview of pertinent aspects of Dewey’s theory (1902, 1915, 1916), focusing particularly on his argument that experience and environments have an influence on students’ perceptions and actions. Next, an overview of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) is outlined, as his theory supports critical thinking (i.e., asking why), which is useful in thinking about cross-cultural education. Last, the chapter moves to a discussion of research on online education and cross-cultural online education.
John Dewey: Sociocultural Theory

Experience in Education

Dewey’s theories have been useful in shaping education in general, and may likewise be relevant to cross-cultural online education; prominent among these theories is his argument that educative experiences influence and guide learning. He argues (Dewey, 1902):

The child lives in a somewhat narrow world of personal contacts. Things hardly come within his [her] experience unless they touch, intimately and obviously, his [her] own well-being, or that of his [her] family and friends. His [Her] world is a world of persons with their personal interests, rather than a realm of facts and laws. (p. 9)

Dewey suggests that children need purposeful experiences, and that these experiences help shape their learning. As learners interact with the world around them, the world and the environment become meaningful, allowing them to make connections between theory and practice. He further argues that within schools, curriculum is often categorized into separated components that are difficult for young minds to relate to their more wholistic experience. Dewey suggests that students’ experiences outside of the school often do not connect with the separate subject and bits and pieces of the school curriculum (Dewey, 1915).

That we learn from experience, and from books or the saying of others only in their vital relation to experiences, are not mere phrases. But the school has been so set apart, so isolated from the ordinary conditions and motives of life, that the place where children are sent for discipline is the one place in the world where it is most difficult to get experience - the mother of all discipline worth the name. (p. 27)

Dewey suggests that students learn best when theory is directly applied to real world situations creating educative experiences. For Dewey schools are an important place where one learns because they can provide for relevant educative experiences.
Many schools are bound to local, state, and national standards, and thus teachers find it difficult to integrate subjects in ways that relate to children’s lives and purposes. Schools could contribute more fully to the development of students by providing educative experiences connected to purpose, instead of simply providing a place to learn material neatly boxed into seemingly irrelevant categories and separate disciplines.

Further, schools have the opportunity to cultivate a social community of learning, support, and growth for developing minds. Interdisciplinary purposeful experiences enable children to form connections between multiple subjects and worldviews. For example, Dewey (1916, pp. 30-33) suggests taking students to experience the process of transforming cotton from raw material into more usable substance. This process allows students to learn from educative experience; making connections both intellectually and socially.

These connections can also be integrated into cross-cultural online education. The unique environment offers students an understanding of how theories apply in different cultural contexts. Students, who grew up in one culture, may understand things differently than those who grew up in another culture. For example, when learning about economic principles, those from a more agricultural society may recognize different applications than those from a more industrialized society.

Social Development and Experience

Educative experiences also have the potential to foster personal and social meaning in an activity. Finding significance can have an impact on a child, especially one that may be struggling in other areas. Growing socially and interpersonally is just as
important as intellectually, although the social aspect is often overlooked in education. Social interaction is part of students’ educational experience and shapes their worldview.

A being whose activities are associated with others has a social environment. What he [she] does and what he [she] can do depends upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations of others. A being connected with other beings cannot perform his [her] own activities without taking the activities of others into account. (Dewey, 1916, p. 14)

Schools are social in nature, as students interact with other students, teachers, and other groups of people throughout the day. Dewey (1916, p. 14) points out that interactions in a school are shaped by the environment. Knowing this, it seems relevant to have an environment that cultivates educative social experiences. However, many schools are setup in a fashion that dilutes social interaction, as the teacher is viewed as the giver of knowledge. Having cooperative projects and interaction with others has an effect on students’ social development and cognitive growth. Dewey (1916, p. 14) suggests that even animals that interact with humans change compared to wild animals. When animals interact with humans, much of the environment is controlled to influence behavior and learning. Dewey makes a distinction, noting that humans are not animals and need education rather than a set of controlled or manipulated variables to achieve a predictable result. Further, Dewey (1916) theorizes that in the beginning, one’s feelings and goals are personal, but later evolve into group emotions and goals.

Making the individual a share or partner in the associated activity so that he [she] feels its success as his [her] success, its failure as his [her] failure, is the completing step. As soon as he [she] is possessed by the emotional attitude of the group, he [she] will be alerted to recognize the special ends at which it aims and the means employed to secure success. His [Her] beliefs and ideas, in other words, will take a form similar to those of others in the group. He [She] will also achieve pretty much the same stock of knowledge since that knowledge is an ingredient of his [her] habitual pursuits. (pp. 16-17)
Recognizing this phenomenon, schools have the opportunity to build an environment that fosters constructive group support and responsibility to young adults, who are, as Dewey (1916, p. 17) states, immature in cognitive and social ability. Social interaction, language use, instruction, purposeful experiences, and many other aspects of an environment can affect the students’ social maturity. For example, the fact that others are able to know what *red* signifies, suggests that there is mutual agreement and social understanding between individuals and groups (Dewey, 1916, pp. 17-19), as one who is more mature would teach one who is immature, though an educative experience, the definition and context in which the word *red* would be used.

In a cross-cultural online environment, students still possess the ability to interact socially, but with students who may require them to step outside the accepted social norms of their face-to-face environment. The practice of adapting their means of social interaction may lead to greater social sensitivity, which is an important skill that extends beyond the traditional school environment. So in addition to adding a unique developmental component, cross-cultural online education has the potential to create a unique social environment that can aid in social development.

*Environment and Knowledge Interaction*

Knowledge is often dependent on the context in which information is presented. It is valuable to recognize that learners have important qualities that can develop further in an educational environment. However, sometimes the goals of education conform to set education standards that do not prompt meaningful learning. This is not to downplay the importance of structured learning and standards, but to make note that Dewey advocates a particular kind of integrated and meaningful learning that is connected to students’
purposes in ways that meet an individual learner’s needs. From Dewey’s point of view, more emphasis should be given to interdisciplinary curriculum and purposeful experiences to promote learning. Subject matter learning and skills are built into the process of learning focused directly on students’ questions. For students, what is learned in a classroom is often challenging to connect to real world experience, or if it is connected, it is many times in a very abstract way that is unnatural for young children, in particular, and therefore less useful. Educators need to help students learn to use what they have learned in one situation to solve problems in another situation.

School environments should be an area where students are free to experiment with knowledge and actions, without fear of rejection or severe consequences, and have support from teachers to guide them as needed. The ability to freely experiment helps students learn to use their skills and knowledge to solve problems in school and in the world.

Educators expect that students will be able to solve problems in school and other life situations. However, many learned tasks in school are focused on rote memorization and drill practice and then students are unable to transfer knowledge to other situations. Being able to understand and perform fundamental skills should be taught across a variety of domains to help students develop problem solving skills. In addition, students would be better able to understand the relevance of abstract learning, if their learned theory and skills were utilized in meaningful learning environments. Dewey (1916) states: “The inclination to learn from life itself and to make the conditions of the life such that all will learn in the process of living is the finest product of schooling” (p. 60). Dewey argues here that one of the significant results of formal education is to develop
within an individual the desire to seek learning throughout life, and to learn from all the unique life experiences. Again, Dewey is concerned with learning to adapt knowledge from different educative experiences to be applied in other life experiences and the drive to seek knowledge through learning throughout life’s journey. Learning should not stop when one leaves the formal education environment, but rather continue, as one is equipped to learn in a mixture of interacting environments and situations.

Environment and Culture

In different contexts and cultures, education may have different meanings, purposes, or social functions. Dewey (1916) states:

To say that education is a social function, securing direction and development in the immature though their participation in life of the group to which they belong, is to say in effect that education will vary with the quality of life which prevails in a group. Particularly it is true that a society which not only changes but which has the ideal of such change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs. (p. 94)

Dewey is arguing that culture, environment, and social norms influence one’s education and worldview. Societies that value different perspectives recognize that change is educative.

Even within one culture, many subgroups (Dewey, 1916, pp. 94-95) form the larger organization. Subcultures are formed around religion, sports, location, origin of birth, school districts, politics, education level, interests, language, and many other facets of life. While the larger social context influences one’s worldview, the subgroup may have a greater impact, as they often consist of strong family or local support. Within society, there are both positive and negative communities (Dewey, 1916, p. 95).

Unfortunately, at times, good intentions from a larger culture have negative impacts on a
smaller subculture. Freire (1970) would argue this happens because of a breakdown in true dialogue and the lack of true generosity, what he terms as a humanitarian effort instead of a humanist effort. Humanitarian implies that there is not an oppressed group, but merely a group that needs help or support in an effort to be self-sufficient. Whereas, a humanist effort suggests that some groups have suffered unjustly and a transformation is needed to repair damage from the oppressors. As experiences affect one’s worldview, it is important to ensure active dialogue through any transformation period. Dewey (1916) and Freire (1970) both argue that each culture, including subcultures, are uniquely different and should be approached differently even though similarities are present. Moreover, recognizing the differences in culture suggests that culture indeed affects one’s educational experience and worldview.

Dewey (1916, p. 115) suggests that because many cultures are represented in the educational system that a dominant or ideal way to educate others developed; therefore, a subset of the society’s goals and objectives have primary influence on the system. He stated, “Since education is a social process, and there are many kinds of societies, a criterion for educational criticism and construction implies a particular social ideal” (Dewey, 1916, p. 115). It is clear, at least in the US, that one genre of education is dominant, which Freire (1970) calls the “banking education,” where students store banks of information told to them. This approach to education has a strong history in US schools.

The dominant culture in any society influences its educational environments. This is not to say that American education is not working or is poorly constructed, but to note that not all types of education are best suited for all types of students and cultures in
America. One type of education may promote certain cultural norms, but not be sensitive to all cultures and socioeconomic classes, and one does not want to segregate education into different approaches for specific students, as that promotes another type of exclusion. Instead, one could offer progressive education (Dewey, 1916) coupled with what Freire (1970) calls problem-posing education (critical pedagogy). Such education requires intercultural acceptance and appreciation, while challenging students to become critical thinkers and develop an open worldview. Over time, critical pedagogy, as Freire argues (1970) could change education and the world into a less oppressive place. Dewey (1916, pp. 94-115), years ago, quickly noticed the dominant culture, promoted as the “ideal culture,” molded education, and their views, morals, ideas, theories, religion, goals, lifestyle, etc. shaped educational norms and goals.

At this time in history when international boundaries are becoming blurred though cultural interactions across society and globally via the Internet, and migration, educational environments should take into account their ever-changing diverse populations. Moreover, Dewey (1916) recognized the social constructs that are found in educational environments. Such social development is important in personal development, and is influenced by one’s culture. Educational environments offer the unique experience that should allow for an oppression-free situation for learners. It is through this culturally diverse and open environment that children can grow and learn to respect others within a democratic context. This growth (Dewey, 1916), guided by the teacher, should encourage learners in the lifelong pursuit of personal, social, and intellectual growth. As each new environment uniquely alters one’s experiences, the learner can make new connections as well as alter preexisting ones. It is here where
learners truly begin to experience critical thinking and lifelong education. The possibility to engage in a cross-cultural online educational situation will allow students to have an understanding of cultural influences and increase their ability to make cross-contextual connections.

It should be acknowledged, however, that while Dewey’s theories are amendable to cross-cultural learning, this was not a focus on Dewey’s work. His focus was more on educating students to live in a democracy, than educating them to live in the global society of today. We can make adaptations to cross-cultural education because of his emphasis on learning from educative experience, diverse views, and dialogue, but I am acknowledging the limits of his theory in this respect.

Paulo Freire: Critical Pedagogy Theory

Critical pedagogy is a comprehensive theory of education that can aptly be applied to cross-cultural online education. The use of dialogue and discussion cultivates growth through a deeper understanding of critical issues, by examining one’s own understanding of an issue (Freire, 1970), as well as how society has influenced those beliefs. One goal, as Freire (1970) suggests, is to help students as well as instructors to think critically in a cooperative environment. As time and societies change, people often modify their worldview and understanding of others. As the Internet makes it possible for cross-cultural collaboration, these modifications can incorporate ideas that would have been out of reach for previous generations.

A critical pedagogical approach encourages people to develop and use critical thinking skills throughout their lives. Simply answering a question or lecturing in a class,
while effective for some purposes, may not be the optimal way to promote learning and critical thought processes. Students need the opportunity to articulate and defend their ideas, theories, and beliefs, as well as have the opportunity to hear other’s ideas and criticisms of their thoughts. Garrett (1989) points out that a Freirean approach offloads some responsibility to the students to come prepared for class, by internally synthesizing and analyzing the material. Students will often be asked to defend the opposite theory to what they believe to be true, in the hope that they will develop a better breadth and depth of the content.

**Critical Thinking**

One of the main objectives of critical pedagogy is to help one develop critical thought patterns in everyday life, so students do not simply accept norms as truth (Freire, 1970). Misunderstanding or misinterpreting, at times, may be byproducts of this method, but often the process of reaching an answer and defense is more important than the answer itself (Garrett, 1998). It is in this process that the learning occurs. Often, a mistake could be used to promote learning and act as a stepping-stone to deeper understanding, by enlightening areas of a field that may not have been realized before. The environment created is often energetic and engaging as students are encouraged to actively participate through discovery and reasoning skills. Easy answers or solutions are not considered an acceptable means to an end, for example, defending uncritically statements like, everyone should have Internet access or government health care. When students are not challenged to think critically about their ideas, they may not realize many issues surrounding a particular solution to a problem. For example, a student might suggest that providing government health care to all citizens would improve people’s
heath, without considering that providing government health care does not mean that people would have transportation to a doctor or hospital, or be able to make informed decisions regarding medical advice. Simply adding government health care would not bring equality. It would be unfair to students and society to simply allow underdeveloped solutions to be accepted without investigating their consequences. Critical pedagogy is one approach that attempts to help students develop critical thinking and analytical skills that they can draw upon throughout their lives.

**Promoting Social Change**

A second objective of critical pedagogy is to promote change when unjust situations have become unquestioned societal norms. Critical approaches may be more common in a cross-cultural online course as students from other cultures may question the norms set by the ruling class of a foreign country. It may be easier to critique another country’s practices than to evaluate one’s own. Freire (1970) states, “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 28). His statement suggests that it is not only the oppressed that need freedom, but the oppressors as well, who are bound by their oppressive ideologies and actions.

Freire further suggests change in the form of less power promotes “false generosity,” and is not “true generosity,” as the oppressors have not made things equal or removed the oppression, but simply lessened the oppression. This could be seen as a good faith attempt to heal tensions, but in some cases, the attempt upsets the oppressed more, as it appears as a slap in the face, because the real oppression remains unresolved. Freire (1970) suggests: “To surmount the situation of oppression, men [women] must first
critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (pp. 31-32). This is where critical pedagogy comes into action because it offers a critique of what society considers the norm and offers paths to a more equitable society.

The evolution from an oppressed nation or situation to a free one may take a considerable amount of time and struggle. Some people fear change and the thought of moving out of an oppressed group into a more equitable society is difficult. Some may worry that as they are “joining” the other team, or that they are losing their identity. Even with these concerns, it is important that the oppressed progress forward to their goal of “true generosity” (Freire, 1970). The oppressor may also find this change difficult, as they may not be aware that they are being oppressive. This newly found “title” is often difficult on an individual level, as one must accept fault and ownership for oppression against a fellow group. Rationalizing away one’s actions does not contribute to the solution, but merely dilutes the issues. Progression forward often occurs when the oppressor ceases to see the problem in an abstract sense and joins the oppressed in their fight for equality (Freire, 1970). This gesture is a sign of equality between the groups and often leads to a road of healing and progressive moments within groups.

Freire (1970) suggests that the beginning of the elimination of oppression starts with dialogue; a dialogue between the oppressed and the oppressor identifying the actions and worldviews that bring about the oppression. It is important to the success of transformation out of oppression that the dialogue be carefully crafted in a way that does not attack the oppressor, causing communication breakdown. The oppressor is wrong in his or her actions, and the oppressed are right in illuminating the wrong doings, but word
choice could spark more oppression, and therefore caution should be used. In addition, the oppressed should be a part of the entire process (Freire, 1970), otherwise true generosity may not occur, as the oppressors may not fully be aware or understand the issues of the oppressed either.

The pedagogy of the oppressed is not simply a humanitarian effort, but a humanist effort. Throughout a Freireian revolutionary process both the oppressed and the oppressors continually evaluate their stances and modify progress as needed. Each party experiences a change, and many, through this process, develop a new identity and profoundly different worldview. Sometimes in the beginning, the oppressed group is so desperate to be free of oppression, they will oppress members of their own group in an attempt to identify with the oppressor. Unfortunately, this act further brings division within the oppressed group, and promotes resentment. Freire (1970) proposes that this phenomenon is most prominent in the middle class, as they strive to become upper-class; leading the oppressed middle class to mimic the lifestyle and actions of the upper-class. Because of oppression, many of the oppressed appear to have low self worth, as the oppressors constantly degrade them. This mindset leads some to believe that they are unable to think for themselves or understand complex issues that only the oppressors are able to understand.

An Alternative to the Narrative Approach

A third objective of critical pedagogy is to provide an alternative approach to the narrative approach used in education (Freire, 1970). This narrative presents the teacher with the knowledge and the students with insufficient knowledge, as the teacher gives them knowledge. This is not to say that the teacher is not more knowledgeable in a
subject, but rather that in many cases the students’ voices go unheard and their needs are unmet, which could lend itself to an oppressive environment. As Dewey (1916) suggests, a school environment should allow for students and teachers the freedom to express themselves in a nonthreatening way--free from oppression, stereotypes, fear, etc. Too often the classroom is an environment where students receive and memorize facts to later be reproduced in a robotic fashion; no critical thought is achieved or discovered, as the regurgitation of facts is what appears to be of importance. Again, Dewey (1916) would argue that facts are merely facts, and that students should learn and connect education through educative experiences within their environment. Interconnectedness and meaning is lost between subjects, synthesis and analysis are diluted, and students may fail to develop an understanding of the world in which they live. Instead, the students develop the ability to follow a leader, while not thinking for themselves, in essence becoming robotic like in their thought and actions. Further, the banking approach (Freire, 1970) breeds students who may lack creativity, imagination, and critical thinking skills, which Freire suggests, robs them of being human. Garrett (1998) and Freire (1970) argue that it is through continual and relentless re-invention, critical analysis, synthesis of new and old information, and inquiry, that knowledge and learning can emerge.

An educator who is committed to helping the oppressed may reject the banking theory of education and embrace the “problem-posing” education theory (Freire, 1970), which emphasizes the importance of active communication and critical analysis of difficult issues. Instead of dampening creativity, problem-posing education promotes a continual process of unmasking reality (Freire, 1970); not the reality of the teacher, school, or even societal norms, but a critical reality that may help one view the world
from a different perspective. Freire (1970) argues that using his approach enables the educator to offer new challenges to students, as they begin to view education as a practice of freedom not domination. Educators as well as students begin to see issues as problems to be solved rather than things to be accepted (Freire, 1970).

*Cultural Themes in Critical Pedagogy*

Themes that contribute to oppression are diverse in nature (Freire, 1970), acting in the local community as well as the national and even world community. While in the process of transformation from oppression to freedom, one may recognize different levels and dynamics of these themes. Sometimes it may be challenging to address all themes at the same time. Using problem-posing education, one first identifies significant oppressive issues, while at the same time guiding the oppressed to make important connections between issues, worldviews, society, etc. It is when these connections are made that critical thinking begins (Freire, 1970). This seemingly easy task is fairly difficult, as students or communities may not understand the relevance of connections or seem to care. But it is at this point that educators must focus on moving the group into critical thinking. Through this process, Freire (1970) suggests that coding is occurring, and that one is not trying to transform the concrete into abstract thought, but rather holding onto both the concrete and abstract. Separating the concrete from the abstract may deprive the student of the ability to make the connections that occur when critical analysis and synthesis are employed. Without the ability to transfer abstract concepts to specific situations, the oppressors may never recognize their actions as oppressive. While it may be challenging and even unpopular, one must guide others to understand the connections. Again, the main goal is not to simply change and transform from oppressed to un-
oppressed in a given area, but to create citizens who are critical thinkers, and this leads to altering oppression. Thinking critically about society, life, children, religion, work, school, eating habits, nutrition, actions, etc. is the primary goal.

Decoding from the concrete to the abstract often reveals unseen issues, which are the true cause of the oppression (Freire, 1970). While decoding, the subparts of the oppressive action can then be analyzed and handled on a one by one basis, while removing the oppressive action at its source. Unfortunately, if the root of the oppression is not found and abolished, the perceived act of oppression may only be pseudo-eliminated and may surface in other areas. A positive result of removing the root of oppressive attitudes is other oppressive areas may be reduced or possibly eliminated altogether. However, removing oppressiveness from the source may only occur if one is able to decode the concrete into the abstract. This is where education has an important role to play.

While discovering themes, Freire (1970) argues that the oppressed should be a co-investigator into the oppressive issues or actions, as it helps keep the goal in focus. In addition, the oppressed group is able to pinpoint themes as they arrive during the investigative process. Here one certainly understands that people are connected to themes (Freire, 1970), and splitting the two apart creates the potential for misunderstanding and the banking effect to occur. If one were to split people and themes apart, in essence, he or she is reducing that individual to a thing, and not recognizing him or her as a person (Freire, 1970). This degradation of the oppressed simply reinforces oppression and should be avoided.
Again, the oppressed are not objects nor are they seeking a humanitarian effort but rather are seeking freedom and a humanist effort. Without the connection between themes and the oppressed, the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed, which is partially the cause of the oppression, may be lost. One may be concerned that having the oppressed operate as co-investigators and being actively involved in the transformation may leave the door open for personal feelings to taint the process. However, Freire (1970) suggests that they are an integral component and should not be separated away from the entire process, as they again are the reason to strive toward freedom. Even as themes change, the investigator should analyze the issues with the oppressed to ensure that things are not overlooked and the vision is still pursued.

Summary

While not directly connected to online education, Dewey’s theories are applicable in a variety of ways. Biesta (2007) suggests that how Dewey (1916) defines purpose reflects the goal of educative experiences within a particular environment. As in traditional education, online education allows one to bring knowledge built through purposeful experiences to the course. Online courses may offer an advantage over traditional face-to-face education, where emotions and body language may influence one’s perceptions of others. This is not to say that this could not happen in an online environment, but it may happen less, as there may not be face-to-face communication.

In an online environment, students share their worldview by participating in group discussions, projects, as well as other online activities. A uniqueness of cross-cultural online education is that students are in their native country while participating in the
course, which provides them with a distinctive viewpoint on topics being discussed. While it is true that within higher education environments, multicultural classes occur and there may be students from different cultures and countries, student perspectives and voices will be influenced from living in the country where the course is being taught, or they may feel uneasy discussing sensitive or emotional topics outside their home country environment. Cross-cultural online education may help reduce these issues, while encouraging students to freely discuss sensitive topics from their positionality within their home country.

Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970; Gur-Ze’ev, 1998) can be applied to the study of online education, as the theory emphasizes how a critical perspective on one’s learning heightens awareness of one’s beliefs and ideas regarding worldviews and societal accepted norms. A critical view is heightened because participants are exposed to views and norms different from their own. For future citizens in a democracy it is important to develop critical thinkers. Studies (Haney, Banks, & Zimbardo, 1973; Milgram, 1963) have shown that under stressful and authoritative conditions, people will obey an authoritative figure, even at the cost of causing severe pain or even death to other humans. Helping others learn critical thinking may help societies become more equitable. This practice of critical thinking may be emphasized online through the activities of challenging ideas, learning from others, and participating with students who hold different viewpoints and worldviews.

As outlined above, one’s experiences influence his or her worldview. Cross-cultural online education offers students from around the world the opportunity to intellectually and socially interact by discussing common misconceptions about sensitive
and emotional topics, while in one’s own cultural context. In addition, interacting online may help reduce common triggers of difference (Merryfield, 2003), as students may not have face-to-face communication. Overall, both critical pedagogy and Dewey’s theories related to educative and purposeful experience may be able to help explain why exposure to other cultures in an online environment may improve cross-cultural learning.

Online Education

Definition

Online education is defined as using the Internet as the main medium for course instruction taking place between two or more individuals (Harasim, 2000). Online education includes, but is not limited to, course management software packages (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard, Moodle, etc.), mobile communication devices (e.g., mobile phones, text capable pagers, etc.), as well as other connected tools (e.g., instant textural and video messaging, short messaging service (SMS), etc.). There are, of course, other narrower and broader definitions of online education; however, for the purposes of this paper, the above definition frames how online education occurs between two distant individuals or groups. This is not to say that one could not be sitting next to someone in the same room participating in online education, as this may happen frequently, but rather the definition used here frames how cross-cultural online education may occur. There may be other situations that constitute cross-cultural online learning, but the learning is individualized or unconnected electronically with others. The focus here is more on collaborative online education, than individualized online education. Again, individualized online education, or other types of education, are important, but are not the focus of this discussion.
History

Over the last 20 years, online education has been gaining momentum as many institutions are implementing online courses (Harasim, 2000). While some courses are completely online, some take a hybrid approach, offering a traditional classroom experience and an online counterpart that allows students to post questions to bulletin boards, participate in live chat sessions, and download course material. Arguably, within the last few years, companies have begun to realize the market for online education and have developed a variety of online course management packages. Blackboard, WebCT, and Moodle are a few of the packages universities now use. Most of the software packages offer similar sets of functionality such as chat rooms, bulletin boards, internal email systems, private chat rooms, homework submission functionality, timed quizzes and tests, plagiarism support, and file storage.

The future of online education is relatively uncertain, and could become the home correspondence course of the web, the Open University of the UK (Bourdillon & Burgess, 1998) or even the virtual world inside Second Life (Delwiche, 2006). Nevertheless, it is necessary to recognize/investigate the potential online education could have on society as technology becomes cheaper and networkable from the far corners of the globe. The potential of online education to reach those for whom traditional education has not been possible or practical is exciting, and research should be conducted to understand and direct its future.

Many may think that online education is relatively new, as it has recently become popular, but the first completely online course was actually offered in 1981, and the first online program was in 1982. Much of the beginning work of online education was done
using email as an electronic pen pal (Harasim, 2000). Soon after networked computers became possible, researchers, businesses, and educators quickly became attentive to the possibilities of online education and training. However, it was not until the early 1990s when the World Wide Web was initiated/developed (Mowery & Simcoe, 2002; Harasim, 2000) that the true capabilities of online education were recognized. Still in its beginning, most uses of the Internet in education were limited to static HTML with rudimentary graphics. Currently, the Internet is going through another change; many refer to as “Web 2.0.” Technology used in new ways now allows for dynamic interactive content. Many services are moving to allow a website to mimic an actual program on one’s computer; thus, blurring the lines between online and offline content and programs.

Harasim (2000) suggests that there have been three main ways to deal with online education--adjunct mode, mixed mode, and totally online mode. The first, adjunct mode, is the use of online technology to enhance live or distant communication and education. For example, many instructors and students commonly use email as a way to communicate information quickly, such as personal communication, the distributing of course materials, etc.

Mixed mode education utilizes online technologies as a significant portion of the course. Many university courses use the mixed mode method, as they are considered traditional courses, but draw extensively on the use of online course management software for grades, homework, handouts, office hours, etc. Currently, mixed mode may be the most prevalent in higher education, as many instructors use programs like Moodle, WebCT, or Blackboard to supplement traditional education. Students often appreciate supplemental online material and access to grades (Wernet, Olliges & Delicath, 2000).
As one may predict, a totally online mode is when online technologies are the primary avenue used for instruction and the course in general. Universities are starting to offer full courses and even some degrees fully online. The UK’s Open University (Bourdillon & Burgess, 1998) and the US’s University of Phoenix Online (Harasim, 2000) may be two of the oldest and most widely known online programs. As technology becomes cheaper and online access moves to wider areas, it is likely that more and more universities will offer online courses and degrees.

Current Approaches

Currently, the type of online education used varies by situation in order to allow for different types of students. Commonly, time and place are prominent factors in how online education is utilized. Some situations require that synchronous sessions be held, as the class members meet in person throughout the week (hybrid approach), where others meet exclusively in asynchronous sessions, because the students are scattered across the globe. Many universities offer a hybrid approach that affords students the convenience of online education with online lecture notes and grades, but coupled with a traditional educational experience by meeting in person for instruction.

Presentational

Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006), offer three approaches that could be used in an online environment, the presentational, the performance-tutoring, and the epistemic-engagement approach. They (2006) suggest that, “The pedagogical contention is that the abstract nature of disciplinary concepts and processes is the crux of learning, and that enhanced presentational capabilities restore to distance learning the vividness and instructional creativity of quality classroom instruction” (p. 584). Through this
approach, multimedia materials are used as a supplement to fact-to-face communication, as a traditional lecture would facilitate. Traditional education typically consists of lecture style instruction, where an instructor stands at the front of the class and presents information (lessons) to the class using a variety of methods, such as overheads, chalkboards, dry erase boards, and PowerPoint or Keynote presentations. Depending on the class size, instructors also solicit students to answer questions or lead discussions as a way of encouraging participation and active learning. An online presentational approach affords many of the traditional education experiences, though the use of online presentations, downloadable PowerPoint and Keynote files, and the use of live video and chat sessions. Often this method will utilize both synchronous and asynchronous sessions.

The synchronous sessions are conducted in a way that mimics traditional education. Students meet online at a predetermined day and time, to participate in class. Instruction for class happens multiple ways. One way is to have a live chat room devoted to course discussion, led by the instructor or a student. In addition, the chat room could be coupled with a presentation synchronously as course instruction is taking place. Using text as the primary medium for instruction has limitations and offers a barrage of advantages and disadvantages to the students as well as the instructor. Text allows one to carefully craft a response, when using vocal language may be more difficult because the use of English or another unfamiliar language as a second language, class dynamics, cultural differences, or personal preference. Textual communication also allows the lecture/course to be archived and revisited in the future.
Using online materials in the presentational approach allows students, as well as the instructor, to keep all information within the course, update past synchronous sessions, and post new information regarding past class sessions. The archiving of information allows class content to be saved and offers others who did not have direct access to view class discussions. One disadvantage of textual communication is that frequently the course moves slower, as people type and edit significantly slower than if they were speaking. Also, it can be challenging to comment as one is typing and leading a discussion, as students need to track multiple textual conversations at any given moment, and body language is unavailable to help determine when one is finished with a thought. Some software packages implement a feature which allows one person to lead the textual discussion, and offers others the ability to be held in a queue and then called on by the leader. This queuing approach mimics that of traditional classroom instruction.

Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) first suggest that one of the main advantages of the presentation method is that one learns better when abstract ideas are presented through the use of multiple visual forms of communication. While empirical evidence supports this argument (Seufert, 2003; Larkin & Simon, 1987; Tsui & Treagust, 2003), other research suggests that sometimes more is not better, and that the material being presented visually must first and foremost be relevant to the discussion (Mayer, 2001). Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) go on to suggest that one must use caution and vigilance when preparing visual presentational information, as the visual information may be apparent to the trained expert eye, but novice and persons in training may have difficulty deciphering the meaning of the information.
Second, Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) state that the presentation of visual multimedia contributes to the restoration of a traditional classroom experience. While in face-to-face communication, an instructor is able to highlight and emphasize unique aspects of visual information throughout the lecture using multiple visual cues (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006). With the addition of synchronous communication, the presentation approach is able to reduce the gap often found between online education and traditional communication, as material is not simply raw and downloadable, but rather has a person explaining and presenting the visual media through live and interactive instruction (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006). Here is the main difference between distance education and online education. Often, distance education does not provide real-time interaction, whereas online education, often affords some type of synchronous communication with the instructor.

One must use caution implementing the presentation approach, as Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) argue that Pera’s (1994) research supports the Myth of Immaculate Perception, which states that: “. . . the perceptual origin of knowledge is deemed unproblematic because knowledge follows inevitable from visual or otherwise sensible evidence” (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006, p. 586). This suggests that the visual representation of media should be used to support, not replace, one’s explanation of material. Visual media is not new to the education environment, but only recently with the widespread adoption of the Internet and computers has this type of information and media been relatively easy to produce and broadcast in live interactive sessions to students around the world.
Performance-Tutoring

Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) write that, “The performance-tutoring view sees the potential of online education in environments that support problem solving and that allow for precise instructional guidance through highly structured tasks and timely feedback” (p. 584). This approach views the instructor as almost a personal tutor for the learner throughout his or her quest for learning. Because computers can manipulate media, learners are able to receive instruction in a way that may benefit them best. Further, instructors oftentimes have the resources to guide students individually in their quest for learning, as all instruction and resources are archived online. Instructors have the ability to track one’s progress and therefore offer customizable and personable instruction to students in a way that may not be possible in a traditional environment. In addition, dynamic instruction and testing of one’s knowledge is now possible through the use of computers that can alter instruction and testing of learners by tracking their online interactions (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006). This approach is derived from intelligent tutoring systems (Miller, Lehman, & Kodinger, 1999, Shute, 1993; Swaak, Joolingen, & Jong, 1998), which act to direct student learning through a guided approach. These intelligent tutoring systems work on a fairly rigid structure which starts with problem solving to encourage meaningful learning (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006). This is not to say that learning is not meaningful, but rather that problems facing students are relevant to a specific learning objective.

There are three main goals that problem-solving helps students achieve. For one, it sets a goal for one to pursue and to learn from the process of solving the problem. When different problems are given, students should be able to apply past experiences to
help in formulating a solution. Purposeful experiences play an important role, as students can learn and apply unique concepts to the solution, while learning from the solution process.

Second, if the environment is setup well, it allows one to practice his or her solution in a nondestructive atmosphere. Not always, will one type of solution work to solve the issue, and therefore a good environment allows the learner to freely pick an acceptable method of his or her choice.

Third, guided support can be offered to the student in his or her approach. Depending on the solution selected by the student, the instructor or even another student may have to adapt his or her guidance to cater to the solution chosen.

In intelligent tutoring system structure, Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) suggest that significant learning is improved when instruction is adaptable to a learner’s needs (student centered instruction). Guidance can be crafted to each unique situation to guide a student in the learning process. In traditional education environments, instructors are often aware of individual student progress and can offer individualized instruction as the student progresses on an assignment or in the class. Students too, can offer support for fellow classmates when guidance is needed.

The intelligent systems offer prompt real-time feedback and criticism on student’s progress (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006). Students and the instructor are then able to adapt the process and instruction taking place. This dynamic feedback-instruction cycle gives students a great context in which to learn. By having constant monitoring of students’ behavior and interaction, processes which may otherwise be learned incorrectly may be caught, preventing the student from having to unlearn a bad or incorrect process.
Instructors gain from not having to repeat instruction multiple times, thus freeing up time that can be used to guide others.

Online instruction mimics the framework utilized in intelligent tutoring systems through goals set, adaptable instruction, and rapid feedback (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006). This is not suggesting that traditional educational systems are unable to achieve these steps, merely that online education has the potential to successfully apply this pedagogical framework. In an online context, a computer would monitor one’s progress and offer suggestions along the way when one may struggle with a specific part of the task. With the information gathered from the student’s progress, the next task or problem can be custom designed for the learner, offering a more individualistic and student centered approach. Online instruction systems, if setup in a similar fashion, can help learners in a similar way to an intelligent tutoring system.

Some traditional educational environments operate as a form of performance tutoring, as instructors monitor student performance and offer guided help when needed. However, unlike some online education environments or some intelligent tutoring systems, traditional education environments may not be able to wait for one who is struggling to learn a particular section, and therefore move on to the next lesson. This is not to suggest that students are not able to receive help later, but that at the moment when they need help, the instructor may need to proceed forward to the next lesson. In some online systems, the student would not move on until he or she has learned the material needed; which is more of a learner centered approach. Not all online courses or environments function this way, but when they do, students are able to move at their own pace.
Students need not rely on the instructor for guidance, but can also utilize the expertise of other students in the course for help and guidance. This eliminates some pressure from both the students and instructor by eliminating a single point of knowledge and guidance. Both instructors and students benefit, as students who help others are able to solidify their understanding of a specific topic while providing help to those who need assistance. Asking fellow students for help may also reduce anxiety related to always asking an instructor for help and guidance. Students are able to build up a social network of support through their peers.

Many graduate programs aim to develop group support by building cohorts of classes each year through course assignment and group activities. Learners gain valuable and often unrecognized social benefits through the development of social groups and support systems. Many advantages are gained from social support systems, as students act as both a receiver and giver of knowledge. Throughout the process, one must be attentive of both the internal and external influences while giving and receiving support, as the influences would affect one’s worldview.

*Epistemic-Engagement*

“The epistemic-engagement view takes on the vision of knowledge and learning as practices both within the structure of a domain and within a disciplinary community” (Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt, 2006, p. 590). This view relates to Dewey’s (1916) notion that educative experience supports learning in unique ways. Using this approach, instead of memorizing facts or ideas, students would participate in guided purposeful experiments that help them gain a better understanding of a given topic or theory. The environment affords an area where students are able to practice applying theory in an
instructor-monitored environment. Students are encouraged to explore and inquire through the learning process. The inquiry is not freeform but directed to help guide one toward a solution. This is where an instructor, or in some cases a fellow student, become important as they have the ability to guide the learner in a productive path. In some cases guiding students to a productive path may be quite simple, however, most of time, an understanding of the student’s history and a deep understanding of the topic as required.

Throughout the inquiry process, it is advantageous for students to make connections between topics, processes, solutions, and outcomes. It is at this point where authentic learning occurs. Students are no longer simply looking for a solution, but rather they are developing critical thinking skills and a desire to be lifelong learners. Previous educative experiences will play a significant role in one’s solution and process and therefore should not be overlooked. Again, Dewey (1916) would argue that one’s past purposeful experiences influence one’s life, through decision making, worldviews, expectations, etc. Because past educative experiences have a large influence on one’s problem solving abilities, being able to interact with others, and observe their solution process, may foster new and unseen ideas. A byproduct of this approach is that students typically learn far more than a given set of predetermined facts, rather they learn a slew of problem solving skills and a critical thinking mindset. Social interaction and learning is also an important aspect of this approach. Bonk and Cunningham (1998) argue that through the use of a social collaborative process, students engage and learn from dialogue, debate, build theoretical and applicable frameworks, and construct meanings for themselves.
Online education offers one the advantage of carefully constructing one’s thoughts and theories before presenting them to other students. Another advantage is if the learner does not speak or write well in the language being used, he or she will have the opportunity to carefully construct an argument or statement without the complexities of real-time involvement. An additional advantage is that students are able to refine their ideas and thoughts over a prolonged period of time, before sharing them with others, often resulting in a more developed theory with connections to past educative experiences.

In comparison, one disadvantage is that students do not learn to think and react in on-demand situations. Even though educational environments should foster situations which allow students to the opportunity to experiment and grow, they should also prepare them for real world conditions; and often, one needs to quickly respond to solve a spontaneous issue. Another disadvantage is that students could spend too much time on a given topic, while missing other important discussions and topics. Even though students are digging deeper into one selective topic, which in some cases is desired, they may also be missing out on the core importance of the course. Here an instructor would be able to guide the students back into the focus of the course, though interweaving their discussion with the instructor’s focus for the course.

Faculty and students need to be cautious of others’ feelings, as deep debates often take on a personal flair. Again, an instructor needs to mediate high tension discussions, so that students do not feel attacked, but rather supported to freely express his or her views. Also, the instructor could challenge students to express themselves in ways that are nonabrasive using a logical and rational approach. Through this educative experience,
students learn the advantages of being able to discuss heated topics in an environment that fosters growth, learning, etc. Being able to debate and learn about new theories, without becoming hostile, is a valuable skill.

Online environments offer advantages and disadvantages for building nonabrasive environments. Not being able to read one’s body language or tone and inflection while online could be both positive and negative. Being online raises the importance of word choice, as one would not want his or her ideas and theories to be interpreted in ways not intended.

Online environments may limit one’s participation and active experimentation to that of a digital world, as traditional education environments are limited by physical space. However, in an online environment, using an asynchronous approach allows one to participate in an experiment or active learning experience, and then at a later time, report the results and reflection in an online environment. Students could also use the online environment to discuss, defend, and refine their perceptions and information gained from experience, all of which help foster critical thinking and redefined worldviews.

A unique aspect of online education is the ability to archive the course material. Even after the course is finished, students have the ability to go back and add appropriate information and even review what took place throughout the course. Traditional education environments lack this accessibility, and once a course is finished, the material is lost and cannot be re-examined. If an online course is offered synchronously, students are able to login throughout the week to comment and ask questions about the previous week’s lesson and discussion.
Larreamendy-Joerns and Leinhardt (2006) suggest that the epistemic-engagement view stems from problem-based education. Interestingly, through purposeful experiences students are able to share unique worldviews with others, while gaining valuable insights into other cultures, outlooks on life, religions, theories, etc.

**Effectiveness**

Online education traces its roots to computer supported cooperative work, as it paved the way for much of what is known and used in online education. Activity theory (Engestrom, 1987; Kuutti 1996; Nardi, 1996; Bardram, 1997; Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki, 1999), suggests that environments should be considered in the analysis of the situation, as they may have an influence. Technology should not be thought of exclusively as an object, but more as a means to an ends or a tool because people use technology as a “tool” in a variety of ways.

Some online environments promote levels of learning comparable to traditional classroom settings, as online students score relatively the same on exams as those in traditional face-to-face environments. Hiltz (1994) in an extended study of online courses, found that often students learned the same amount, and sometimes scored higher. Previous research from Schramm (1977), suggests that students’ learning is relatively the same with no difference in outcomes, based on delivery media; noting that each delivery or interactive media have advantages and disadvantages. Hiltz (1994, p. 20), points out that “. . . it is not that ‘media does not make the difference,’ but that other factors may be more important . . .” Clark and Salomon (1986), suggest that the delivery media is not a direct influence on learning (Clark, 1983), but rather the implementation of the media (Hiltz, 1994) and reform brought about from the media.
Students participating in online courses express enjoyment, participate frequently within the online environment, and contribute to collaborative learning. Harasim (2000) reported that through the 1980s in the courses he taught online, even with extremely slow connections, students reported high levels of learning and satisfaction with the courses. Collaborative learning was one of the foci of the courses, which fostered the combined knowledge and effort of students from all over Canada. Students in the courses displayed high levels of work quality, participation, and completion. An interesting result found that students reported that the online courses were more social than traditional education, with an average between 5 and 10 postings per person per week, which contributed to 85% of the postings. Harasim’s analysis of the postings revealed that students formed positions within debates, added to others’ messages, referenced other students’ messages, and contributed to other student postings. Webb’s (1989) research suggests that student interaction is positively related to achievement and higher-level reasoning.

As technology changes and spreads, researchers and instructors are combining some of the best parts of traditional and online education to create a mishmash of hybrid online courses that are used in educating students in a variety of disciplines. Researchers also suggest that there are unique benefits of an online approach that a traditional classroom may not offer. For example, using a hybrid approach, Xiao, Baker, O’Shea, and Allen (2007) from Old Dominion University (ODU) used Wikibooks (http://www.wikibooks.org) to facilitate learning in a traditional classroom. The course used a hybrid approach, as the students met for class during the week, but used Wikibooks to publish information regarding a specific topic within the context of course, social and cultural foundations of American education. This technique allows students the
opportunity to “publish” their work for others to use, and to some extent, be peer reviewed. Also, the instructors frequently used previous semester’s work to help guide current students and to develop a more comprehensive Wikibook. Using the Wikibook website allows others to take advantage of valuable material from others the class. Moreover, other students are able to add to or remove information as needed from the Wikibook, to hopefully develop a richer section and ultimately a book. Their study suggests that students enjoyed using the Wikibook as a substitute to a traditional textbook, and felt that they gained valuable higher-level thinking skills. A possible unseen gain were that many reported a higher proficiency with technology, and many indicated they spent more time with the Wikibook then they would have using a traditional textbook. While the Wikibook project is not directly cross-cultural, it does offer the unique ability to allow others to modify and take advantage of the course material.

Online education is not without drawbacks and concerns. MacDonald, Stodel, Farres, Breithaupt, and Gabriel (2001) outline some of the drawbacks, such as a lack of course preparation, lack of pedagogical change, uncertainty about how to utilize resources, and poor technical support. Instructors may fail to recognize that when first setting up an online environment, the course may require more time and preparation to set up than a traditional course. A lack of preparation often is difficult for both the instructor and students, as the instructor may feel uneasy with the course, while students may interpret the lack of preparation as a low quality course or bad instructor.

Online environments may require new pedagogical approaches. New approaches may involve new training and time and a shift in one’s current teaching technique.
Incorporating these new tactics in one’s class may be challenging for some, and therefore may serve as a deterrent in adopting and migrating to an online course. Effectively utilizing technology may be difficult for some, and therefore they may need training or assistance from the technical support staff. If the support staff are unable to help, first one may feel frustrated and lost in a technical mess, while also, not understanding what tools or resources the online environment may offer to use in an educational setting. These challenges of online education may hinder future acceptance and use of online education.

While research appears inconclusive as to whether online education is more effective or better than traditional education, research does support the idea that the implementation of educational material has an impact on learning. Instead of focusing on which is better, traditional education or online education, it is more informative to focus on the process and environment in which online education best supports particular kinds of learning. If current trends continue, online education will move forward, and instead of fighting change, educators have the opportunity to learn to implement a new technology in a way that may foster better education.

**Future of Online Education**

The future of online education will no doubt branch out in unique ways using new technologies and hybrid approaches. Gaming within education is a hot topic, and many are conducting research in this area. Second life, along with other hybrid reality games (Silva & Delacruz, 2006; Gee, 2003), are increasingly popular and blur the lines between reality and virtual reality. Some are even making a living (Dibbell, 2007) through massive multiplayer online role playing games (MMORPG). Universities are now using Second Life (Delwiche, 2006) to conduct virtual online education where students
construct three dimensional (3D) avatars to interact with other students. The avatars have a variety of interactions they are capable of producing.

The University of Illinois is developing its own software that could be used for virtual education. Virtual education does offer potential benefits over content management software, as one is able to virtually see a 3D representation of the person he or she is interacting with. As technology becomes more advanced, the avatars will become life-like. Currently, these virtual worlds have demanding computer hardware requirements needed to render the environment, but in the future as technology progresses, this form of online education will increase.

Harasim (2000) forecasts that future online education courses should consider the following attributes when implementing and designing a course--many-to-many education, any place education, any time education, text based communication, and computer mediated messaging. Using Harasim’s framework allows for almost infinite approaches to online education, as the frameworks allow for multiple types of communication, learning, technology, environments, learners, etc. He further argues that society is in a unique era, as educators are able to influence the online education revolution and mold it into a bright future. Through the use of educational theory and pedagogy, online education could become a powerful educational avenue.

**Negative Outcomes**

There are several negative outcomes (MacDonald, et al., 2001) that may result from online education. One potential negative outcome of online education results from it being a somewhat emergent field. While it is true, that online education has been around for the 20 years, within the last five years it has really began to flourish, as broadband...
Internet and personal computers prices have decreased significantly. Professors and students alike may not understand how to implement or react to an online course. For example, instructors may find transferring a traditional face-to-face course to an online course confusing and daunting. Computer and technical lingo take time to learn and may be a cause for frustration. For some, learning how to speak using computer terms may be like learning an entirely new language. Herein lies a hurdle for those wanting to move courses to an online environment, as before they even start outlining the courses, they may feel defeated because of the new language and skills they need to learn.

As with many new advances, computer terms and theories are evolving at an enormous rate. At this frustration point, one may question why it is better to move to an online environment when what he or she currently has, appears to work fine. It is here in the beginning where training is important to the success of a migration from face-to-face courses to online course.

This leads to a second negative outcome of online education: the need for training. With the migration to an online virtual classroom, it is likely that training will need to occur for users of the online system. Training may be difficult for both the instructor and the students (professors, lecturers, etc.). As outlined earlier, one of the first hurdles to overcome, by both the instructor and students is becoming comfortable with new jargon. A possible next phase in training may be explaining the details of the online course management software, such as its limitations, what happens when things do not work correctly, how files need to be backed up, what to do if a file is accidently deleted, etc. The above concerns address only some of the possible technical issues that training needs to address.
From an education point of view, training may need to address both pedagogy and educational issues. It may be problematic to migrate from face-to-face education to an online environment keeping traditional pedagogical approaches. This is not to say that traditional pedagogy is not compatible with online education, but caution should be used. Instructors may need to learn new pedagogical approaches and educational theories as online education is not simply taking a traditional face-to-face course and putting it online. For example, it may be more difficult to handle multiple simultaneous conversation threads in an online situation as opposed to a traditional classroom.

Another challenge of online environments is the amount of time needed to move an existing course to an online one. Some may not want to devote the extra time it takes, when they feel their current course works well. While the amount of initial work involved in developing and implementing an online course requires substantial work, the time required to prepare future courses will diminish. Even with a hybrid approach, a course may require extra time in the initial setup of the course.

Another issue in moving from a traditional educational environment to an online one is that it may be difficult to convince others to move to an online environment. It is possible that when administration is suggesting a move to a hybrid or fully online course, that instructors may be more resistant. This is not to say that one may not benefit from the online component, but that the initial amount of work may seem overwhelming. Again, training may help with those who are apprehension.

Another issue in migrating to an online environment is what happens when software is upgraded, or even worse a new course management software package is
purchased (e.g., moving from WebCT to Blackboard, or Moodle). If instructors were to lose online courses materials, they may have reservations about continuing.

Finally, difficulties may arise if one loses course materials due to a software error, hacker, upgrading of the software, or hardware failure. Most of these issues are out of control of the IT staff and instructors, but may have a negative effect on overall attitudes within a department or university. Some may not want to continue when materials are lost, because to them the old system worked fine.

Interestingly, some of the issues outlined above are related to educational pedagogy and theory, while others are related more to technical or political issues. Unfortunately, these issues do not have a single solution, and may require multiple levels of cooperation to solve. Nevertheless, given the proper resources, time, money, support, and attitudes, issues can be addressed and problems solved. As with any environment, an online education environment is constantly growing and therefore may require pruning to keep things working well and to be successful for all the parties involved (i.e., instructors, students, administration, IT staff, etc).

Positive Outcomes

Despite the potential for negative outcomes, the research suggests that online education has a potential for positive outcomes. Lapadat (2002) argues that textual asynchronous communication offers a variety of benefits. One such advantage is that because the majority of the course is not taking place in real-time, students have the opportunity to reflect on comments, discussions, and lectures throughout the week. Reflection, as Freire (1970) and Dewey (1902, 1915, 1916) would suggest, is an important step toward critical thinking. Here online students may have a slight advantage
over students in a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. In a face-to-face class, discussions and questions are held during the scheduled course time. If students develop ideas or theories outside of the class time, there is a chance they may not have time during the next class meeting to discuss them. Further, if there is time to discuss their ideas, it takes time to bring the class back to the previous week’s topics. In an online environment, students may logon to the course any time of day or night to read and post comments; seemingly unrelated topics may be discussed by students during the week, and even may continue after the course has officially ended.

Students in online courses also have the ability to link to, internally and externally, relevant information to provide more information about a topic. During this process, students begin to form interconnected links between information and theories.

A related advantage of online education is that it allows for the information from the class to be archived and even referenced in future work. Unfortunately, in face-to-face communication, much of the dialogue and ideas are either lost or held privately between the two parties. Even if the conversation or class is recorded, one must search sequentially (e.g., moving in a linear motion from one point to another) though the recording. One advantage of an online class is that all communication conducted within the course environment may be archived. Students can search for a string of text, relevant article mentioned, or even review past lectures. Classes are sometimes organized topically, allowing students to return to relevant articles and discussions.

Another advantage of online education is that it encourages participation from students who may be less comfortable in a face-to-face classroom setting. Sometimes in face-to-face courses, one person or a group of students overpower the course, causing
frustration of other students. One may be hesitant about speaking in class, as the vocal student(s) may dominate or belittle the student’s ideas unintentionally. Online education can have this problem also, but there is less potential for vocal students to be as domineering.

In online education, the influence of body language, vocal inflection, and emotions are reduced due to the lack of face-to-face communication. There is additional time for thought and effort in typing responses, and less possibility for quick stereotyping. Online education also allows for multiple threads of discussion to be ongoing simultaneously, which may also reduce the chance of vocal students dominating. Some students may not be comfortable speaking or writing the language used in the course. Online education can help such students, by providing them the opportunity to carefully construct thoughts offline and then post them online. This approach may offer some emotional and physical relief, while promoting and encouraging one to offer his or her opinions in class.

An additional advantage of online education is its convenience for non-traditional students. Students who live at a distance may not have the means to attend a traditional university, as costs, visas, and entrance requirements may be challenging. Unfortunately, traditional universities and countries have a finite amount of available slots to offer students, and must turn away qualified individuals. Online education may offer education to additional students at reduced cost.

Before the widespread adoption of the Internet, distance education was conducted using video and self-guided workbooks. However, the Internet now offers the ability,
previously only offered with traditional face-to-face education, to have real-time interaction between other students and instructor.

Finally, online education has the advantage of including students from around the world. While traditional education is frequently multicultural, online systems allow a broader range of culturally diverse group of people to attend class together, thus creating a cross-cultural educational experience. Cross-cultural education was available through exchange programs, but the Internet allows greater access. Research has just begun to examine the potential benefits of cross-cultural online education.

All of the above mentioned positive aspects of online education may be present in face-to-face education, but online education offers these benefits naturally. Given these benefits, educators should look for ways to encourage online education. This is not to downplay the concerns about online education, but to highlight that textual communication, asynchronous communication, cross-cultural educational experiences, and the archival of course material provide unique benefits in an online environment.

Cross-Cultural Online Education

*History*

Much of the research on cross-cultural education has stemmed from a cognitive development paradigm (Harkness & Keefer, 2000). Dasen (1972, 1994). Researchers sought to understand cognitive development in different cultures using Piaget’s stages of development. Piaget concluded that the most important factor contributing to a child’s achievement during the stage of concrete operations was whether a child attended school. This finding led Dasen to research how culture affected cognitive functioning related to
schooling. His research (Stevenson, 1982), which independently evaluated the effects of school attendance, found that school significantly influences one’s performance on numerous cognitive tasks. Other research has confirmed Dasen (1972; 1994) and Stevenson’s (1982) findings that education affects one’s mental development. This type of research poses many issues, as Stevenson (1982) suggests there are other influencing factors that could influence one’s cognitive ability. Research from LeVine, Miller, Richman, and LeVine (1996) found that a mother’s education level had direct influence on their child’s language skills and vocabulary, which in turn, contributed to the child’s performance on intelligence tests.

Harkness and Keefer (2000) propose that educational cross-cultural research began within an ethnographic framework studying indigenous education (Fortes, 1970). Greenfield and Lave (1982) conducted research on students’ performance on pattern tasks. Participants were given a pattern where they had to use colored sticks to represent and match patterns. Interestingly, they discovered that each culture taught this task differently. One form of instruction focused on a highly structured apprenticeship model, while the other provided less structure and was exploratory in nature, which in turn directly affected their performance on transfer skill tasks (Greenfield, Maynard, & Childs, 2003; Greenfield & Lave 1982). Tharp (1994) incorporated Greenfield and Lave’s (1982) findings in a study of Hawaiian and Navajo students, noting that informal education and teaching methods for the Hawaiians were different from that of the Navajo (Harkness & Keefer, 2000). One of the unique findings from Greenfield and Lave (1982) was the impact that informal education had on students. They argued that informal education can offer rich pedagogical practices for teachers (Harkness & Keefer, 2000).
Their work later was implemented in Serpell’s (1998) research in Zambia, where the lines of formal and informal education (e.g., developmental skills) were blurred to form a cohesive entity between the two education paradigms.

Individualism versus collectivism or independence versus interdependence also has provided an important framework for the study of cross-cultural education. Psychologists Traindis (1989), Markus and Kitayama (1991), and Greenfield and Cocking (1994) suggest that individualism versus collectivism are a component that depict common elements of cultural distinctions within society. For example, Gardiner, Mutter, and Kosmitzki (1998) found that cultures that stress collectivism over individualism focus more on the well-being of the family than any one individual. From this research and others (Kagitcibasi, 1996a, 1996b), new frameworks for understanding individualism and collectivism have been developed and applied in research settings (Kagitcibasi, 1997). Harkness and Super’s (1996) research found that in Western societies there is a significant disparity between teachers’ theories of child development and behavior and contemporaneous variability between school and home practices (Harkness & Keefer, 2000).

Cross-cultural research has also been conducted from within a linguistic framework. Classroom linguistic diversity is increasing around the world, as people and groups migrate to new areas. Communication and culture influence each other (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1996), which in turn affects one’s education, worldview, etc. The Whorfian hypothesis (Hunt & Agnoli, 1991) suggests that language influences one’s thoughts and perceptions. Further, Hunt and Agnoli (1991) suggest that each language brings different cognitive challenges and support. While in its strictest form
(language controls thoughts), the Whorfian hypothesis is difficult to prove, many accept the validity of the hypothesis in general (language influences thoughts). This suggests that cultural groups do develop and process ideas and perceptions of life differently. Therefore, within education, it is important to recognize culture and language as influencing students’ worldviews.

Intentional or not, students from different cultures bring their worldviews into the course. These different worldviews may be the result of not only cross-cultural divisions but also class divisions. Danah Boyd (2007) found that class divisions were prevalent in online social networks. If class divisions are prevalent in a virtual world, then it seems plausible that cultural differences would also be noticeable in online communication.

Current Approaches in Cross-Cultural Education

Before the evolution of the Internet, cross-cultural education mainly took place through exchange programs. These programs allowed students from across the world, to compare their experience and worldview to a different environment. Through this comparison with a different culture, students come to view their own situations differently. Currently, with the growth the Internet and widespread adoption of computers, cross-culture education has become common within higher education institutions. Although using the Internet for cross-cultural education in K-12 education may currently not be very prevalent, it could become more commonplace.

Weisner (1984) and Weisner, Matheson, and Bernheimer (1996) developed an approach to cross-cultural education that stresses the importance of daily routines on children’s development (Janhonen-Abruquah, 2006).

The eco-cultural model draws on socio-cultural and activity theory and research which emphasize the socially constructed nature of cognition and mind. Activities
and practices are the constructive elements of daily routine that produce developmentally-sensitive interaction. Within these activity-created interactions arise zones of proximal development in which more capable individuals assist communicative and cognitive apprentices to perform at levels which they will eventually achieve. (Weisner & Gallimore, 1994, p. 13)

Through their model of family dynamics has been investigated in school/home relations, family interventions, and with developmentally delayed children (Harkness & Keefer, 2000). This theory, put into practice at a Hawaiian school, led to the development of child-generated activities, which were more successful than traditional education (Weisner, Gallimore, & Jordon, 1988).

Benefits of Cross-cultural Online Education

One benefit of cross-cultural online education is the lack of face-to-face communication that may influence one’s perceptions of the other. Merryfield (2003) in her two yearlong studies of American teachers and cultural consultants found that online education offers unique affordances not found in traditional classrooms. Because online education typically does not allow one to visually see other participants within the course, accents, body language, and other nonverbal cues are absent from the conversation. Merryfield (2003) coins the phrase “triggers of difference” for these nonverbal interaction cues. The freeness of these interactions allows students to focus on the issues in the course, without other prejudices influencing the communication. However, a drawback of relinquishing these trigger differences, is in most situations people do interact by way of nonverbal communication, and it is important to be able to work with and respond to trigger differences. It could also be argued that communication is never free of prejudices and assumptions, which may be embedded in written texts and responses between students even in the absence of visual triggers of difference.
A second benefit of cross-cultural online education is that real-time communication is replaced with other forms. Asynchronous textual communication offers additional lines of communication to online education, which traditional face-to-face interaction may not afford. As previously discussed, Lapadat (2002) argues that online education, specifically textual communication, facilitates both social and cognitive construction of meaning. Whereas synchronous communication requires students to think fast and respond quickly to others' communication, asynchronous communication allows them to process other classmates’ postings, as well as move throughout the site with random order and relatively no time constraint. In both synchronous and asynchronous communication, participants have equal access to “talk” and respond to others’ postings. A possible downside of synchronous communication could be that the thought and possible requirement of formal communication could make some apprehensive when responding or posting.

Bidirectional communication often leads to multiple conversations taking place at the same time. Some online course software has attempted to solve this issue with technology, by having a “microphone” so that only one person can respond at a time, and then others are able to “raise their hand” to respond. The holder of the microphone is able to call on whoever has their hand up; mimicking traditional classrooms, with the exception of the instructor always having the floor. This relatively unique aspect of asynchronous communication helps students who may be shy or have difficulty with the language being used.

A third advantage of cross-cultural online environments is that they allow students to experience education in a way that is most appropriate to them. Kim and
Bonk’s (2002) research suggests that cross-cultural students experience differences in online education. American and Finnish students displayed lower levels of social interaction than the Korean students. Interestingly, Finnish students posted nearly twice as many postings per person (11.9) as US students (6.1). All communication was coded into the following behavior categories—planning, contributing, seeking input, reflection/monitoring, and social interaction. Within the broad behavior categories, communication was further broken down into more precise subcategories. Qualitative analysis of the results suggests that Finish students were more theory driven, while US students were more action drive. A closer look at the data reveals interesting cross-culture differences between three cultures, Finish, American, and Korean students and instructors appear to participate differently in online education.

A final benefit on cross-cultural online education is the ease with which students from different cultures are brought together. The communication freedom online education offers may allow those from other cultures to communicate in ways that are culturally relevant. Research by Hall (1976) suggests that the communication differences between cultures could be the result of high-context and low-text communication. High-context communication is defined as communication through the context of the society, environment, and situation. For example, in many Asian cultures, much relevance is given to the elderly; consequently, they are less likely to focus on verbal communication. Kim and Bonk (2002), theorize that Americans and Finish are more in tune with low-context, and the Korean culture is high-context in nature. Studies (Goodwin, 1999; Gudykust & Ting-Toomey, 1996) reveal that high-context and low-context are correlated with collective cultures and individualism respectively (Gudykunst & Matsumoto, 1996).
Summary

Online education has evolved over the past 20 years. There are a variety of different approaches that can be utilized. First, the presentational approach can be compared to face-to-face instruction, where an instructor lectures to a class (Freire would describe this as the banking method of education). One advantage of the presentational approach is that instructors and students are familiar with that type of instruction. A second approach discussed was performance-tutoring. The performance-tutoring approach supported semi-guided problem based learning. The third approach, epistemic-engagement, required that participants engage in educative experiments. This approach was similar to Dewey’s (1916) argument that purposeful experiences promote learning.

Past research has shown that online education can be as effective as face-to-face education and is in some cases more effective. Further, any students also reported feeling satisfaction from their online experience and participated as frequently or more frequently than students in face-to-face courses. Technology is rapidly changing, and the future of online education is open to new possibilities but also challenges. For example, some courses are implementing Wikis (Wikibook) as a medium to build course textbooks. Others are flocking to virtual online worlds, such as Second Life, for classrooms and instruction. As with any classroom, when integrating technology into teaching, it is efficacious to use empirically validated pedagogies, or that research be conducted when new pedagogies are tried.

Online education and the use of technology in teaching have both disadvantages and advantages. One disadvantage is that transferring a face-to-face course can be time intensive. Additionally, technology is constantly evolving and can be difficult to integrate
well, as instructors and students might not have been trained how to use it. One advantage of online courses is the ability to have the information archived forever. Now, information is not lost once the course is finished, but rather available for others to explore. Further, students who traditionally felt uncomfortable in face-to-face courses might feel more comfortable in an online environment. When designing an online course or implementing technology in teaching, it is important to weigh the disadvantages and advantages.

Historically, cross-cultural education found its roots in cognitive development, as research explored the influence of culture and education on cognitive development. Cross-cultural education has evolved, as students are now able to interact with others across the world while never leaving their native country. One benefit of cross-cultural online education is that it can help diminish common visual and audio stereotypes, if a textual communication is utilized. Another benefit is that multiple forms of communication can occur. Students are able to communicate synchronously or asynchronously as time permits. The evolution of the Internet and technology has offered the opportunity for new cross-cultural interactions and online educational courses.
Overview

My purpose in this study was to conduct research on cross-cultural online education and to use sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy as theories to frame the study and interpret the findings. This study was an empirical inquiry single descriptive case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) that examined a single cross-cultural online course. Gerring (2004) defines a case study as, “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of units” (p. 342). For this project, a descriptive case study analysis (i.e., in-depth description of this case) was conducted to examine what can be learned from cross-cultural online education. Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) describe case study research as an effort to understand a complex phenomenon within the context of real life events. Therefore, because I was interested in a rich understanding that considered the context of a cross-cultural online class, a case study design was chosen.

Application

Case study research has five applications according to Yin (2003); a case may be used to explain, describe, illustrate, explore, and meta-evaluate. In the context of this paper, the case study was used to explain a single cross-cultural online course, describe the case in the real-life context in which it occurred, illustrate the influences of both the online and cross-cultural components, and explore how the online and cross-cultural components affected the course, students, and learning. It is important to note that the
results of this study were not intended to be statistically generalized to populations, as there are no sample populations or units in the study (Yin, 2003). However when sound case study methods are employed, Yin (2003) suggests that: “Under these circumstances, the mode of generalization is ‘analytic generalization,’ in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the study” (p. 32). Stake (1995) also suggests that:

But people can learn much that is general from single cases. They do that partly because they are familiar with other cases and they add this one in, thus making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations. (p. 85)

The results of this study contribute to past and current case studies that were similar in nature, as well as offer sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy interpretations.

Tied into the sociocultural framework, the cross-cultural aspect of the course provided an opportunity for students to share their life experiences.

People learn by receiving generalizations, explicated generalizations, from others, regularly from authors, teachers, authorities. People also form generalizations from their experience. Deborah Trumbull and I (Stake & Trumbull, 1982) decided to call these generalizations naturalistic generalizations, as different from explicated (propositional generalizations. Naturalistic generalizations are conclusions arrived at through personal engagement in life’s affairs or by vicarious experiences so well constructed that the person feels as if it happened to themselves. It is not clear that generalizations arrived at in two quite different ways are kept apart in any way in the mind. One set of generalizations through two doors. (Stake, 1995, p. 85)

Through the naturalistic and explicated generalizations that each student brought into the study, the critical pedagogical approach of the instructor supported students’ ability to learn, evolve and question their own understanding of the complexities of race, education, America, South Africa, etc.
Defining Cross-Cultural and Multicultural Education

In the research literature, cross-cultural education has been narrowly defined as education that “crosses” national borders. In a similar way, multicultural education is defined as education within national borders. Multicultural education sometimes refers to education that occurs within classrooms or schools. Using these definitions, the online component of the course (linking students from two different countries) provided a cross-cultural learning experience, whereas the internal diversity of the students in the course provided multicultural education.

In both of these contexts, students learned about and through cultural diversity (Nieto, 1999, p. 47-71). Additionally, there were other kinds of diversity, which would fit within more current definitions of cross-cultural and multicultural education--diversity of opinions, commitments, and perspectives. Current frameworks for multicultural education certainly include cross-border learning (Nieto, 1999; Sleeter, 1999; Hidalgo, Chavez-Chavez, & Ramage, 1996) but for the purposes of this study a distinction was made between the two. When examining the data, the two definitions provided useful distinctions to examine both ‘cross-cultural’ and ‘multicultural’ learning.

Both the cross-cultural and multicultural environments facilitated a problem-posing educational (Freire, 1970) experience, where students were challenged to think critically about diversity and their own worldviews. The instructor often started the course with a critical question that encouraged students to reflect on the weekly readings and their personal worldviews. This approach promoted critical cross-cultural and multicultural dialogue between students. For example, during a discussion of how “I” and “we” were relevant in a 21st century Africa, students engaged in a discussion with both
US and South African students. Similar to Freire’s (1970) theory of problem-posing education (critical pedagogy), Ladson-Billings (1995) outlined that one component of cultural relevant pedagogy is the idea of “critical consciousness.” She stated: “. . . students must develop a broader sociopolitical consciousness that allows them to critique the cultural norms, values, mores, and institutions that produce and maintain social inequities” (p. 162). Ladson-Billings further argued that: “In the classrooms of culturally relevant teachers, students are expected to ‘engage the world and others critically’” (p. 162). In diverse environments, such as in this cross-cultural and multicultural class, students learned to critically view and analyze the world and social inequities. When students discussed how “I” and “we” were understood in Africa, they had to critically evaluate what they had read, engaged with both the US and South African students’ opinions and cultural ideas. Engaging in cross-cultural and multicultural discussions provided students with learning opportunities that encouraged critical thinking and self-reflection.

One component of Cochran-Smith’s (2003) conceptual framework for multicultural education, “ideology or social justice question,” was important in understanding the importance of diversity in the cross-cultural and multicultural discussions in this course. She argues:

The ideology, or social justice question, is closely related to the diversity question and has to deal with ideas, ideals, values, and assumptions. The ideology questions asks: What is the purpose of schooling, what is the role of public education in a democratic society, and what historically has been the role of schooling in maintaining or changing the economic and social structure of society? (p. 11)

The diverse context of the course challenged students’ cultural assumptions, explored social injustices issues, and investigated the influence of cultural ideologies on schooling
in South Africa and other countries around the world. For example, when students discussed the influence and transition from a missionary (religious) educational system to a Bantu educational system, the South African participant (a guest speaker) provided important personal perspectives. Discussion regarding the transition between these two educational systems encouraged students to critically evaluate the role and injustices of schooling in both the US and in South Africa. The cross-cultural and multicultural components of the course promoted unique learning opportunities through hearing students’ personal experiences and participating in critical dialogue.

A second component of Cochran-Smith’s multicultural framework, “the knowing question,” was also beneficial when exploring the cross-cultural and multicultural aspects of the course. Cochran-Smith stated: “The knowledge question asks: What knowledge, interpretive frameworks, beliefs, and attitudes are necessary to teach diverse populations effectively, particularly knowledge and beliefs about culture and its role in schooling?” (p. 12). Students in this course came to recognize that having a critical mindset and identifying cultural biases were essential ingredients for understanding and addressing culturally sensitive issues. During the missionary and Bantu education discussion, students demonstrated sensitivity to dominant cultural influences. Cochran-Smith’s questions about ideology and knowing were both apparent in the cross-cultural and multicultural learning within the course.

Although the majority of the course participants attended a US school, white students did not dominate the class. The course was comprised of a variety of students from different departments, ages, races, and had both male and female students. For example, there were nine different departments represented, ages ranged from 21 to 33,
five self-reported races, and eight women and three male participants (see figure 2 for participant demographics). The cross-cultural differences (US and South African) in the course and the diversity of participants in the US students (multicultural) created a valuable learning experience. Having a professor who was a native of South Africa provided authentic personal experiences for which the students could learn. During one of the chat sessions, the instructor shared his contrasting experiences of having a telephone line installed in the US and in South Africa. He noted that in the US it took less than a week, but in South Africa it took months and was still not installed.

The experiences (Dewey, 1916) and viewpoints of each participant cultivated a valuable learning environment. Sleeter (2001) stated: “Students of color tend to bring richer experiences and perspectives to multicultural teaching than do most White students, who dominate numerically” (p. 94). Seven of the eleven participants (including the professor) described their race as nonwhite. As Sleeter suggested, this diverse cross-cultural (i.e., groups that spanned the US and South Africa) and multicultural setting (i.e., groups that did not physically cross national borders), stimulated a variety of learning experiences described by the course participants. Students described their learning from both the cross-cultural and multicultural critical dialogue (Freire, 1970).

Design

The research questions and sub-questions provided guidance in the overall design of the study. My research questions were:

1. What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment?
   a. How do students describe their learning?
b. What do students learn from exposure to different perspectives?

c. What aspects of the instructors’ pedagogical approach facilitated students’ learning as described from their perspective?

2. What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education?

a. How do students respond to the online components of the course?

b. What aspects of the online environment support, or detract from, their learning?

c. What aspects of the online environment support cross-cultural learning from the students’ point of view?

Research questions, propositions, unit(s) of analysis, logic linking, and criteria for interpreting results are five design elements Yin (2003) argues are vital to case study research.

Research Questions

The two main questions used in my study, “What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment?” and “What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education?” were used to guide the study. In addition, the main questions were used to provide a framework as themes emerged. For example, the theme diversity had two subthemes--ideas and experiences.

Propositions

Each of the two main questions had a set of three supporting questions (“how” and “what” questions), which provided propositional guidance. These supporting questions were not intended to ask specific questions, but rather the questions were intended to direct attention to areas that should be investigated. For example, one of the supporting questions, “What do students learn from exposure to different perspectives?” provided direction during the development of the interview questions, online survey, data
collection, and data analysis. While the question is broad, it helped direct the study toward one of the main research questions, and therefore provided propositional support.

Unit of Analysis

This study was a single descriptive case study of a cross-cultural online class. The unit of analysis was the course itself, as the research questions framed the relevant information gathered and studied (Yin, 2003). Neither the type of instruction nor the instructor was studied as part of the case. Examples from the course discussions were used as illustrations, but the teaching was not evaluated.

The course as a holistic unit was studied as the “case.” The two main research questions helped define the case. Yin (2003) suggests: “As a general guide, your tentative definition of the unit of analysis (and therefore of the case) is related to the way you have defined your initial research questions” (p. 23). Both research questions focused on the course as the case. The first research question (What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment) framed the cross-cultural component of the course. The second research question (What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education?) framed the online component of the course. These two components, cross-cultural and online, describe the unit of analysis. Further Stake (1995) stated: “Louis Smith, one of the first educational ethnographers, helped define the case as ‘a bounded system,’ drawing attention to it as an object rather than a process” (p. 2). The online course provided the object of study, therefore the boundaries of the case.
Logic Linking

Through the research questions, this study linked and explained themes as they emerged. For example, the themes diversity, similarities, and self-reflection and learning were linked to the first research question: What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment?

Criteria for Interpreting Results

Both Dewey’s sociocultural theory (1902, 1915, 1916) and Freire’s theory of critical pedagogy (1970) provided guidance in interpreting the results. For example, Dewey theorized that purposeful experiences influence students’ learning, while Freire argued for the benefit of problem-posing education.

Framed using Dewey’s (1902, 1915) work, Bruce and Levin (1997) defined learning as “the natural impulse to inquire or to find things out” (p. 5), and further describe media as “. . . the meditational function of technologies, which link the student to other learners, teachers, other technologies, ideas, and the physical world” (p. 5). The two descriptions of learning and media provided direction and support for the study.

Theoretical Paradigm

As a researcher, I adopted an interpretive theoretical paradigm to frame my research. Guba (1990) defines a paradigm as “a basic set of beliefs that guides actions, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry” (p. 17). Adopting an interpretive perspective influenced how I thought about my research design, research questions, and interpretations of the findings. Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) state: “Each interpretive paradigm makes particular demands on the
researcher, including the questions the researcher asks and the interpretations he or she brings to them” (p. 22). Different paradigms make different demands on the researcher.

Denzin and Lincoln suggest several phases that guide interpretive research (2005, p. 23). Phase one is seeing the researcher as a multicultural subject embedded in a history and research traditions, conceptions of the self and other, and the ethics and politics of research. I saw myself in this research as situated in particular research traditions that I studied in my PhD program and influenced by professors and students with whom I studied. I have constructed a self-concept as a particular kind of researcher for this study that differs from the quantitative research traditions I adopted in my masters degree work. I have become aware of the ethics and politics of research as I considered doing research on an online course in which I was involved as a technical assistant and with a professor with whom I had developed a strong relationship.

Phase two, for Denzin and Lincoln, involves adopting a theoretical paradigm. For this particular case study, interpretivism best helped me think about how I wanted to design and proceed through this research. This framework helped me articulate my role as an interpreter and to acknowledge the ways in which my approach to this research was influenced by my commitments and theories related to my research interests. Greene (1990) further defines interpretivist knowledge in a way that helped me focus on the intersubjective meanings that I would face in my study. She writes: “. . . interpretivist knowledge comprises the reconstruction of intersubjective meanings, the interpretive understanding of the meanings humans construct in a given context and how these meanings interrelate to form a whole” (p. 235). I viewed my study as a holistic unit, and defined it as an “interpretive case” (phase three, selecting research strategies). I was
mindful of the environment, research questions, emergent themes of my case study, a context where intersubjective meanings were being constructed through human interaction within a particular context. My role as a researcher was to interpret what was happening within this context by using particular methods (phase 4-methods of collection and analysis) mindful of the ways my own ontology, epistemology and interpretive methodological orientation influenced my choices. When a participant with a negative view of the course emerged, I did not dismiss it, but rather examined it as an anomaly that offered important information about the meanings constructed by one of the participants.

Denzin and Lincoln define Phase 5 as the art, practices, and politics of interpretation. Here I had to consider the criteria for judging adequacy of my interpretations and writing as an interpretive endeavor. I was writing about my participants’ meanings and was aware that these interpretations needed careful examination and reflection with full acknowledgement that these were interpretations, not statements of fact or “Truth.”

Credibility

As a researcher, I must remain credible and ethical; this study followed guidelines set forth by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They propose that a researcher should address the issue of credibility through prolonged engagement, persistent observations, triangulation, and referential adequacy. To help build credibility throughout this study, I was online with the class for 15 out of 16 synchronous session (prolonged engagement), and often logged in asynchronously throughout the week to read postings (persistent observation).
Data gathering was conducted using multiple instruments along with a variety of questions (triangulation). In addition, all personal interviews were recorded, and the course content was archived using WebCT (referential adequacy). The combined methods provided credible results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credibility</td>
<td>Prolonged Engagement</td>
<td>Stay in the field until data saturation occurs.</td>
<td>a. researcher was involved throughout the entire class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                    | Persistent Observation| Consistently pursue interpretations in different ways in conjunction with a process of constant and tentative analysis. Look for multiple influences. Search for what counts and what doesn’t count. | a. researcher was present during synchronous class sessions  
|                    |                     |                                                                                             | b. researcher monitored other areas of WebCT asynchronously                                 |
| Triangulation      |                     | The best way to elicit the various and divergent constructions of reality that exist within the context of a study is to collect information about different events and relationships from different points of view. | a. online surveys were utilized (fifth week and post-course)  
|                    |                     |                                                                                             | b. in-person and phone interview sessions were held (fifth week and post-course)           |
|                    |                     |                                                                                             | c. data were gathered through online class sessions and other WebCT areas                  |
| Referential Adequacy|                     | What materials are available to document your findings? Video tape provides a good record but it can be obtrusive. | a. all interviews were recorded and transcribed  
|                    |                     |                                                                                             | b. all class synchronous sessions were recorded and archived                                |
|                    |                     |                                                                                             | c. all asynchronous material was recorded and archived                                       |

*Figure 1. Credibility.*
Prolonged Engagement

Throughout the study, I was actively engaged with students through synchronous and asynchronous communication, online surveys, and personal interviews. My initial communication was through email, and later moved to face-to-face communication for the introduction session (University of Illinois students) and interview sessions. Two face-to-face interview sessions took place at the University of Illinois. The course took place over a four-month period, during which I was actively involved in communication and observation of the students and the course in general. Through online class sessions and the use of probing interview questions, I developed a deeper understanding of what and how students learned through cross-cultural online courses.

Persistent Observation

Because the course was online, I was able to observe nearly all the interactions of the students (except for personal communication outside the course). In addition, the online environment allowed all the communication to be recorded and archived, which allowed me to preserve data within its natural setting. Synchronous class sessions were held for 90 minutes once a week and the students were required to post reaction paragraphs to assigned readings before class. I was able to observe all but one of the synchronous class sessions and logged on at least once a week to view any new student postings.

Triangulation and Referential Adequacy

By using more than one data source, I was able to triangulate findings across multiple sources. Data were gathered from a variety of sources including online class sessions, discussion boards, two personal interviews, and two online surveys. Select data
sources were coded and were triangulated to help validate results and themes that surfaced across the multiple data sources. One advantage of the online system was that all the data were preserved in its original context and form, therefore, it helped keep the data free from memory or transcribing error. In addition, all the interviews were recorded to allow me to revisit the original data as needed. Boeree (2003) suggests that one must be conscious of “role selection,” where participants attempt to react in a way the researcher expects or views as correct. Using triangulation helped reduce this phenomenon, but nonetheless, I was sensitive to each situation, environment, and participant.

Ethical Considerations and Research Bias

Ethical considerations were addressed through a variety of approaches. First, each participant was provided with an informed consent form, which provided an overview of the study, contact information, and general information regarding confidentiality. At any point during the study, a participant had the right to withdraw or not answer a question without any repercussion. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained to ensure anonymity and ethical treatment of the participants. In addition, the research staff completed the online ethical training course offered by the IRB office. During the project, participants were always the first priority, as their rights must be protected.

Lord, Ross, and Lepper (1979) suggest that one constructs his or her own reality based on previously held theories, and Denzin and Lincoln (2000) state that there is not a “single reality” in which one can study. During the study, I remained attentive to the realities and perspectives that emerged from the research and from my own personal worldview, while recognizing the complexity of individuals, life, and interactions. Using
multiple modes of data gathering and analysis helped me maintain a critical attitude toward my own personal reality and worldview. The study was not free from biases, rather I acknowledged and was attentive to my personal biases.

My interest in cross-cultural online education stemmed from my background in education and technology. I acknowledged that I value online learning, but in this study I was open to comments that were different from my own perspective. In addition, I worked with Dr. Ndimande in a previous version of this course and built a strong relationship with him. Due to our strong relationship, I took care not to have this affect my findings. For this reason, I did not study the instructor or evaluate his teaching. I did use examples from the online sessions to demonstrate the ways in which he used problem-posing education.

Research Biography

While studying in a Master’s program at Purdue University, I taught a variety of technology and engineering courses. As a TA, I also taught a technology integration course for teachers, while working on a PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. These teaching experiences, combined with my undergraduate education in engineering and technology education, strengthened my interest in learning and technology. I have always been fascinated with technology and am interested in the process by which technology benefits learning. A dissertation study of an online cross-cultural course provided a fantastic opportunity to study a context that combined my interests in learning and technology. Through my advisor at Illinois, I was introduced to Dr. Bekisizwe Ndimande and asked to be a technical assistant for one of his online
courses. While working with Dr. Ndimande on his course, he and I developed a strong relationship. After the first semester assisting with the course, the idea developed to use a second offering of this course as the focus on my dissertation study.

Participants

Originally, the participants in the study included students from two universities--the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the University of Pretoria. However, due to unforeseen circumstances in Pretoria beyond the control of the instructor, only students from the University of Illinois were able to participate throughout the course. South African participants were online for only three sessions. Participant education levels ranged from undergraduate (BS/BA) to upper graduate level (PhD), they varied racially, and were from several departments.
### Students

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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race (self reported)</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Department</th>
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### Professor and Technical Assistant

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<th>Gender</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chris</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Curriculum and instruction</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Ndimande</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>South African</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Curriculum and instruction</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 2.* Participants.

The course took place online using WebCT and met synchronously one-and-a-half-hours once a week on Thursday. During this time, students participated in guided discussion, similar to that of face-to-face communication in an online class chat room. The course was taught by a professor who is originally from South Africa and has done research on the desegregation of public schools in post-apartheid South Africa. In order to maintain confidentiality, each of the students was assigned a random letter to ensure anonymity during data analysis and publication.
Procedures

At a meeting with the students at the University of Illinois during the first week of the course, I described my research by explaining the purpose of the study and answering any questions or concerns the students had (see appendix B for a copy of script). During the following two weeks, an email (appendix C for a copy of the original email) was sent to all the students, asking them whether they were willing to participate. Once the participants were determined, either an in-person or phone interview (see appendix I for a copy of early interview questions and J for a copy of late interview questions) was conducted. After each interview session, the participants took an online survey. Again, the surveys (see appendix G for a copy of early online survey and H for a copy of late online survey) and interviews were conducted once at the beginning (5th week of the course) and once at the end of the course. Once the course was completed, the data were coded using a coding schema for tracking and then later coded to emergent themes using NVIVO software. The coding schema used for tracking was as follows:

(coding category)-(fifth/post-course)(where the data originated)-(date)(person)

A1 - C3 - 23G

For example, a particular interview comment coded to the “benefit” category would be labeled: benefit (A1), during a post-course (C) interview (3), on Friday, October 12, 2007 (23) by participant G. The raw data were stored on a University of Pretoria server running WebCT and were downloaded to a University of Illinois server for analysis.
Data Gathering

A variety of qualitative and quantitative data were gathered from the participants and the online course. The data for this case study included:

1. Semi-structured interviews: The interviews were conducted at the University of Illinois, once near the beginning (fifth week), and once near the end of the course (post-course). Interviews were conducted using a variety of methods--in person and over the phone. Semi-guided interview questions were chosen to gather qualitative data while allowing the participant the freedom to express ideas, thoughts, and reactions to the course.

2. Online survey: The online survey, which included Likert scale items and open-ended questions, was given at the beginning and end of the course (after each interview session).

3. WebCT class discussion and other online areas (e.g., bulletin boards, etc.): The synchronous class sessions, as well as other areas of the online course (e.g., bulletin boards), were used as illustrative examples, but the systematic analyses of these data are not included in this dissertation.

Data Coding and Themes

Data were initially coded using the three main categories--cross-cultural, learning and growth, and online. The figure below lists the data categories used, as well as the number of coded interview sections.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Main Categories</th>
<th>Data Categories</th>
<th>Number of Coded Sections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cross-cultural</td>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American educational issues</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South African educational issues</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The importance of trust and openness</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other student influences</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supported the development of trust and openness</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other student viewpoints</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The role of race issues in South African education</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South African perspective on educational issues</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supported the understanding of race issues</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cultural response to course</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The role of race issues in American education</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic response</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relating to others</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supported understanding of other student viewpoints</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and Growth</td>
<td>Important things leading to learning and growth</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supported academic learning or growth</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change that could have improved cross-cultural learning or growth</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change that could have improved online learning or growth</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long term academic educational influence</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rational for the most important component</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long term cultural educational influence</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Most important component</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Contributing factor in developed new or evolved theories</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Best method for explaining theoretical concepts</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Supported cultural learning or growth</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed new or evolved cross-cultural theories</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed new or evolved online theories</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online</td>
<td>Difference if it were a face-to-face course</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Benefit</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advantage</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disadvantage</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Asynchronous influence</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Synchronous influence</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Evolved benefit</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Data categories.*
Once the data were coded using these data categories, themes emerged related to the research questions. After reading the data multiple times and combining the data categories, the following theme (i.e., number, 1, 2, and 3) and subtheme (i.e., a, b, and c) structure were constructed.

Diversity, similarities, and self-reflection and learning were the three emergent themes within the first research question. Trust and openness, flexibility, and disadvantages were the three themes related to the second research question. Subthemes were also identified. For example, the theme diversity had two subthemes--ideas and experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment?</th>
<th>What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Diversity</td>
<td>1. Trust and Openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Ideas</td>
<td>a. Professor’s contribution to course framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Experiences</td>
<td>b. Feeling of anonymity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Similarities</td>
<td>c. Textual communication (thinking before responding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Discrimination</td>
<td>d. Improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Access to resources</td>
<td>2. Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Chatting</td>
<td>b. Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Assignments</td>
<td>3. Disadvantages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Readings</td>
<td>a. Speed of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Miscommunication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Less personal and social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Theme structure.

This organization and re-organization of the data is typical of qualitative analyses. Using a constant comparative method of analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967), I tried to be sensitive to emergent themes as well as then organizing these themes in ways that addressed my research questions in meaningful ways.
Data Analysis

Systematic analysis procedures were used to analyze the qualitative data and statistical analyses of quantitative data were run to help triangulate the results (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). I was not interested in simple yes or no answers, but rather rich descriptions about learning from cross-cultural online education and learning from this particular online course. The data from the survey and interview questions were in two different formats—Likert and open-ended responses; therefore, two approaches to analyze the data were used. Statistical analysis were used to analyze the Likert data, as the data were structured numerically. Because qualitative data were more free-flowing, the data for the interview and open-ended questions were coded and analyzed according to emergent themes and categories (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) using Nvivo software.

1. Semi-structured interviews: Interview data were transcribed from audio recordings, and coded to categories (figure 3) using Nvivo. The codes were then organized to address the two main research questions, creating both emergent themes and subthemes from the coded data.

2. Online survey: The Likert data were analyzed using quantitative methods. Standard deviation, mean, and t-tests were calculated on the fifth week and post-course survey data.

3. WebCT class discussion and other online areas (e.g., bulletin boards, etc.): Freire (1970) provided a framework for interpreting data from the online course. Dialogue, critical thinking, and reflection are important components of critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970, pp. 70-72). These concepts were used as analytic criteria for coding and selecting examples in support of categories that emerged from data used for this study.

Negative Participant

The data from one participant did not fit into the categories and themes that emerged from the analysis of the other participants. Brown, Stevens, Troiano, and
Schneider (2002, p. 8) suggest that: “trustworthiness is also strengthened by exploring negative cases that illuminate more varied and sophisticated expressions of the phenomenon” (Glaser, 1978). The participant with a negative perspective in this case was analyzed separately, because it provided interesting insights and an increased range of responses about this online course.
CHAPTER 4
RESULTS

Overview

Themes emerged as the data were analyzed with respect to the two research questions: What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment? and What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education? These two main themes were derived from the data collected within this cross-cultural online course considering the instruction and interaction online between two countries--the United States and South Africa. In addition, data sources included two interviews and two online surveys.

The following chapter delves deeper into the emergent themes within the research questions. Diversity, similarities, and self-reflection and learning were the themes within the first research question: What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment? Trust and openness, flexibility, and disadvantages were the themes within the second research question: What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education? Subthemes provided support and examples for each theme. For example, the diversity theme was comprised of the subthemes--ideas and experiences. The following outline illustrates the structure of this chapter.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment?</th>
<th>What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>a. Ideas</td>
<td>a. Professor’s contribution to course framework</td>
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<td>b. Experiences</td>
<td>b. Feeling of anonymity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Similarities</td>
<td>c. Textual communication (thinking before responding)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Discrimination</td>
<td>d. Improvements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Access to resources</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Self-reflection and Learning</td>
<td>2. Flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Chatting</td>
<td>a. Cross-cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Assignments</td>
<td>b. Time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Readings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Disadvantages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Speed of class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Miscommunication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Less personal and social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 5. Theme structure.*

Due to a series of unfortunate circumstances beyond the control of the instructor, only two South African students participated in the course and attended three online course sessions. In addition, a guest professor from South Africa attended one online course session to talk about South African education. From the interview data analysis, it became clear that students appreciated and benefited from the South African students’ participation, but would have benefited from more extended involvement from them. Students commented that it was valuable having a course instructor from South Africa and teaching from South Africa, as he provided a unique South African perspective for students. Further, the diverse U.S. class composition offered a variety of student backgrounds and opinions in class discussion.
What do Students Learn in a Cross-Cultural Online Environment?

The data analysis indicated that students learned from this online course in a variety of ways. Some students described learning from readings, while others described growing from having their worldviews challenged. Through the three themes—diversity, similarities, and self-reflection and learning—this section provides evidence of student learning. Questions from the online survey offer a comparative glimpse into students’ perceived learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Fifth Week Survey</th>
<th>Post-course Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0 = not at all; 6 = very much)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you foresee learning (Have you learned) new and unique educational and cultural things from the South African students in this course?</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you foresee (Has) your understanding of the South African students evolving (ed)?</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>2.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you foresee (Has) your understanding of race evolving (ed)?</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you foresee (Has) your understanding of post-apartheid South Africa evolving (ed)?</td>
<td>4.50</td>
<td>2.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you predict (did) you may learn about other cultures from this course?</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How concerned are you about the problems that exist in the educational system in South Africa?</td>
<td>5.12</td>
<td>.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How useful do you foresee (will) this course being in your future?</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>2.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, how much do you foresee (did) this course influencing your worldview?</td>
<td>4.12</td>
<td>1.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How positively or negatively do you feel towards this course at this point in time?</td>
<td>4.25</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Online survey questions: Learning

Overall there were slight differences between the responses of the fifth week and post-course surveys, but statistically, there were no significant differences. Students who
began the course with high expectations ended the course with those expectations met. Likewise students who began the course with lower expectations had those expectations confirmed. Minimal differences between means suggested that students had a better understanding of post-apartheid South Africa and were concerned about the South African educational system. The following themes provide insight into students’ reasoning behind their responses to the above questions.

Theme - Diversity

Students described learning through the diversity of ideas and experiences. Diversity of ideas and experience came from both students in South Africa and the United States. The professor also offered his insights, which contributed to the diversity of ideas in the class.

Subtheme - Ideas. Being exposed to new ideas caused students to refine and reconsider their worldviews. Cindy described learning from diverse worldviews.

Chris: what do you see as the benefits of this cross-cultural course?

Cindy: hopefully that we learn, more about their culture, and they learn about ours, in a more accurate, and less, ah historical, you know, I mean, cause you’re right, a lot of my impressions are probably so awful and backwards and wrong, that I’m almost embarrassed to say them, because I don’t know, I mean, but likewise, they might see Americans as the land of bounty and we all, we all don’t drive Mercedes and, you know, yeah, so I mean I don’t know, maybe they don’t have those impressions of us, but I think there’s probably a lot of misconceptions on both parts, about not only the cultural and societies we both live in, but our views on things, and how things really are, so, I’m, I’m really hoping that we gain that from each other.

(Message ID No. X3-J5-12P fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Cindy stated:

Cindy: I think the benefits, I talked about before, are just that you really get, get a better idea, I mean, you think that you know something, and then you talk about something, you know, talk about let’s say education with someone from a different country, and you’re like okay wow, maybe they have not even the same
concerns, they have completely different concerns, they have completely different ideas, they have completely different, you know, way of thinking about something, I mean, or maybe just completely different, I don’t know, I think just the differences and to be able to look at the differences, and not only that, but then to be able to, kind of, internalize it, and look at your own thinking, and your own, maybe misconceptions about people and different countries, so.
(Message ID No. X3-Z5-44P post-course interview)

Cindy described how she benefited from hearing and learning about the South Africans from their perspective and worldview. Her response illustrated her learning from this diversity. Laura explained how the class created a unique opportunity to exchange and hear different worldviews.

Chris: how do you foresee involving students from other countries influencing or changing the course . . . ?

Laura: yeah, like I said, for the most part, I do think that just them bringing a unique angle of vision on a particular topic, especially for a cross-cultural course like this where we’re discussing the educational system in South Africa so the students who are from South Africa obviously have a very, you know, they have a personal connection with that, and they can offer that to the class for those of us who don’t have that, that personal connection to it, so I think it will definitely help at least broaden, broaden the horizons of those students who are not there and for those students who are, you know, in South Africa, they can listen to how we’re, you know, interpreting what we’re reading and they can get something from that as well, so it will be an exchange of ideas, an exchange of knowledge.
(Message ID No. H7-J5-17E fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Laura stated:

Laura: as I said earlier, it allowed for, it provided the space for that diversity of opinions, I mean you can get that without having, you know, students who are in a different cultural, country, you can have diversity of opinions, you know, within a class, a US classroom, for instance, but I just think that having an international classroom, if you will, where, you know, people from other countries can sit in, and not necessarily be in the same culture, be immersed in the same culture, in the same psychical location, but in their own respective locations around the world, I think that definitely brings a certain, feel to the classroom, particularly, this online classroom . . . .
(Message ID No. H7-Z5-44E post-course interview)
Laura’s response described how the course provided an opportunity for her to learn and grow from the diversity of opinions. She explained how being able to participate while in one’s native country, was beneficial for the class. Brendon explained how he learned from the diverse perspectives of the students.

Chris: how do you foresee involving students from the other country influencing or changing the course?

Brendon: it certainly gives you, a wide range of perspectives, so it’s sort of a good wall, of which to bounce your own ideas about how people see Africa and Africans, what it means to be an African, you know, is there even such a thing as an Africa, so in that regard it’s certainly also as good, because you get a nice a, sort of cross pollination of different global perspectives.
(Message ID No. H7-J5-12Q fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Brendon stated:

Brendon: well they have, certainly a wider base of knowledge, than I did, I read, I saw that quickly to be honest, so there was some really sharp well read people in the course, so again, it was exposure to yet more information I had not previously been exposed to.
(Message ID No. H7-Z5-88Q post-course interview)

In both the early and later interview, Brendon described how the students in the course provided a diverse set of perspectives that contributed to his growth. His response illustrated that he gained from having his worldviews challenged by others. Jason explained how he learned from the influence of the South African students.

Jason: I mean, when they [South African students] were present, I, I enjoyed their comments, I thought they were good, it was, it’s always good to know what people think, it influenced the course, in that it a more, genuine experience . . . I think it’s important to have African people, I mean, it doesn’t matter if you agree with their opinion or not, they’re, they’re from there, and they have a relationship to the context of what you’re learning about that you’ll never have, so it’s crucial in my opinion, and you know, I think for the most part, it, when it was present the influence was positive.
(Message ID No. H7-Z5-63L post-course interview)
Jason’s response described how he thought it was important to have a South African perspective, and that the course was influenced by their opinions. He discussed how even if he did not agree with one’s worldview, hearing diverse ideas would still be beneficial. The student examples portrayed how the diversity of worldviews influenced their learning and evolution of their own ideas.

Subtheme - Experiences. Students described how hearing other students’ experiences contributed to their learning. Below, Cindy discussed how the experience of a South African student influenced the course.

Cindy: well, I think because it’s their [South African students] firsthand opinion, I mean we could sit here, in white cornfield suburbia here and, and talk about oh Africa this, and Africa that, and you can read a lot of books, and you can read articles, and you can even read articles and books from South Africa, but without actually talking to people who are living there, you don’t really know, and in fact we had student last, last week’s synchronous session, where a United States student said one thing, because we were talking about “we” versus “I”, and the Illinois student said well, I think they’re the same, and I think that we romanticize the we and bla, bla, bla, and and the student from South Africa came back with no, I don’t think that, you know, and she was very passionate, but it was completely against you know, this other view, and I thought that was so interesting, because if we didn’t have that direct perspective, . . . if we didn’t have the South African point of view, we would have just gone on, you know, and we wouldn’t, we would have been like yeah, okay, but then you have the South African point of view, and then it really makes you think, cause then you can really compare and contrast, you can really kind of delve in deeper . . .
(Message ID No. H7-J5-12P fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Cindy stated:

Chris: So those are more of the academic way, what about culturally or socially, what do you feel is the most important thing you learned, what really led you to that?

Cindy: . . . overall I see an “I” versus “we”, I found that very fascinating and very interesting, but I didn’t, I can’t think of anything else like that.
(Message ID No. I4-Z5-44P post-course interview)
Cindy described how her worldview was challenged through contrasting ideas and experience of the South African student. The chat transcript below, illustrated how students’ experiences contributed to diversity of worldviews and influenced course discussions.

Dr. Ndimande: How relevant or functional is the concept of “I” and “We” in the 21st century Africa
Dr. Ndimande: I mean to say “I” versus “We”

Cindy: It seems like there is too much I and not enough we!
Cindy: I was really struck by Ch4 in Tedla and emphasis on we (i.e., the community)

Dr. Ndimande: Yes, it is like that in most parts of the world, but just wanted to know about it applicability in Africa today, is it feasible?

Cindy: Hmm... Good question. Let me think about it

Dr. Ndimande: Thanks, Cindy...good points about the community there. thanks. I will pass to Jason.

Jason: I think we is an important conception that western individualism tends to minimize in the interests of economic and intellectual expediency. These modes of thought can be traced back to Plato and his separation of man from nature, and well as the impact of Protestantism. However I do feel as if in Africa the we is romanticized slightly too much and it needs to remember that individual agency is necessary for creating the realization and action required FOR group action.

Jason: I and we are the same.

Jason: or ought to be and i think they are still analyzed as different and this is problematic

Dr. Ndimande: I like your earlier points, Jason, but I would not agree that I and We are the same. Thanks for these points...let me move on to others..who is ready? Thanks Jason!

Elizabeth: I wish that there were more cultures/communities around the world that put more of an emphasis on the “we”. That was one of my favorite discussions on the article. I think it’s so important for African culture to maintain that idea of “we” is so necessary in making any kind of significant chance. But I think I agree with Jason...although maybe not that I and we are the same, but that the concepts can interact with each other successfully to create powerful movements

---

3 The text of this chat session has been cleaned up to allow for easier reading. See appendix K for the complete text.
Dr. Ndimande: Great points, Elizabeth, but also should realize that Africa has changed this lately. The We is quickly eroding.

Dr. Ndimande: Maybe Annie can share with you about the growth of individualism in SA.

Annie [South African student]: in actual fact there should be more “we” than “I” especially in Africa. I don’t necessarily think that i and we are the same Jason. at least not yet. the day we establish 1 common culture, education system etc

Dr. Ndimande: I am not sure I understand what you mean at the end there, Annie..can you say more, please.

Annie [South African student]: individualism in Africa, is a fancy way to express every man for himself.

Dr. Ndimande: Annie, I agree with you that there is a slight difference between the “I” and the “we”, although they may feed onto each other as Elizabeth and Jason argued earlier

Annie [South African student]: maybe in some parts of the world. I’m not sure if it applies to Africa

(Message ID No. P5-S3-92 chat session transcript)

Through dialogue, the experience of both American students and the South African student, contributed to learning. Elizabeth described how the professor and other students’ experiences contributed to her learning.

Chris: how do you foresee involving students from another county influencing or changing the course?

Elizabeth: . . . . I think it also influences the topics that we talk about, and the manner of which we talk about them, and, I guess it influences the thought flows that we have when we are having our discussions, and the kind of topics that come up, like I said, she [Annie] brought up the idea “we” being so central to Africa cultural, when we might not have otherwise thought about that.

(Message ID No. H7-J5-17W fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Elizabeth stated:

Elizabeth: well I can say that I mean I did enjoy like the classes that they did come to and when they were bringing up just some points, and I feel like it’s I think it’s important in a class like this where you’re learning about a new cultural, that you have not just like the research part, but also like the personal experiences
and while Dr. Ndimande was able to share his, like it was interesting to hear the students as well . . .
(Message ID No. H7-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Elizabeth’s response described how hearing South African’s firsthand experiences provided her with new insights, which solidified what she learned from research and articles. Her example also illustrated how she benefited from hearing the professor’s personal experience. Lucy discussed how experience of the South Africans challenged her worldviews.

Chris: okay, what do you foresee as the benefits of this cross-cultural class?

Lucy: I just see it as exposing myself to another part of the world and the education system in another part of the world, to be able to critically, be able to examine our education system here in America, because all we ever learned about in undergrad and grad school, is what happens really in America, and so this course is teaching me about what’s going on in another country through firsthand experiences and conversations of the other people that are in the course so, if I’d hadn’t been enrolled in a course like this, the thought of Africa’s education system would have never really crossed my mind, because all we’re bombarded with here is what’s going on in America and legislation in America and all that kind of stuff.
(Message ID No. X3-J5-54B fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Lucy stated:

Lucy: just learning, just thinking about how education is, and how some race issues are and stuff in Africa, kind of made me think about how things are in America and how it’s related to our schools, and why kids are they way they are, and things like that, because, it’s because the way they were brought up, and that’s kind of why Africa, some of Africa is the way it is too, because of their cultural, and because of the politics, and because of, just the way the kids are brought up, so it just kind of made me, it just kind of made me address political issues and stuff, that I normally wouldn’t think about, that I would just kind of brush off, but because I had to do the readings and stuff, I kind of made a lot of, correlations between Africa and America, in regards to the race issues and stuff, and so it kind of made me reflect on my everyday life at school.
(Message ID No. X3-Z5-18B post-course interview)

Hearing the South African students discuss their experiences led Lucy to examine her own upbringing and worldview. She described how she compared and analyzed what she
learned in class, with her own teaching experiences. Students described how hearing the South Africans’ experiences from their viewpoint, challenged them to consider their own experiences and its influence on their worldviews.

**Theme - Similarities**

Students described the ways that finding similarities between South Africa and the United States contributed to their learning process. Two subthemes are discussed below--discrimination and access to resources.

**Subtheme - Discrimination.** Interview responses illustrated that students made connections between discrimination in the United States and South Africa, which contributed to their learning. Lucy described similarities in discrimination that she recognized between the United States and South Africa.

Chris: what do you perceive as the educational issues in South Africa . . . another question was in America, but you answered that all in one question, because you said they were the same sometimes.

Lucy: right, well, again it’s the Eurocentric type of view, with the European type of view, with the white European, for some reason always take precedence, and so that’s creating a big issue there, because much like America, like I keep saying in my responses, Africa is such a conglomeration of different cultures and backgrounds and beliefs and values and stuff, and so there’s no reason why the Eurocentric point of view should be what’s being taught in the schools, they should be teaching all these different cultures and backgrounds and stuff, so that students come out of schools being well informed individuals, cause we’re not there to teach kids to believe what we believe, we’re trying to teach them to be able to think for themselves, so I think that’s a big issue in Africa, teaching them how ever the white European governmental officials what their kids to be taught, but not taking into consideration all the other strong cultures, and other things that make Africa what it is.

(Message ID No. J4-J5-54B fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Lucy stated:

Lucy: well, I think that the race issue . . . you know, big issues in, in the school setting and stuff, just like, you know, here, during the civil rights movement and things like that, which it kind of reminded me of, that it was hard to teach and
hard to go to school, and things like that, because of everything else that was going on, so it seems like the race issues, especially, really impact schooling, and such in Africa, because of everything that’s been going on. (Message ID No. J4-Z5-18B post-course interview)

Lucy’s response portrayed how discrimination, Eurocentric views, racial issues, etc. were similar in both countries. Her example illustrated that she made connections between the complexities that influence discrimination.

Chris: how would you describe the perspective of an African student on these issues in South Africa . . . ?

Elizabeth: I think, I don’t know if the views are different so much as the stages of development and the racism is different, I think that we’ve gotten in American society, we’ve gone past the stage where it’s blatant racism, and it’s become more subtle and it’s become, you know, and I think in South Africa they still, there’re still trying to get out of that blatant racism stage. (Message ID No. P5-J5-17W fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Elizabeth stated:

Elizabeth: that was it, I guess just like, especially in the curriculum I think, even in the United States, we’re still learning to get like, in our testing, in the standards that we have in our curriculum, we still have some racist policies, that you know, discriminate against a particular group of students, and I think that’s true in South Africa too, where the way that the curriculum is set up, and the way that the system is set up, benefits one group of students over another. (Message ID No. B6-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Elizabeth’s discussed her view of the discrimination that favors one group of people over another. She described how both countries discriminate, but appeared to be at different stages. Below, Brendon described the influence America had on South Africa.

Chris: do you think the educational issues in South Africa are different than the ones in America?

Brendon: that, I’ll be honest, that’s what really, dare I say, blew my mind the most, that, that cause I know about the education of black folks, the negro, in America, but, boy, the parallels, I was like man, wow, it is hauntingly eerily very similar unfortunately, unfortunately, I guess South Africa, we were the bad big brother, like having a big brother who smokes dope, Chris, and you know, beats up the other kids on the block, and you the little brother, you go do it too, you
know, we were the bad big brother, we set a very bad example for South Africa and elsewhere too probably, yeah.
(Message ID No. J4-Z5-88Q post-course interview)

Brendon learned that South Africa’s discrimination paralleled that of the United States and set a poor example for the South African community to follow. Below, Jason described similarities between American and South African segregation.

Chris: okay, what do you perceive as the educational issues in South Africa?

Jason: . . . . issues with education in the United States, part of that stems from I think that the fact, you know, that Apartheid was based off the United States segregation, so I think that sort of over history has influenced both of the systems in similar way, but in Africa, South Africa, you have more issues you have to think about in terms of Apartheid and colonial era and really imperialism, we sort of live in the belly of the beast here.
(Message ID No. J4-Z5-63L post-course interview)

Similarly, in the post-course online survey, Jason stated:

Online survey question: Given your current level of knowledge about South Africa, what do you perceive of as the significant challenges facing the educational system?

Jason: Same as in the US really. Funding, curriculum imperatives, unequal opportunities for blacks and whites, lack of government priority.
(Message ID No. J4-Z1-43L post-course online survey)

Jason stated that American discrimination, through segregation, had a direct influence on discrimination in South Africa. Student responses described how they viewed discrimination parallels between both countries, and how the United States negatively influenced South Africa’s infrastructure.

Subtheme - Access to resources. Student responses indicated that they came to realize that the United States and South Africa both struggle with equality of resources in schools. Brendon described this:

Chris: . . . what do you think are the educational issues in South Africa?
Brendon: I know for certainly, cause for so long you had sort of a ah society that was not equally funding schools.

Chris: is that pre-Apartheid?

Brendon: for pre-Apartheid South Africa, and so I guess if that’s being done for decades, and not centuries, you know, 1990s to now, it’s not very much time to undo all of the imbalances, that have been built-up over centuries, of uneven distribution of educational funds, that there has been any progress made at all is a miracle, you have to give people on the ground credit, of all backgrounds, you know, that people are working together . . . .

(Message ID No. J4-J5-12Q fifth week interview)

Similarly, when asked about American education, Brendon stated:

Chris: . . . what do you think are the educational issues in America?

Brendon: I think in some ways they parallels, because you know, I have students, cause you want them to be able to see this, you can’t solely have an educational system where people in wealthy areas where there are moneys, their students have an education that is better than students who area aren’t moneyed, and so they don’t have computers, they don’t have the best teachers gravitating to the area . . . you don’t want to fund my school, that’s why I can’t read and write, it’s hard, and I don’t care how good your parents are, at a certain point, schools must have facilities, you can’t have one school that has laptops, and another school have secondhand books, and the kids, there’s, there’s not even chalk for the chalk board, and you wonder why certain kids aren’t learning . . . there are kids right here, who can’t pay for their own books, and then you wonder why they don’t want to learn, they have horrid teachers, they’re living in, they’re learning in horrid physical environment, and you have the audacity to wonder why they don’t want to learn, come to the Bronx and we’ll walk around, I’ll show you why folks don’t learn, aren’t learning.

(Message ID No. B6-J5-12Q fifth week interview)

In the post-course online survey, Brendon stated:

Online survey question: Given your current level of knowledge about South Africa, what do you perceive as the significant challenges facing the educational system?

Brendon: The challenges here are akin to many of those in Africa, including the creation of systems of education that all the cultures and accomplishments of all citizens.

(Message ID No. J4-Z1-85Q post-course online survey)
Brendon described how access to resources (i.e., money, teachers, and facilities) influenced American and South African education. His response illustrated the degrading effects that unequal access has on students and educational systems. Laura discussed her view of how access to resources influenced education in both countries.

Chris: what about in American education, what do you think is, are the educational issues . . . ?

Laura: yeah, well, access definitely is an issue in American education, the wealthy has access to better schools, to better teachers, better facilities, better technology and so we, because of those differences because of all the inequalities we’re not able to really even the playing field for all people, I mean we’re supposed to be democratic system where, I mean, everyone is supposed to have the same opportunities but we know that that is just not the case, I mean those who are more affluent have better, better educational opportunities and are tracked different ways and, yeah, so access and I guess technology could be another one, I guess that falls under access as well, so.

(Message ID No. B6-J5-17E fifth week interview)

In the post-course online survey, Laura stated:

Online survey question: What do you perceive of as the significant challenges facing the educational system in America?

Laura: The significant challenges facing the educational system in America are the actualization of equity (equal access to the best resources) and diversity among schools.

(Message ID No. B6-Z1-43E post-course online survey)

Similarly, when asked about South African education, Laura stated:

Chris: what do you foresee as the educational issues in South Africa?

Laura: equal access is definitely one, it seems like there is still a lot of inequities, as far as resources distributed, I think at one of the later classes maybe in one of the last few classes that we had, it discussed how, some parents try bus their kids to, ah better neighborhoods so that their children could have a better educational opportunity, because the schools in their own district are very poor not well funded, don’t have a lot of resources and so, the more affluent white schools have those resources, so it just the barriers that, that they encounter trying to get their students, their children, to these schools with better resources, how there’s zoning issues that try to bar them out, you know, there’re financial obligations that they try to impose to bar out these, you know, black South African children, so just
things like that, just the inequalities in resources, it seems like there’s a technological gap definitely, yeah.
(Message ID No. J4-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Laura’s response described the effects that unequal access had on the South African educational system. She discussed how, similar to the United States, South Africans do not have equal access to resources such as technology. Elizabeth described what she learned about access to resources from the course.

Chris: what do you think are the educational issues in South Africa?

Elizabeth: in addition to racism, I would say I think, we learned a lot about how funding, funding and equities contribute a lot to the disparities in education there, ah I guess also like, post colonialism that’s embedded in the curriculum and things like that, I think those are like the major issues that.
(Message ID No. J4-Z5-44W post-course interview)

In the post-course online survey, Elizabeth stated:

Online survey question: Given your current level of knowledge about South Africa, what do you perceive as the significant challenges facing the educational system?

Elizabeth: In regards to education, I perceive the significant challenge in South Africa is providing all students with equal access to a quality education. This challenge is complicated by factors such as race, effects of colonization, socioeconomic status and politics.
(Message ID No. J4-Z1-43W post-course online survey)

Similarly, when asked about American education, Elizabeth stated:

Chris: what about in America, and you mentioned you saw similarities.

Elizabeth: right, funding and equities and funding is a huge thing I think in both countries, and I think that contributes to, like the perpetuation of racism and, racial and ethnic disparities and, I guess also the extent to which we’re still kind of unaware of the subtle racism that exists, ah.
(Message ID No. B6-Z5-44W post-course interview)
Elizabeth’s response illustrated she learned that funding (access to resources) was a parallel problem in each country influencing racial inequalities and resulting in subtle discrimination. Lucy described how access to wealthier school systems created issues.

Chris: what do you perceive as the educational issues in South Africa?

Lucy: well, I think that the race issue, and the distinct areas of, the impoverished areas versus well to do areas, create you know, big issues in, in the school setting and stuff, just like, you know, here, during the civil rights movement and things like that, which it kind of reminded me of, that it was hard to teach and hard to go to school, and things like that, because of everything else that was going on, so it seems like the race issues, especially, really impact schooling, and such in Africa, because of everything that’s been going on.

(Message ID No. J4-Z5-18B post-course interview)

In Lucy’s response, she discussed how South Africa, similarly to America, had school districts that were wealthy, and some that were not. She described how issues like funding, had an impact on one’s ability and resources to teach. Julie explained what she perceived of as the educational similarities between the United States and South Africa.

Online survey question: Given your current level of knowledge about South Africa, what do you perceive of as the significant challenges facing the educational system?

Julie: . . . spreading funding out so as to even out current inequalities left from the apartheid era, and making quality educational institutions throughout all regions of the country.

(Message ID No. J4-Z1-56V post-course online survey)

Similarly, when asked about American education, Julie stated:

Online survey question: What do you perceive of as the significant challenges facing the educational system in America?

Julie: Making school funding equal instead of relying on property taxes, so that all schools have competent teachers and all necessary supplies . . . .

(Message ID No. B6-Z1-56V post-course online survey)

Julie’s response described that that America and South Africa both struggled with providing equal access. Students in this subtheme described how access to resources in
some schools, especially low income schools (i.e., unequal funding, books, computers, etc.) were similar between the United States and South Africa.

Theme - Self-reflection and Learning

Students described how various course components influenced their learning. Three subthemes of self-reflection and learning are discussed below influenced by chatting, assignments, and readings.

Subtheme - Chatting. Students’ interview data indicated that chatting online and hearing other students’ worldviews challenged their personal worldviews. Elizabeth described how the discussion topics online contributed to her learning.

Chris: what do you foresee being the most important component of this class?

Elizabeth: the discussions, I would have to say, yeah, I think that we have, I personally never had the chance to study anything related to Africa academically, and I know there are some people in class, whether they’re actually from South Africa or they just have a lot of knowledge about the area, and I know there are other students who are in the same situation as me, they’re studying it for the first time, and some of the discussion we have are pretty amazing, like, a lot of the experiences that we share, or a lot of the reflections we give, the opinions that we give and, it’s, we’re all, I think we’re all pretty good about having like respectful discussions, but like an insightful one at the same time, so for me that’s definitely the hugest most important part of class.
(Message ID No. M1-J5-17W fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Elizabeth stated:

Elizabeth: . . . . it provided a context mostly for a lot of the questions and issues that we discussed online, and I think that’s where I learned the most, when we’re reflecting on them, discussing our different interpretations and what we thought about it, and also, like I said before, just having students challenge what’s being said and what is being discussed, was also really helpful.
(Message ID No. M1-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Through dialogue, the online chat systems provided an opportunity for Elizabeth to reflect on the readings and her personal worldviews. Her response illustrated that hearing
other students’ worldviews provided a learning experience for her. Laura described how hearing other students’ viewpoints (online chatting) contributed to her learning.

Chris: what do you foresee causing you to learn these things?

Laura: . . . it really brings it to life so to speak, it makes it I guess more of active learning when you’re discussing it with other people, and you can bounce ideas off of other people and, especially someone from another culture, you know, they might be coming from a different cultural standpoint on an issue and then you can bounce ideas off them as well, just that transaction of information, that transaction of knowledge I think adds to the course . . . it’s really the interactive discussions that I think the exchange of ideas that helps, you know, with the learning and you know, getting new perspectives off some of the ideas that we’re talking about.

(Message ID No. Q1-J5-17E fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Elizabeth stated:

Laura; the discussions . . . listening to the professor and the, even the students in the US, a lot of the students in the US in the class, seemed to be very knowledgeable, even about stuff that’s going on in South Africa as well, and South African educational situations, so that was helpful too.

(Message ID No. Q1-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Laura described that her learning was influenced through the exchange of ideas using the online chat system. Brendon’s response illustrated how interacting with class members, using the online chat system, contributed to his learning.

Chris: . . . what are the most important things you foresee learning or growing from in this class . . .?

Brendon: so certainly on the, my personal side, the interaction with the internationals in the class, and the instructor, and getting that, some new perspective on education, here and certainly in Africa . . . .

(Message ID No. L7-J5-12Q fifth week interview)

When asked about contributing factors Brendon stated:

Chris: what do you think will contribute and help you learn these things in the course?
Brendon: . . . the chat, and the academic sort of interaction between us in the class . . . . if it doesn’t, if you’re not, if you’re the same person in December after this experience, to me there is something really wrong, and it’s not the class. (Message ID No. Q1-J5-12Q fifth week interview)

Brendon described how chatting with other students in the course influenced his learning. He explained that participating in the course influenced his worldviews and changed him as a person. Susan discussed how even though she was not in the synchronous chat session, it impacted her learning.

Chris: okay, what was the most important component of this course in your estimation?

Susan: . . . you know, the synchronous discussion helps everybody understand the things that they weren’t getting, helps everybody understand, I mean, there were a lot of different viewpoints out there about what we did read, oh, and then, also I would say that I thought the professor’s summaries of what we read were really good, because not being from, you know, the educational background, it was good to read basically the interpretation, you know, not from a political science standpoint of what was going on, so. (Message ID No. M1-Z5-88H post-course interview)

Susan’s description illustrated the importance of the synchronous chat sessions on her learning. She described the benefit she gained from hearing other students’ ideas and being able to clarify any misunderstandings she had from the readings. Student responses described how the online chat sessions were beneficial and influential in their learning process.

Subtheme - Assignments. A variety of course assignments contributed to students’ learning. Below, Lucy described how the reflection paper assignments helped her make connections between America and South Africa.

Chris: what is causing you to learn those things, is it chatting, is it the readings?

Lucy: . . . doing my responses, in order to do my responses, I’ve got to make that connection between Africa and America or whatever, maybe it’s just about Africa, but it still causes me to think about America, so because I’m not in on the
synchronous session, it’s not really the chatting, I mean, I’m reading what people are saying, and I’m saying oh yeah that’s totally what I think or I don’t really know what she’s talking about, but for me personally it’s mostly the readings and the reflections . . . . I feel like I’ve learned a lot and really been able to reflect on my own teaching and our education system a lot, because I’ve been so bombarded with all these readings and all these discussions about education.

(Message ID No. Q1-J5-54B fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Lucy stated:

Chris: okay, what are the most important things you learned or grew from?

Lucy: just I really like the idea of all the different political ideas being brought up, really made me think about things, that like I said, that I normally would just blow off or not really have time for, but I was forced to, because I had to write reflection papers and stuff on them, so it brought up some good political ideas, and commonalities between Africa and America that affect the way we live.

(Message ID No. L7-Z5-18B post-course interview)

Similarly, in the post-course online survey, Lucy stated:

Online survey question: What did you learn from this course and was it what you expected, or not?

Lucy: . . . . most importantly, though, I learned to reflect on my teaching and things that go on in my life/world in a more critical way, especially in regards to race issues.

(Message ID No. L7-Z1-78B post-course online survey)

Lucy described how the reflection writing assignments forced her to reflect on what she had learned through the readings, chat transcripts, etc. Reflection on what she read influenced Lucy’s learning in the course. Elizabeth’s response described that the course assignments influenced her learning.

Chris: what are the most important things you learned or grew from?

Elizabeth: . . . . through my response papers and my reflection papers that I did, I was constantly thinking of, comparison to the United States, and I guess I’ve always seen like the two countries as so very different and so very split with different issues and different things, when I write my reflection papers I’ve, I start to understand and realize a lot of the similarities that there are.

(Message ID No. L7-Z5-44W post-course interview)
When asked to further describe her learning, Elizabeth stated:

Elizabeth: right, I really do feel like I learned a lot through my assignments, especially since everything was so new, I had so many questions, so many, you know things going on in my head, and it was good to be able to write it down and reflect on it, so I definitely think that being able to do those assignments contributed to my experience in the class.
(Message ID No. Q1-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Course assignments guided Elizabeth’s learning process, as they provided her the opportunity to synthesize her reflections. Her response illustrated the importance of having writing assignments. Below, Laura described how the response papers helped her tie together the components of the course.

Chris: what was the most important component of this course . . . ?

Laura: yeah, the reading response paper, I think was one of the most important parts of the course, because, we would read the assignments, we would read the, you know, do all the readings, and then if the professor posted a topic we, you know, talked about the topic, or just basically discuss, our, our understanding of what the topic was, was the article was trying to say and things like that, but I think the response papers gave us time to really reflect on what we were reading, and just respond however we, you know, however we felt necessary from the readings, and so I think that gave us time to really sit and think and process what was going on in the article, and give our, genuine first impression of the articles, there might have been some things that we didn’t understand in the article, that we got to flesh out in the response paper or there might have been some things that didn’t sit well with us, or that we disagree with in the article, and then we can use the response paper to kind of flesh out those as well so, I think the response papers were very helpful.
(Message ID No. M1-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Laura’s response illustrated how she learned through the self-reflection paper assignments. She described how the papers provided her the opportunity to reflect and write about what she had read and experienced. Cindy described how one of the assignments provided her the opportunity to critically analyze what she was learning.

Chris: what are the most important things you learned or grew from?
Cindy: I think overall, my general understanding of Apartheid of the different race issues, just a general understanding of some African history, was really good, a lot of critical thinking, a lot of just don’t take things at face value, really need to think about it.
(Message ID No. L7-Z5-44P post-course interview)

When asked to further describe her learning, Cindy stated:

Cindy: definitely the James Loewen book, and then how we related that back to some of the African history textbooks, I think that was actually a really good assignment, when we had to go look at African history textbooks and see what they said or see what they covered, and you’re just like okay, even with my limited knowledge, I was like okay, that’s a really one sided, you know, Eurocentric point of view there, you know, so I think that was, that, that started it and then that kind of then, the further you went you kept looking, okay, remembering back let’s see what else this might mean, let’s see how else I can.
(Message ID No. Q1-Z5-44P post-course interview)

Cindy described how one of the comparative analysis assignments caused her to think critically about what she reads. This final example demonstrated how Cindy learned from completing the final course project, where she researched the use of technology in South Africa’s educational systems.

Chris: what do you think are the most important things you may learn or grow from in this course . . . ?

Cindy: good question, well I hope to, through my research project for this course, find out more about technology and educational practices in South Africa and Africa, which definitely I think would be tremendous, I mean, I think it’s important especially since I want to do dissertation work on technology, I want my future research in, you know, to be on technology, and think to have a better understanding about . . . . I think that would kind of add some depth to my understanding of technology and use of technology in educational settings, so I think definitely my project, I’m really looking forward to doing the project in this class . . . .
(Message ID No. L7-J5-12P fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Cindy stated:

Chris: okay, what about in an America or global context, do you see both those [technology] markets the same . . . ?
Cindy: well actually my paper was on this topic, kind of in regards to South Africa and their educational system, kind of with technology, and I guess, I’m for technology regardless of where it’s at, regardless of its third world or industrial or whatever, I think technology is good in schools, do I think we’ve got different problems yes, do I think that there’s different issues yes, so I guess my overall answer is, yeah I think technology should be there, but I think you’d have to look at, look at how to do it in a lot of different ways depending on where you were at.

(Message ID No. G8-Z5-44P post-course interview)

The final project offered Cindy the opportunity to research an interest she developed early on in the course – the role of technology in South African education. Her project provided an outlet to support her learning process. Student responses illustrated how course assignments contributed to learning.

Subtheme - Readings. The readings selected for the course provided students the opportunity to grow, as the readings challenged their worldviews. Jason described how the readings contributed to his learning experience.

Chris: in your estimation, what is the most important component of this course?

Jason: . . . . I think our, the readings you can get more into what they’re talking about and your own thoughts regarding that . . . . I thought, probably the most amount of information and learning we got done was from the readings he chose for us to read.

(Message ID No. M1-Z5-63L post-course interview)

Jason’s response illustrated how a well-selected set of course readings provided a learning opportunity. Brendon discussed how specifically, one of the readings prompted him to explore what it meant to be African.

Chris: what do you think is the contributing factor . . . ?

Brendon: like with this, I’ll use this week as an example, understanding what it is to be or not be African but that, doesn’t sort of push your thought process and gets you to think in new ways I don’t know what will, so readings like that certainly, you would hope, kind of push you . . . .

(Message ID No. Y0-J5-12Q fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Brendon stated:
Chris: what led you to that understanding?

Brendon: the last few readings, like the last four or five readings, just like I told you, now I understand, I was there and I really wish, while I had spent those eight weeks there, right, in that program, a couple of summers back, that we had gotten some information on the whole history of the education process, you know, in the region, but we didn’t, so we went to a couple of schools, but there was no, I have a context now to put what I saw in, you guys gave me a better context, now to put it in.

(Message ID No. Q1-Z5-88Q post-course interview)

Similarly, in the post-course online survey, Brendon stated:

Online survey question: How did your interest in education and South Africa change or expand? What aspects of the course contributed to this change (e.g., cross-cultural aspect, online aspect, the readings, etc.)?

Brendon: All of the readings really helped to add to my knowledge base regarding the history of education in South Africa.

(Message ID No. Q1-Z1-85Q post-course online survey)

Brendon’s response described how the readings provided a context for learning and understanding African cultural and history and “pushed” him in his learning progress.

Elizabeth discussed how the course readings influenced her worldview about identity.

Chris: did you develop existing or did you evolve existing theories or new theories within the course?

Elizabeth: I did, in terms of identity . . . . like, I’ve always been fascinated by like the dialectical relationship and I covered it in different classes and I learned to think about it in different ways, but I think that looking at it in the context of an African identity, was really fascinating for me, cause I remember there was this quote in one of the readings we did, and it was like, if everyone is an African, then no one is an African . . . . and I remember that just really hit home for me and, and it really explained the dialectical relationship or that idea in a different way that I’ve never really considered before, ah yeah, that was one of the biggest things that stuck in my mind.

(Message ID No. A2-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Elizabeth’s described how her understanding of identity evolved based on one of the assigned readings. In addition, in the post-course online survey, Elizabeth explained she learned about South Africa from the readings.
Online survey question: How did your interest in education and South Africa change or expand? What aspects of the course contributed to this change (e.g., cross-cultural aspect, online aspect, the readings, etc.)?

Elizabeth: The readings for the course brought about a greater understanding of South Africa’s education system and some of the challenges that it faces. This has led me to have a greater interest in understanding education in Sub-Saharan Africa on a deeper and non-ethnocentric level . . .
(Message ID No. L7-Z1-43W post-course online survey)

Elizabeth’s response illustrated how the readings enhanced her learning experience, as she gained a better understanding of South African educational issues. Below, Cindy’s response illustrated that the course readings provided a firm foundation, in which she was able to build upon as the class progressed.

Chris: what do you think are the most important things you may learn or grow from in this course . . . ?

Cindy: . . . also the readings have been really great, cause, they really have made me think, they made me sit back, okay this is kind of the way I thought, so you know, let’s reevaluate and look at it in these terms, and I mean some of its stuff maybe you’ve thought about, but never really thought about it, like, I kind of knew that, but I never really thought about it, so I think I’m getting a lot, a deeper understanding of a lot of different topics .
(Message ID No. Q1-J5-12P fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Cindy stated:

Chris: what was the most important component of this course in your estimation?

Cindy: for me at least, I needed the readings to even provide, like a foundation of what was going on, they really, they help me to better understand the discussion then about, you know, that were arguing about this, that, or whatever, and it’s like okay, reading, that’s okay, this is where we’re coming from and that’s what we’re talking about, so for me I really needed the readings, I could have not participated in the discussion without the readings, I think some of our other students might have been able to participate in the discussion without the readings, but for me, I know I needed the readings in order to participate, in order to even have a clue about what was going on.
(Message ID No. M1-Z5-44P post-course interview)
The readings selected for the course, contributed to Cindy’s understanding of South Africa and their educational environment. Cindy’s response illustrated how important it was for her to have a solid content foundation in order to freely participate in the class. Students described how the readings influenced their learning experience by providing a foundation and general information about South Africa.

What Does an Online Environment Add to or Detract From Cross-Cultural Education?

The nature of the online environment provided both benefits and challenges for the course and the students, which are revealed or demonstrated in the three themes--trust and openness, flexibility, and disadvantages. This section provides examples and supporting evidence of online influences for this particular course.

To begin, the online survey results provided insight into students’ perceptions regarding the online environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Fifth Week Survey</th>
<th>Post-course Survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(0 = not at all; 6 = very much)</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>SD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;As a student, how much do you foresee (did) the cross-cultural component (i.e., interacting with students from South Africa) improving the course?</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much do you foresee (did) the online component improving the course?</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>1.46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 7. Online survey questions: Online influence.*

Although there were small decreases in the perception of the influence of the cross-cultural and online components, statistically there was not a significant difference between the fifth week survey and post-course survey on the cross-cultural question, \( t(1, 13)=1.38, \ ns \), and the online question, \( t(1, 13)=.30, \ ns \). This suggests that students’

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4 This question explored the online component, as it directly influenced the cross-cultural experience.
predictions about the influence of the cross-cultural component and online component were accurate. The three themes below (trust and openness, flexibility, and disadvantages) help to flesh out the reasoning behind students’ responses to the questions given both during and at the end of the course.

**Theme - Trust and Openness**

Students reported that the way the professor framed the course contributed to feelings of safety and a desire to be open in their conversations. Additionally, the lack of face-to-face and visual communication contributed to students feeling more open in the online environment, compared to face-to-face situations. Lastly, students described that they benefited from using a textual communication system because it allowed them the ability to think before responding. There were instances when students needed to further explain their statements for clarification, as visual cues were absent. Discussed below, three subthemes--the way the professor framed the course, the feeling of anonymity online, and the ability to interact using textual communication--provided support for the trust and openness theme.

**Subtheme - Professor’s contribution to course framework.** Six out of eight students described that the way the professor structured and framed the course had a positive impact on how open and comfortable they felt in the class. In this first response, Lucy, who participated in the course asynchronously, described that having the professor setup a constructive environment and helped the students be open and accepting of others.

Chris: what do you think encouraged that or helped build that . . .?
Lucy: I think it got better as it went on, but, I think he setup a good environment, for everyone being accepting and stuff . . . .
(Message ID No. K5-Z5-18B post-course interview)

Laura described how the professor framed the course in a way that contributed to an open environment.

Laura: . . . . like I know like at the last session, Dr. Ndimande said that, you know, that let’s just make sure that, you know, we’ll careful about how we say things to, you know, make sure that we all know that we’re not attacking each others’ ideas but we’re just, you know, saying, you know, what our opinion is, and so sometimes over, you know, email or chat system, that might not come across as clearly . . .
(Message ID No. T3-J5-17E fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Laura stated:

Laura: I think he did a pretty good job regulating that, in the beginning of the class, I believe he stated that, you know, he was trying to foster an environment where everyone felt welcome in this online classroom, where everyone felt comfortable in voicing their opinions on how they felt about certain issues, and a couple of instances I think that, the conversation kind of got a little, heated, I guess, and I think he did a good job again of quelling the situation and, you know, making sure that we all are being respectful of each other’s opinions . . . . I think he did a good job of making sure that, you know, we’re all not attacking anyone particular, you know, someone might disagree with your idea, and you know, we can voice that and we can discuss that, but it’s not personal towards anyone, so, I think he did a good job of doing that.
(Message ID No. T3-Z5-44E post-course interview)

In both the fifth week interview and the post-course interview, Laura described how, from the beginning, the professor structured the course in a way that helped cultivate an environment where students felt open and comfortable. Further, she described how at times, situations became “heated,” but the professor kept the conversation controlled.

Cindy too, described the benefit of having an instructor frame a safe online environment.

Cindy: the openness, I think it’s just the way, the instructor was pretty open to talking about just about anything, and even if he disagreed, he’d be like well that’s your opinion, I might not agree, and so I mean, but he wasn’t like no that’s wrong, that’s bad, don’t, I mean, the instructor, you could tell if he might not necessarily have of agreed with what you said, but at least he was open to hearing
you out, and letting you say what you thought, and even if he was questioning it, then maybe he would question you a little further, and say okay, I might not still agree with you, but at least I understand where you were coming from, and I think that helped, kind of, set the mood for the rest, for the whole class, in that you felt, felt open to say what you thought, because you knew the teacher wasn’t going to come down on you . . .

(Message ID No. K5-Z5-44P post-course interview)

Dr. Ndimande’s comments illustrated Cindy’s previous statement.

Dr. Ndimande: I like your earlier points, Jason, but I would not agree that “I” and “We” are the same. Thanks for these points...let me move on to others. Who is ready? Thanks Jason!

(Message ID No K5-S3-92U chat session transcript)

Having a professor who constantly offered positive feedback throughout the class appeared to have an impact on Cindy’s feeling safe. The course framework and structure, implemented by the professor, helped create an atmosphere where students felt safe and comfortable sharing their thoughts and personal experiences.

Subtheme - Feeling of anonymity. Students described the online environment as providing a sense of anonymity, since they were unable to visually communicate with one another. A uniqueness of an online environment is the absence of “triggers of difference” (Merryfield, 2003, p. 160) caused by visual communication (e.g., body language, appearance, etc.). Merryfield described triggers of difference as, “… visual and oral differences often subconsciously make people uncomfortable or otherwise constrain people’s abilities to listen, interact, and learn from others” (p. 160). Laura’s response described how she felt more open due to the lack of visual triggers associated with online environments.

Chris: . . . how do you think that [anonymity] will be important in the course . . . ?

Laura: well, actually I’ve never, I hadn’t thought about that, well like I said earlier, I think that the class will be more open simply because you’re kind of hidden behind the screen so to speak, and so, you can say, you know, what you
want to say, you can say how you are feeling without having the repercussions of getting like mean stares, or you know, it is just not like that with an online course so I would think that we would be more open, but like I said, there are some people who would rather see, you know, who there’re talking to and know who their, you know, openings and messages are getting across to, and that might make some people apprehensive, but not me, I mean, I haven’t even considered the issue of trust and being open, it, it just hasn’t been a thought that has crossed my mind, and so, yeah I enjoy the course and say whatever I am thinking and feeling, and.  
(Message ID No. T3-J5-17E fifth week interview)

In two separate fifth week interview questions (above and below), Laura discussed how an online environment contributed to the feeling of anonymity. As a result of feeling hidden, she described that students were more open than they would have been in a face-to-face course.

Chris: how do you foresee this class being different if it were a face-to-face class?

Laura: well, I think people tend to be more honest when they are using online systems simply because you don’t have that intimidation of being face-to-face with someone, like you’re not looking at the professor per se or you’re not looking at the other classmates per se, and so you might be a little more liberal about, about what you say knowing that people aren’t literally staring and focusing in on you visually anyway, so yeah, I would say that for the most part, I think people are able to be more direct and be more up front about what they want to say without feeling that tension to have to, you know, come up with the right words right on the spot to say I mean you can pretty much think out your comment, type it, you know, spell check it, make sure that it’s right before you post it, it’s a little bit different feel than being in class.  
(Message ID No. R2-J5-17E fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Laura stated:

Chris: okay, how do you think this class would be different if it were a face-to-face class?
Laura: . . . I think sometimes classes, face-to-face, say a person is shy, or not really an extravert, you know, doesn’t really want to participate when other people are looking at them speak, I think the online class is a way for those students to, you know, kind of type freely, not necessarily hide behind the screen, but it’s a forum where they can kind of voice their opinion openly without having that intimidation of being in a classroom setting, like, actual physical classroom setting, ah.
(Message ID No. R2-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Laura described in both interviews that online environments contributed to her feeling anonymous, since she felt safe hidden behind her computer. Lucy explained how her involvement in the course and the feeling of anonymity, contributed to her participating more in class discussions.

Chris: how do you foresee this class being different if it were a face-to-face course?

Lucy: well obviously it wouldn’t be as flexible and honestly, you wouldn’t think as a teacher I’d be afraid to talk up and stuff in class, but when there’s a big class, with people I’m unfamiliar with, I’m not going to say a whole lot, I’m not going to kind of step out there and say the things that I’ve been saying in this class, not that they’re controversial really, I just wouldn’t be speaking up nearly as much and wouldn’t be giving my opinion, I’d probably just be sitting there kind of soaking it all up and wouldn’t be speaking up as much, since I’m somewhat anonymous on this . . . nobody’s there to look at me like I’m crazy.
(Message ID No. R2-J5-54B fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Lucy’s stated:

Lucy: no, I think it was better, because I think that there’s always that, no matter how outgoing you are as a person you are, there’s always that kind of shyness component, when you’re face-to-face with somebody you don’t know that well . . . you weren’t going to be sitting there seeing someone, or seeing their face or getting into a verbal argument with them, you could write, you could type whatever you want, and it’s not a big deal.
(Message ID No. R2-Z5-18B post-course interview)

In Lucy’s first response, she described that she participated more in the online setting, since there was some degree of anonymity from not being seen. She also expressed that she felt “much more comfortable” than if she were in a face-to-face setting. In the post-
course interview, Lucy described again how the lack of visual communication allowed her and others to freely participate in the course.

**Subtheme - Textual communication (thinking before responding).** Students described that using written text as the medium for discourse provided a unique experience, which allowed them to think about a response before responding. Susan described that shy students might be more communicative in an online situation than they would be in a face-to-face course.

Chris: in what ways do you think developing trust and openness will be important in this course?

Susan: I think that’s important in all courses because I think everybody needs to feel comfortable with discussing their opinions and needs and desires and all of that, and like I said, I think is some ways it will be easier for some students to put those things forth, because they are typing instead of face-to-face. (Message ID No. T3-J5-51H fifth week interview)

Susan explained that she predicted students would be more open, due to the use of textual communication, instead of visual communication. During a different interview question, Susan suggested again, the advantage of textual communication.

Chris: how do you foresee the online component as influencing the course, synchronously and asynchronously?

Susan: so I think one of the good things about it, is that it gives people kind of a chance to think before they blurt things out, um, when you are all sitting around in a classroom, I think a lot of times people are kind of scared to talk, because they don’t know or there’re the talkers and they say too much, and, so it helps I think to think, like as far as the people who are talking. (Message ID No. U8-J5-51H fifth week interview)

Because students had time to prepare their written response, Susan thought that an online environment offered a place where they would feel at ease contributing to class discussions. Below, Laura described her perception of the advantages of textual communication on the course.
Laura: . . . I think the online class is a way for those students to, you know, kind of type freely, not necessarily hide behind the screen, but it’s a forum where they can kind of voice their opinion openly without having that intimidation of being in a classroom setting, like, actual physical classroom setting, ah. (Message ID No. R2-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Laura, described how the utilization of text for communication, provided students with the opportunity to think before responding. In addition, she also explained that students expressed themselves freely using text. Below, Laura illustrated how textual communication was beneficial to those who did not speak the language of instruction fluently.

Chris: how’s it, how do you think the online cross-cultural component is different, than maybe a cross-cultural component . . . ?

Laura: I think one could potentially be a language barrier, sometimes international students, their English might not be that good, I mean, they might know English very well, they probably could type it, just as fast as anybody else could, but it doesn’t come off the same, because they don’t speak it as well, so the online component where we’re just typing our answers, it seems like everybody, you know, is pretty much on the same level as far as, speaking and being able to communicate with each other, so, in that sense I could see it being more beneficial to do the, have it online. (Message ID No. A4-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Laura recognized that some students found it easier to dialogue using a text based system than speaking, as they would in a face-to-face course. In the last response, Lucy expressed how the online environment contributed to students being open in their dialogue.

Chris: do you think that was comparable to how it would be maybe in a face-to-face course . . . ?

Lucy: . . . you weren’t going to be sitting there seeing someone, or seeing their face or getting into a verbal argument with them, you could write, you could type whatever you want, and it’s not a big deal. (Message ID No. R2-Z5-18B post-course interview)
Lucy, along with other students, described the advantages they experienced from textual communication. The advantage of being able to think before responding contributed to students being open when dialoging and discussing sensitive topics. Further, students who struggle with the native language used in a course might find it easier to communicate using text.

Subtheme - Improvements. Students offered suggestions on how to improve trust and openness in an online environment. A common suggestion from six out of the eight students was to better implement an asynchronous component (bulletin board). Cindy described how the development of trust was not as developed as it could have been if parts of the courses were implemented differently.

Chris: what could have been improved to help you grow or learn more in the course, either technically, or cross-culturally?

Cindy: . . . I think asynchronous, asynchronously we could have done a lot more with a forum, you know, where I post my weekly response and then you reply, you know, you comment on it, and I’ll comment back to you, I think we could have got the whole class more involved because you didn’t require you being at one place at one time, for only an hour, an hour and half or whatever.

(Message ID No. F5-Z5-44P post-course interview)

Cindy suggested that having a more active asynchronous component of the course would have helped cultivate trust between students, as they would have the opportunity to engage in more dialogue with others. Elizabeth implied that using the asynchronous component would have improved dialogue, and ultimately trust and openness.

Chris: do you think the online component, asynchronously, influenced the course . . . ?

Elizabeth: I don’t think we used it as much as we could have, I could just bring up the points to Dr. Ndimande, that maybe we should post our reflections online, so we can share that, because sometimes we don’t have things, we don’t have time bring things up in class, or we think of things after discussions that we have
online, and we did our presentations, you know, using the asynchronous thing, and I think that worked really well, as well, so I that contributed to the class. (Message ID No. W3-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Elizabeth suggested that she would have benefited from posting her reflection on the bulletin board (asynchronous section), and receiving feedback from others, as she did during her online presentation. In the last example, Jason described how posting to the bulletin board gave him freedom in both writing and responding to others.

Jason: I mean, that was sort of like whatever you wanted to post you could post, I think that probably, part could be developed better.

Chris: how?

Jason: you know, people get, I think people get tired of being on the computer a lot, but I think posting is nice, because you have the freedom to say what you want, and, and respond, you know, and have time to think out your thoughts, I personally liked the posting method, cause you can go on and see what other people have done, and you all don’t have to be there at the same time . . . . (Message ID No. W3-Z5-63L post-course interview)

Jason suggested that using the bulletin board provided him time to fully develop his thoughts before posting. He also enjoyed being able to read what others posted. Student responses indicated that they would have benefited from more active involvement using the asynchronous component (bulletin board).

*Theme - Flexibility*

The online environment used for this class contributed to the course flexibility. As a result of the course being flexible, students from the United States and Africa were able to participate, which in turn provided a cross-cultural learning experience. Two subthemes under flexibility are discussed below--cross-cultural and time.

*Subtheme - Cross-Cultural.* The online environment created for this course provided a cross-cultural opportunity for students from South Africa and America. Cindy
described how participating in the class provided a cross-cultural experience that she would not otherwise be able to participate in.

Chris: do you think there are advantages and disadvantages to doing a course like this online, like because it’s cross-cultural?

Cindy: I think definitely the advantages are the fact that because it’s an online course, we are able to get participants from two different continents, I think that adds a lot to the course, that was, I mean, this was just a course without being from the other continent, I don’t know if I would have wanted to talk it as much, cause I was interested in taking class that, where we had students from different cultures, where we had, you know, just, just to be able to experience that, I thought in and of itself was well worth taking the class, so I think that’s right there the biggest advantage.
(Message ID No. A4-J5-12P fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Cindy stated:

Cindy: I think the advantages are that you can have people from all over the world, I mean I think the idea behind the course is amazing, I mean, that’s why I took the course, was that, I was really interested in actually having a course with people from other countries with different points of view, with different you know, everything, I mean not only just cultural and points of view, but you’re talking about religion, you’re talking about educational systems, I mean, just, I was absolutely fascinated and so think, I don’t think there’s any other way, another, then an online course, to have taught this, and to do it effectively and really have gotten everything out of.
(Message ID No. A4-Z5-44P post-course interview)

Cindy explained how the online course provided her the opportunity to interact with students from South Africa and described some of the benefits gained from the cross-cultural situation. Jason described how the online environment provided him the opportunity to participate in a cross-cultural class.

Chris: sure, what do you foresee as the benefit of this, even though the class, what do you just think benefits may be?
Jason: . . . I think it’s beneficial that we get to interact with, ah people in South Africa . . . I think it’s beneficial to be able to have a professor like Dr. Ndimande who can be in South Africa . . . it’s advantageous to have an online class, where he can be and be contributing in South Africa and at the same time, stay connected with the people here, so I think in general that’s a benefit . . . . (Message ID No. X3-J5-12L fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Jason stated:

Jason: well, the perceived benefits haven’t really changed, in that, cross-cultural, cross-cultural classes are, because you have people from different contexts discussing different things, and especially from Africa, where you know, a lot of times people over here don’t really know what actually African people think . . . . (Message ID No. X3-Z5-63L pre-course interview)

Jason’s response described his perceived benefits of the cross-cultural class, as being able to interact and learn with others from all over the world. Below, Elizabeth explained how the flexibility of the course being online, provided her with a cross-cultural experience.

Chris: what do you foresee as the benefit of this online course?

Elizabeth: I think the main benefit for me would be having access to resources and opinions and ideas that I may not have otherwise had, just in terms of being able to meet students from other cultures . . . . (Message ID No. O9-J5-17W fifth week interview)

Elizabeth’s response described how she was exposed to new ideas, people, and cultural situations. Laura illustrated how she viewed the cross-cultural aspect of the course.

Chris: what do you foresee as the benefits of this online class?

Laura: the benefit of the class, well one of the benefits would be that this is an online class, and more people are able to attend, internationally that hopefully it will have more diverse opinions in the class and so hopefully it will make the students in the class more culturally aware, culturally tolerant, culturally sensitive, which is definitely one of the things that I got from the class. (Message ID No. O9-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Through interacting with diverse students, Laura described how the cross-cultural class helped her become more culturally aware. The student responses illustrated the benefits
they received from the cross-cultural course. They described that interacting with South Africans exposed them to new worldviews and experiences.

*Subtheme - Time.* One of the advantages to an online class is its flexibility with time for both synchronous and asynchronous components. Below, Lucy described how the course offered flexibility for her.

Chris: what do you foresee as the benefits of this online class?

Lucy: well, I think the best part is, I don’t, I don’t have to be locked into a certain time every week that I have to be on campus . . . . it gives me that flexibility to do the work and get the same thing about it, but do it whenever I have the time, and whenever I can fit it in.

(Message ID No. O9-J5-54B fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Jason stated:

Chris: okay, what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of doing a course like this online?

Lucy: well, I think it’s really, the flexibility really helps someone like me, help me be able to do the coursework and learn a lot about other nations and about myself and my own teaching without having to give up my own job . . . . the fact that it was online, was just, you know, did it for me . . . .

(Message ID No. A4-Z5-18B post-course interview)

Lucy’s response illustrated the convenience of time that the online environment provided for her situation. She described that she was able to keep her other commitments, while still participating in the class. Susan also found that the online course provided her the flexibility of time.

Chris: what do you foresee as the benefit of this class?

Susan: that I can sit at home and work on my stuff while my daughter is taking her nap.

(Message ID No. O9-J5-51H fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Susan stated:

Chris: what were the benefits, of the online class . . . ?
Susan: I’m confused, well, it was nice to be able to take the class from home, and I guess one of the nice things was being able to kind of do it when I had a chance to do it, as opposed to doing it, you know, at a specific time every week . . .
(Message ID No. O9-Z5-88H fifth post-course interview)

Susan, who participated in the course asynchronously, described how she found the flexibility of the course beneficial; she was able to contribute during her free time, instead of being required to attend specific times. Brendon described the flexibility that the online environment brought to the course.

Chris: how do you foresee the online component influencing the course . . . ?

Brendon: . . . that great part of about it, is you can have people from all the world on any given Thursday having this discussion, now I just, I just, like a dope I just figured out the asynchronous part of it right, okay, so that even makes it more amazing, so I guess so that after the fact you kind of add your comments right, right, so that’s even more amazing.

In the post-course interview, Brendon stated:

Chris: okay, how did the online component influence the course asynchronously . . . ?

Brendon: well, I guess people got to certainly, thrash out ideas, and put ideas up, so it was certainly very good in that sense, you could sort of fully get all your ideas out, unlike in I guess, a formal classroom, traditional classroom, where there might be less time, so that I can get up at two o’clock in the morning right, and put something up, if it comes to mind, boom, you can put it up.
(Message ID No. W3-Z5-88Q post-course interview)

Brendon’s response illustrated how the course was not constrained by time and location. He explained that he was able to catch-up on a missed class by reading the archived chat transcripts. The option to post new ideas and thoughts, regardless of the time, led him to recognize how flexible the online environment was. Laura explained her perceived benefits for students participating in the online course.

Chris: what do you think, you mentioned one advantage, but do you think there are other advantages or disadvantages of doing a class like this online . . . ?
Laura: yeah, I think that other, nontraditional students, who might not be able to attend courses, you know, will have opportunities to participate in this course, given that’s online and even the asynchronous component, because all of us, obviously, we couldn’t meet at the same time synchronously so it still gave those students the opportunities to participate in the class asynchronously, so that’s definitely another benefit of having an online class.

(Message ID No. A4-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Her response illustrated how both traditional and nontraditional students were able to participate in the course through the synchronous and asynchronous components.

Students described how the online environment provided a variety of flexibilities, which in turn, had a direct influence on the traditional time constraints of face-to-face dialogue, courses, etc.

Theme - Disadvantages

Students also identified disadvantages with the online environment created for this course. Three subthemes found in the data are described below--the speed of the class, miscommunication, and the lack of personal and social development.

Subtheme - Speed of class. Because typing is slower then speaking, students described that using the online environment caused the class to move slower than a traditional face-to-face course. Below, Susan described how she felt the synchronous sessions moved slower than a face-to-face class.

Chris: so, maybe the Internet is important so that we can all get together or text is important or video is important . . .

Susan: . . . I’m not there during the synchronous, but from reading the chat, my feeling is that there is a lot of lag time between people talking to each other, I’m not sure but that’s what it looks like.

Chris: why do you think that?

Susan: because every once and awhile, there will be like a three minute space between times people say something, or somebody will say, are you there, are you there, something like that, so I’m not sure if that’s how it feels when you are, but
that’s how it feels when I’m reading it . . . like I said, I feel like when I’m reading the chat, not quite as much is accomplished during that ninety minutes than we often accomplish if we were sitting around a table for ninety minutes, and I am not sure if that is true.

Chris: why do you think that though?

Susan: it just feels, you know what, when I’m done reading the chat, I’m surprised how little has been covered, so, but the other thing is that I am used to two hour and twenty minute classes and ninety minutes, so it might have something to do with that, but, if things could move along more quickly, that might help, I don’t know.

(Message ID No. Y8-J5-51H fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Susan stated:

Chris: what are the advantages and disadvantages of doing a course like this online . . . ?

Susan: . . . . I think disadvantages, once again, the whole typing thing, I’m not sure that everybody gets exactly their idea across, and I do think that that hour and a half is a little bit less productive than an hour and a half?.

(Message ID No. Y8-Z5-88H post-course interview)

Susan discussed in both the fifth week and post-course interviews, that the speed of the course was slower than a face-to-face course and that the amount of material covered during the online course, was less than what she had experienced in face-to-face classes.

She expressed how she thought the online synchronous sessions took about twice as long as it would have in a face-to-face situation. Laura’s response illustrated that she too found the speed of the course relatively slow.

Chris: and then if we added audio, that then could be a drawback?

Laura: it could possibly, possibly be a drawback, but it could possibly be a benefit in that it would probably speed up the pace of the class, and allow for more discussion to happen if it was audio, as opposed to only the typing back and forth.

(Message ID No. D3-Z5-44E post-course interview)
In comparison to talking, Laura found that the textual communication used in the online environment slowed down dialogue. Jason response illustrated how the movement of the course has hindered by typing speed.

Chris: . . . how do you foresee the synchronous session part influencing the course or the asynchronous part . . . ?

Jason: . . . as far as the synchronous session goes, I think there is a huge difference between people’s ability to type, and I think that hurts the synchronous session, it slows it down a lot, we go through like, three questions, you know, throughout the hour and a half or two hours that we are there, which is very little . . .

(Message ID No. U8-J5-12L fifth week interview)

Jason: . . . it’s a little bit frustrating just being able to talk so little and addressing so few issues in the synchronous session.

(Message ID No. U8-J5-12L fifth week interview)

Jason’s answers described how using textual communication slowed down the flow of communication and dialogue. The student responses demonstrate that using textual communication in an online environment slow down dialogue compared to natural speaking settings.

Subtheme - Miscommunication. At times, not hearing tone of voice or seeing body language caused miscommunication between students. In order to help resolve the times when miscommunication occurred, students reworded or further explained their point. Lucy explained how chatting online led to miscommunication of her ideas.

Chris: what are the advantages and disadvantages to doing a course like this online . . . ?

Lucy: . . . I guess a disadvantage would be, and again I’m not in on the chat sessions, so I don’t know, but sometimes some of the stuff I read it’s like, it’s hard to communicate, it’s like when you are IMing somebody, it’s like you can’t get your thoughts in, you know, you can’t type as fast as you can speak, obviously, so sometimes it gets a little messy in the chat room, and sometimes too, just like with email, you don’t, you don’t see the facial expressions, and you don’t hear the tone of voice and stuff, so things can easily be misleading in a
course like this, you can take people’s ideas and thoughts the wrong way, not that I really have, that’s just something that could happen, so that’s about it.
(Message ID No. Y8-J5-54B fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Lucy stated:

Chris: okay, do you see disadvantages of doing a course like this online . . . ?

Lucy: just, just the non-face-to-face contact and sometimes things are misunderstood and stuff online, so, no.

Chris: did that come up at all in the course, I mean just from your perspective, reading the transcripts, did you see any?

Lucy: not necessarily in the chat logs, but like in the comments people made about projects and stuff, I could feel a little bit of tension between people, and then people saying like, oh no, you didn’t understand that right, or even myself like there wasn’t any tension or anything, but a couple of people responded, they’re like I don’t quite understand this, you know, and once I re-explained it, it was fine, but because, you’re not there face-to-face, showing them what you’re talking about and stuff, it’s not always fully understood.
(Message ID No. Y8-Z5-54B post-course interview)

A select segment from the bulletin board (asynchronous) transcript illustrated how Lucy needed further explained her thoughts and project.

Thanks to everyone for all of your great input on my project. I wanted to clarify a couple of things which will (hopefully) answer the questions a few of you have about what my project will look like . . . .
(Message ID No. Y8-S7-94B bulletin board post)

Lucy described how miscommunication occurred in the asynchronous (bulletin board) component. Even though at first, students did not understand what she was attempting to portray, she was able to further explain her idea to clarify any misunderstood points.

Below, Laura described how she viewed miscommunication within the course.

Chris: what do you think that advantages and disadvantages, the disadvantages are of doing a cross-cultural course like this online?

Laura: . . . . a disadvantage I would say is that sometimes when you are using online systems as far as chat messages, you might type something and it might come off the wrong way and because you are not face-to-face with someone, they
can’t see your expression and know if, you know, you meant it in a mean way or, you know, you really, you know, meant it in a nice way, but sometimes things can be misinterpreted over a chat message system . . . . so sometimes over, you know, email or chat system, that might not come across as clearly as if you are in someone’s face, and so that would be a disadvantage .

(Message ID No. Y8-J5-17E fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Laura stated:

Laura: . . . . we can tend to get very passionate, and the fact that we are online, sometimes you can’t really get a good feel of someone’s emotions, you don’t really know if there’re, purposely trying to come off offensive or not, and so because you don’t have that face-to-face contact with someone to really know how there’re trying to communicate with you, sometimes if you, you know, you could just read something a certain way and it may come off offensive . . . .

(Message ID No. Y8-Z5-44E post-course interview)

As Laura explained, conveying emotion in an online environment is more difficult than in a face-to-face situation, and how not seeing one’s expression lead to miscommunication.

Jason explained how he perceived facial expressions contribute to dialogue context.

Chris: you said it felt depersonalized.

Jason: yeah, just because you can’t see expressions on people’s faces and you know, when you, when you make comments or something, you make them in a certain context, and the flow of conversation is different, so some things you say, might come off harsh or something, whereas in, I think in a more personal context, I don’t think that happen, ah just because, you know, the person can see in your face more what your intent is behind what you’re trying to say, or you can more easily interject your comments at, at relevant points, it’s tricky because you have to facilitate the conversation, such that, people can follow it online, because it’s more complicated, because you’re reading it . . . .

(Message ID No. Y8-Z5-63L post-course interview)

Seeing body language and personal reactions provided Jason the visual information that helped him navigate personal communication. Because of the lack of visual information, Jason found communication more difficult. Students described how using text for dialoguing caused communication inaccuracies at times. They explained how, at times, visual cues were important in decoding conversation meaning.
Subtheme - Less personal and social. Student data conveyed that the online environment did not promote personal and social relationship building, as it would have in a face-to-face class. Their answers revealed that the lack of visual cues, such as tone of voice and body language, contributed to the course being less personal and social. Jason described this:

Chris: how do you foresee this class being different if it were a face-to-face class?

Jason: . . . . I feel like typing is, sort of, very impersonal, and a lot of those cultural things get lost when it is not face-to-face . . . .
(Message ID No. R2-J5-12L fifth week interview)

In the post-course interview, Jason stated:

Jason: you know, I don’t think, usually in classes you make more friends, I mean I tried to, you know, be personable with people online, but you really don’t walk away knowing any of the other students I would say, you kind of go to class to handle your business, and you don’t form any relationships with the students, unless you decide to email them outside the context of the class, or you know them already, you know, I think it’s, I don’t know, I think it would be different for some people, cause for me personally I like to see people face-to-face, I like to be able to talk to professors face-to-face . . . . it’s depersonalized, and you walk away less relationships, that come out of the class, also, you don’t, I don’t think you learn as much about dynamics in between people, as you do, I mean, every class is different and, part of what you’re learning when you go to school is not just a subject matter, but you’re also learning how other people interpret the subject matter, and you’re also learning how, how to reconcile your own opinions and thoughts about the subject matter, with other peoples, and that’s not impossible online, but I don’t think it’s as effective as in person.
(Message ID No. R2-Z5-63L post-course interview)

Jason’s response demonstrated he did not form personal relationships with other students in the class. He explained how the absence of visual information prevented him from forming relationships with the students and professor. When responding to a different interview question, Jason’s response was similar, in how he found the course less personal.
Chris: okay, how did the online components influence the course synchronously, do you think?

Jason: . . . . it had disadvantages, in that, it was sort of, depersonalized, and it required much more facilitation by the instructor.

Chris: what do you think could have been done to make it more personal, if anything?

Jason: to make it more personable.

Chris: you said it felt depersonalized.

Jason: yeah, just because you can’t see expressions on people’s faces and you know, when you, when you make comments or something, you make them in a certain context, and the flow of conversation is different, so some things you say, might come off harsh or something, whereas in, I think in a more personal context, I don’t think that happen, ah just because, you know, the person can see in your face more what your intent is behind what you’re trying to say, or you can more easily interject your comments at, at relevant points, it’s tricky because you have to facilitate the conversation, such that, people can follow it online, because it’s more complicated, because you’re reading it . . . . you know, just generally working of the of the format, in terms of asking questions and responding to them, as opposed to just, sort of random facilitation, you know, not random, I mean, the professor he chose how would speak, he tried to keep it on topic and stuff, but random in that it’s, it’s solely his discretion, it’s not sort of based on the dynamics of the entire class.
(Message ID No. Y8-Z5-63L post-course interview)

Again, Jason described how visual communication hindered his development of social relationship with others. He also explained how the general facilitation of the online class synchronous dialogue, disrupted the natural flow of conversation. Below, Lucy explained how she would have benefited from the class being more personal.

Chris: okay, how do you think the cross-cultural component could be improved?

Lucy: . . . . it would be nice to get to know each other as, on more of a personal level, as much as you can online.
(Message ID No. C9-Z5-54B fifth week interview)

In a post-course interview, Lucy stated:
Lucy: possibly audio, just to kind of make it a little bit more personal . . .
(Message ID No. E3-Z5-18B post-course interview)

In two separate interview questions, Lucy explained how she would have like the online environment to be more personal. Her response, suggested that, again, the lack of visual communication contributed the course depersonalization. Laura described how the addition of video would increase the personal feel of the course.

Chris: okay, that’s great, what technologies do you foresee as being most valuable in an online course, text, video, audio?

Laura: . . . . it would make the classroom setting more personal if there was like video where, you know, I could be, my face could be projected or all of the students and the professor in the class, you know, our faces were projected on the screen, and so we could connect the face with, you know, the online, you know, names, that were communicated with, so, I think it would definitely give the online classroom a more personal feel to it.
(Message ID No. V2-J5-17E fifth week interview)

The lack of visual input contributed to Laura’s experience of the class being depersonalized. She described that she experienced a disconnect with others, due to the lack of visual information used in the online environment. In this final example, Brendon described the depersonalization he noticed in the class.

Chris: okay, did you grow at all socially, do you think, or did you?

Brendon: I guess, somewhat, but I guess that helps more, I guess that’s a, that aspect might be grown a bit more, when you have maybe perhaps right, more personal face-to-face contact, ah.

Chris: is there anything that could have been done to maybe promote that or encourage that or, or help that grow at all?

Brendon: I with online that, see there are certain things, I guess, the online experience perhaps just can’t convey, so maybe that’s one, you know, area where, you know, if you get five out of ten, you ahead of the game.
(Message ID No. L7-Z5-88Q post-course interview)
In Brendon’s response, he explained how face-to-face interaction would be more conducive to developing personal relationships. The student responses demonstrated that one disadvantage of the online environment was the lack of personal and social development. A common cause of the depersonalization of the class was attributed to the lack of visual information and cues used in face-to-face dialogue.

Critical Pedagogy

Informal conversations with Dr. Ndimande describing his formal schooling in critical pedagogy with Michael Apple at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, helps to explain why Freire’s (1970) critical pedagogy theory was important in the development of the course. Freire also provided a lens for interpreting the course. Each class session generally followed the pattern where Dr. Ndimande asked a question related to the weekly reading assignments, followed by hand raising mode dialogue and pointed questions that promoted critical thinking, and finally open dialogue (unmoderated chat). To encourage reflection and meaningful conversations, Dr. Ndimande asked questions that required further elaboration. However, many times when critical dialogue was occurring between students, he only intervened when they needed direction or there was an opportunity for him to encourage self-reflection. The segment below, taken from the seventh week of class, is representative of a 20 minute section near the end of an hour and half class session. Dr. Ndimande started the chat session off, by asking students’ opinions of Horsthemke’s (2004) article “Knowledge, Education and the Limits of Africanisation. In order to provide context, below is a brief synopsis of the article.

Africanisation is generally seen to signal a (renewed) focus on Africa, on reclamation of what has been taken from Africa, and, as such, it forms part of
post-colonialist, anti-racist discourse. . . . This paper, while sympathetic to the basic concerns that inform the call/s for Africanisation, spells out the problems and limits of this project. . . . In the light of these points, this paper suggests a more promising alternative: a framework of basic human rights appears to be a more appropriate locus for the pertinent concerns and demands. (p. 571)

Specifically, Dr. Ndimande asked about Horsthemke’s criticism that Ngugi called for a “decolonization of the time,” but has written many of his works in English, not Kikuyu or Swahili (p. 577). The chat session below is illustrative of both how Dr. Ndimande encouraged students, and how they engaged in critical dialogue.

5Dr. Ndimande: Is H [Kai Horsthemke] correct to criticize Ngugi for using English in his work?

[Julie made a comment regarding a previous question that was unrelated the current conversation thread]

Brendon: I guess you have to begin somewhere, so the use of English is okay as a first step.
Brendon: Just as a first step; I cannot be too critical here

Dr. Ndimande: Ohhh, I see...can you say why?

Brendon: We cannot simply dismiss the impact of European rule in Africa...
Brendon: The use of non-African tongues is a problem that will take time to solve

Dr. Ndimande: Yes, I agree with you Brendon, but also I would argue that English is okay in a diverse nation like Kenya and of course Ngugi’s work needed to reach out to critical mass out there.

Brendon: in Africa.
Brendon: Good point Doc N...

Dr. Ndimande: Good insights, Brendon...Thanks. I am going to hand over to Cindy

Cindy: I’m not very “aware” of issues compared to Brendon, Julie, & Jason... Yet, isn’t H’s paper written in English? Is it the pot calling the kettle black?
Cindy: And I agree that in order to get the information out to the masses, it doesn’t seem like a bad idea to use English.

5 The text of this chat session has been cleaned up to allow for easier reading. See appendix L for the complete text.
Dr. Ndimande: You make me laugh...Cindy...that’s was funny:-)

Cindy: But where does one draw the line?
Cindy: Everyone needed a good laugh ;-)
Cindy: Between getting the information out to the world, and staying true to one’s language and culture?
Cindy: I’m done!

Dr. Ndimande: Thanks Cindy...you made very good points there.
Dr. Ndimande: Going to Jason...thanks
Dr. Ndimande: Jason, you are up!

Jason: I think that first Ngugi came to some of his realizations after he already started in English. secondly being that he wrote his critique of the lang. situation in English it is obvious he thinks it important to convey this idea to some English speakers, and thus probably in his writings as well. I think it is also good to criticize him to keep him to his own standards, because he could also be writing in Swahili, which would certainly reach more Kenyans than English. I like the idea of his translation institute because it encourages translation into other to read it and his works being written in more languages in general

Dr. Ndimande: Brilliant points, Jason..Thanks!! Didn’t know about his translation institute? where, in Irvine CA?

Jason: yes that was his main project after writing his lang. critique
Jason: it is really a great idea
Jason: I often wonder why graduate African language students aren’t encouraged at other schools to contribute to this proj.

Dr. Ndimande: Absolutely...I didn’t know about it, but yes, it is good, Thanks for sharing this!

Jason: even to trans. English works into African languages so more people can read them

Dr. Ndimande: I will raise it to SCALI...good point

Jason: oddly enough only the bible has really succeeded in this on a mass scale

Dr. Ndimande: Okay, thank Brendon..I am handing over to Brendon

Brendon: The push for a true lingua franca is something that must be discussed by Africanists at some point in the near future. The institute is a great idea and overdue...

Dr. Ndimande: Absolutely, Brendon. Thanks!
Brendon: I can understand why scholars use Euro-languages, how else could one really begin.

Dr. Ndimande: Okay, let us move on to our next question, unless you have a question.
Dr. Ndimande: I will open up the floor for people to say what they want and then go back to the next and last question of the night (morning for you:-)

Jason: I think it would be useful to look at the idea of regional African languages.
Brendon: Cool.

Jason: like Swahili lingala Zulu Wolof Arabic
Jason: for scholarship
Jason: of course with consideration to other smaller languages.

Dr. Ndimande: Look at them (languages) for what, Jason...say more please.
Brendon: But how many “regional” languages would that be??
Jason: I mean in terms of an africanization.
Dr. Ndimande: Ohhh, I see.

Jason: that way instruction is in an African language, but also can reach the max. amount of people.
Jason: of course this is problematic in terms of choosing which languages,
Jason: but good to consider
Jason: also it is important to remember
Jason: that it plays to the strength of Africa.

Dr. Ndimande: Did you guys know that SA has 11 official languages by the constitution, yet is still English and Afrikaans predominantly?

Cindy: I’ve read that.

Jason: because people there are generally gifted with being able to speak and use multiple languages on a daily basis.
Jason: and from a young age.

Brendon: What about the idea of a regional “Creole,” that included words from several regional tongues?

Dr. Ndimande: And in a nation that is 79 percent black!
Cindy: What languages do the 79% use?
Dr. Ndimande: And in a nation that is 79 percent black!

Cindy: predominantly

Dr. Ndimande: Mostly IsiZulu (the Nguni languages mostly)

Jason: regional creole would be interesting....
Jason: ever read about Esperanto?

Dr. Ndimande: Nope, not me, sorry

Cindy: Interesting, yet in the schools do they still have to speak English?

Jason: it was a universal European language they tried to invent and implement in the 1970s

Dr. Ndimande: Very interesting and yet troubling issue

Brendon: I meant some young urban school children in Botswana back in 2003 and they could not speak any siSwati. I was stunned!!

Jason: didn’t really work out
Jason: wow

Brendon: I have not heard of Esperanto...

Jason: that is messed up in Botswana

Dr. Ndimande: Okay, I am going back to the mic mode so we can do our last question.
(Message ID No. L7-S3-19 chat session transcript)

The above synchronous class session demonstrated how Dr. Ndimande facilitated critical dialogue between students. Beginning the class with the question: “Is H [Kai Horsthemke] correct to criticize Ngugi for using English in his work?” encouraged critical thinking and ultimately a discussion. As the conversation started, and students veered off topic; Dr. Ndimande quickly brought them back to his original question. For the majority of the session, students participated in meaningful communication that promoted critical thinking. Dr. Ndimande used positive reinforcement, and when needed,
presented students with probing questions to encourage critical analysis and further explanation of their argument. Near the end of each discussion, Dr. Ndimande disabled the hand-raise (mic) function, and allowed students to freely chat. When not constrained by technology (hand-raise mode), student dialogue would increase, but the conversation would not be as focused (multiple topics would be discussed simultaneously). As Freire (1970, pp. 70-72) argued, dialogue, critical thinking, and reflection are important components of critical pedagogy. For this reason, they were critical elements in the structure of this course.

This pattern of following critical questions with critical dialogue occurred in nearly every class. Another example of this pattern is described in detail below. Taken from the 12th week of class in the middle of the chat session, the section below is representative of a three minute dialogue between students and Dr. Ndimande. Dissecting a section of a chat session further illustrates how Dr. Ndimande encouraged critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970). The chat started off with a question, and then as dialogue progressed, Dr. Ndimande asked probing questions.

6Dr. Ndimande: Having read the article, would you agree that race plays a constitutive role in school reform in RSA [Republic of South Africa]?

Next, Laura and Julie participated in relevant dialogue.

Laura: I would definitely agree.

Dr. Ndimande: Say more, Laura

Laura: Especially how in your article you talk about parent choice.

Dr. Ndimande: huuummm

Laura: But it’s really only choice for those black parents who are affluent

6 The text of this chat session has been cleaned up to allow for easier reading. See appendix M for the complete text.
Laura: They legislate rules to keep black children out of better equipped schools.
Laura: Either the black parents can’t afford to send their children to better schools.

Dr. Ndimande: But this is illegal
Laura: and the ones who can...

Below Dr. Ndimande used pointed questions to help students think deeper about their statements.

Dr. Ndimande: So, how does this become a race issue?
Laura: are sometimes kept out due to zoning rules, etc.
Laura: It’s definitely illegal!
Laura: Because they are still in essence practicing de facto apartheid
Laura: in my opinion...

The following statement is illustrative of how Dr. Ndimande used positive reinforcement.

Dr. Ndimande: You are correct, Laura, I was waiting for you to say that no white parents is deprived of school resources...good points
Dr. Ndimande: I am moving on, if you are done...Laura

Laura: Yes, you can move on to let someone else speak.
Laura: Thank you

Dr. Ndimande: Thanks, Laura

Finally, Julie added to what Laura said earlier in the session.

Julie: I agree, too. I think a lot of people think that you can reverse many years of institutionalized racism with the signing of a few laws, but changing the laws won’t result in the changing of social views and patterns. As Laura pointed out, only affluent black families are likely to be able to send their kids to historically white schools, but I would like to add to that, that even affluent black families would have a strong incentive to stay away from these schools because of racism that still exists within them
Julie: So even though a few of them can technically send their kids there, I would definitely see why they might not want to if they think it will provide a not-nice atmosphere for their children

(Message ID No. L7-S3-73 chat session transcript)
Again, Dr. Ndimande promoted critical thinking by asking the question: “Having read the article, would you agree that race plays a constitutive role in school reform in RSA [Republic of South Africa]?” The initial question prompted students to draw upon three articles in order to synthesize an educated response to how race played a role in school reform. Next, as dialogue progressed, Dr. Ndimande asked Laura pointed questions to promote reflection and clarification of her ideas. In addition, positive enforcement provided students encouragement to future develop their ideas. Last, Julie referenced Laura’s comment and offered additional thoughts regarding racism. Structuring the course using problem-posing education (Freire, 1970) provided a framework that supported learning.

Negative Participant

The data included one contrasting participant with negative responses. Julie (the only undergraduate) responded to the interview questions and class quite differently. Below are examples that illustrate the contrasts between her participation in the course and her responses during the interview.

Chris: okay, how did the online component influence the synchronous part of the course?

Julie: I just thought it was really disorganized and not much really got done. (Message ID No. U8-Z5-21V post-course interview)

When asked about the advantages or disadvantages of the online course Julie stated:

Julie: the only advantage, like I said, is just not having to go in, a disadvantage is, I don’t know, personally I didn’t really take it very seriously. (Message ID No. A4-Z5-21V post-course interview)

When asked about the benefits of the cross-cultural aspect of the class:
Julie: nothing, I mean I don’t, like I said, I really didn’t, I don’t remember the times when the people from South Africa did come over and, yeah, I mean, I didn’t really feel like we never talked to them about anything really cultural, or not in the readings.
(Message ID No. X3-Z5-21V post-course interview)

When asked about trust and openness, Julie stated:

Julie: . . . I think that a lot of them really, really didn’t know very much about South Africa to begin with, and so I think they would have accepted pretty much anything you told them . . . .
(Message ID No. K5-Z5-21V post-course interview)

When asked about the education influence for you Julie stated:

Julie: I don’t know, I guess it won’t, I’ll probably forget about it in a few weeks.
(Message ID No. S8-Z5-21V post-course interview)

A brash response to a student:

Julie: Jason, just as a final comment: you can’t expect people to know what you’re talking about if you don’t know yourself. Even in your comment you contradicted yourself in what you meant. It’s not like you were referring to any scholarly “everyone” that I was just too ignorant to pick up.
(Message ID No. L7-S3-19 chat session transcript)

Julie’s examples represent an unfavorable attitude toward the class, and even, at times, toward students. She described that she considered the course disorganized, she did not take the class seriously, that other students were not well educated regarding South Africa. She commented that she would probably forget about the class in a few weeks. She had many complaints and answered all questions with negative comments. Her comments were in contrast to the rest of the students and provided a unique perspective on the course.

Unlike her responses in the interview questions and survey, many times, Julie was actively engaged in meaningful dialogue during the synchronous chat sessions. Below are segments from class chat sessions, which demonstrate her purposeful engagement with
others. Julie replied to another student’s question, offered her opinion, and referenced the course reading assignments.

Julie: In response to Brendon’s question- I agree with what Elizabeth said, but also I think that 1) conservative teachers want to portray the image that the U.S. is mostly perfect. (A good quote from Loewen comes from when he said that instructors often want to project the image that “if we ever did anything wrong, it was with the best of intentions.”) And 2) liberal teachers mostly grew up in the Cold War era, and probably learned themselves all of these educational lies, so they themselves don’t know that they’re there.

Julie responded to Brendon’s idea and offered additional points of interest.

Julie: Brendon, I like your points. I think you might be aware of the alternative school Ms. Katherine Dunham was operating in East St. Louis for much of the 1970s and 1980s in which she taught impoverished African-Americans African-influenced dance, as well as languages (to a small degree) such as Wolof. I just wanted to add this to see what people thought about this idea. Ms. Dunham eventually ran up against extreme financial obstacles (no one would fund her) and spent the last years of her life depending on rich friends in New York City.

Below, Julie commented on one of Freire’s arguments.

Julie: One thing I’d like to point out regarding Freire’s argument is that it seems to treat banking education and problem-posing education as mutually exclusive, which I don’t believe it is. While it is important to be able to analyze and build upon one’s knowledge through reflection, there are still many things that I believe people should simply know. For example, while I believe it is more important to be able to reflect upon how the Crusades affected the course of Middle Eastern history (an example of the problem posing method) than it is to be able to list names of people associated with the crusades and their birthdays (which I see as largely inconsequential), I find it equally important that someone know where oxygen comes from, even if a person can’t reflect too deeply on what that means. So it seems to me that it should not be viewed as an issue of problem-posing vs. banking, but rather how best to balance those to maximize education. Anyway, I have to go to my next class now.

Julie’s chat session comments stand in contrast to her statements when being interviewed and answering the online survey. The examples illustrated that Julie responded to student questions, added to their ideas, posed thoughtful questions regarding the course readings,
and generally engaged in meaningful dialogue with others. Even though Julie responded negatively when asked about the course, during the class, she was actively engaged. She provided students with relevant feedback and contributed important dialogue to the course despite her overall negative evaluation of it.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

Overview

The Open University and the University of Phoenix have offered online courses for some time, but the burgeoning of online education may only now be at a tipping point (Gladwell, 2002). Due to the rapid growth and adoption of the Internet and technology, universities around the world have begun offering online courses, and in some cases, entire programs. Online courses afford students the opportunity to take classes in their native country while being connected to students from all over the world.

The online class studied for this dissertation research allowed students from South Africa and the United States to participate while in their respective countries. Unfortunately, the South African students were only able to participate in three online synchronous chat sessions. In a similar course the previous year, there was vigorous interaction between students in the two countries, which led to the proposal to study the subsequent offering of this course. Due to the unfortunate low South African student involvement, however, American students drew upon the comments of the professor, a native of South Africa and other students for diverse viewpoints.

My two research questions focused on the learning, cross-cultural, and online aspects of this course. The two main questions with sub-questions were:

1. What do students learn in a cross-cultural online environment?
   a. How do students describe their learning?
   b. What do students learn from exposure to different perspectives?
c. What aspects of the instructors’ pedagogical approach facilitated students’ learning as described from their perspective?

2. What does an online environment add to or detract from cross-cultural education?
   a. How do students respond to the online components of the course?
   b. What aspects of the online environment support, or detract from, their learning?
   c. What aspects of the online environment support cross-cultural learning from the students’ point of view?

The theoretical framework for the course included sociocultural (Dewey, 1902, 1915, 1916) and critical pedagogy perspectives (Freire, 1970). Despite the advantages of this particular course, it was not without disadvantages, and there were areas that students indicated could be improved. In the sections below, I discuss my research questions and how sociocultural and critical pedagogy contributed to framing and interpreting the results. Last, I discuss the possibilities for future research and recommendations for online cross-culture environments.

Research Question 1: What do Students Learn in a Cross-Cultural Online Environment?

Students learn from a variety of different mediums and environments. The professor developed the course in a way that supported a problem-posing educational environment, instead of an educational banking atmosphere. Freire (1970) argued that educational institutions typically employ methods that treat students as a “bank” to be filled with teacher knowledge. He stated: “Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiques and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat” (p. 58). In the following section, I explore how challenging the students’ worldviews through online chat sessions, assigned readings, and
assignments cultivated a problem-posing and authentic educational atmosphere, which offered students the chance to think critically, learn, and grow both academically and personally.

*Chatting, assignments, and reading.* The professor utilized synchronous communication, written assignments, and reading assignments to promote critical thinking, which in turn was the foundation for “true dialogue” and learning (Freire, 1970). For Freire, dialogue involves critically analyzing and discussing diverse viewpoints. As a result, the students described that the course offered an assortment of opportunities for them to develop critical thinking, as their understanding of cultural norms and worldviews were challenged. In addition, the class offered the opportunity to engage in diverse and open dialogue with others. Susan described how the online synchronous chatting contributed to her learning, as she stated:

Susan: . . . . you know, the synchronous discussion helps everybody understand the things that they weren’t getting, helps everybody understand, I mean, there were a lot of different viewpoints out there about what we did read, oh, and then, also I would say that I thought the professor’s summaries of what we read were really good, because not being from, you know, the educational background, it was good to read basically the interpretation, you know, not from a political science standpoint of what was going on.

(Message ID No. M1-Z5-88H post-course interview)

Developing critical thinking is one of the goals of critical pedagogy and was used in the course to promote learning. Freire (1970) explained how true dialogue only takes place in the presence of critical thinking, when he stated:

Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking - thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and men [women] and admits of no dichotomy between them - thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity - thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (pp. 80-81)
As Freire proposed, critical thinking enabled the students and the professor to engage in what he termed true dialogue. Dialogue supports learning. Students also explained that the assignments helped their understanding of South African issues, and ultimately led to learning and critical thinking. Laura specifically highlighted how she found the reading response papers beneficial.

Laura: Yeah, the reading response paper, I think was one of the most important parts of the course, because, we would read the assignments, we would read the, you know, do all the readings, and then if the professor posted a topic we, you know, talked about the topic, or just basically discuss, our, our understanding of what the topic was, was the article was trying to say and things like that, but I think the response papers gave us time to really reflect on what we were reading, . . . there might have been some things that we didn’t understand in the article, that we got to flesh out in the response paper or there might have been some things that didn’t sit well with us, or that we disagree with in the article, and then we can use the response paper to kind of flesh out those as well so, I think the response papers were very helpful.

(Message ID No. M1-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Assigned readings contributed to the process of critical thinking and learning about South Africa’s educational system, and provided a general foundation for knowledge of South African culture. Laura’s response, also exemplified Dewey’s (1916) argument that learning is a process, as he stated:

Our net conclusion is that life is development, and that developing, growing, is life. Translated into its educational equivalents, this means (i) that the educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end; and that (ii) the educational process is one of continual reorganizing, reconstructing, transforming. (p. 59)

Dewey’s theory provided a lens that brought to light the importance of the process of growth. Laura’s response illustrated the importance of growth as she considered and reconsidered ideas. This was evidenced in her online dialogue with others and her personal response paper reflections. Dewey also suggested that learning continually evolves throughout one’s life. Within this study, students described that they gained new
critical perspectives. Using their newly formed critical lenses, they described how their worldview had evolved, and that they were viewing the world from a different perspective than before. Below, Elizabeth explained how the readings provided context for the class and helped her think differently.

Elizabeth: I did, in terms of identity . . . . like, I’ve always been fascinated by like the dialectical relationship and I covered it in different classes and I learned to think about it in different ways, but I think that looking at it in the context of an African identity, was really fascination for me, cause I remember there was this quote in one of the readings we did, and it was like, if everyone is an African, then no one is an African . . . . and I remember that just really hit home for me and, and it really explained the dialectical relationship or that idea in a different way that I’ve never really considered before, ah yeah, that was one of the biggest things that stuck in my mind.

(Message ID No. A2-Z5-44W post-course interview)

The professor selected reading assignments that encouraged Freire’s (1970) theory of problem-posing education, as they challenged students’ ideologies. Freire described problem-posing education when he said:

In problem-posing education, men [women] develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (pp. 70-71)

Similar to Freire’s suggestion, the assigned readings helped students reevaluate their personal constructed realities and worldviews. Moreover, the assigned readings provided an authentic context, which aided students in their learning process.

Learning and pedagogy: One of the first steps in reform is coming to recognize oppressive worldviews of both the oppressor and the oppressed. Through the development of critical thinking and dialogue, students learned to describe and understand some of the issues facing South Africa. Further, students saw similarities between South Africa and America, as Brendon stated:
Brendon: . . . I’ll be honest, that’s what really, dare I say, blew my mind the most, that, that cause I know about the education of black folks, the negro, in America, but, boy, the parallels, I was like man, wow, it is hauntingly eerily very similar unfortunately, unfortunately, I guess South Africa, we were the bad big brother, like having a big brother who smokes dope, Chris, and you know, beats up the other kids on the block, and you the little brother, you go do it too, you know, we were the bad big brother, we set a very bad example for South Africa and elsewhere too probably, yeah.

(Message ID No. J4-Z5-88Q post-course interview)

Specifically, the professor guided the students in identifying oppressive worldviews, and then guided them in making relevant connections to society, culture, and their own ideologies. Freire illuminated the value of recognizing oppressive ideologies, when he stated: “This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: liberate themselves and their oppressors as well” (p. 28). Students expressed that the course challenged them, and through self-reflection their worldviews evolved. These pedagogical methods constructed an educational environment that promoted active communication and critical analysis. Laura stated:

Laura: Equal access is definitely one [educational issues in South Africa], it seems like there is still a lot of inequities, as far as resources distributed, I think at one of the later classes maybe in one of the last few classes that we had, it [the class] discussed how, some parents try to bus their kids to, ah better neighborhoods so that their children could have a better educational opportunity, because the schools in their own district are very poor not well funded, don’t have a lot of resources and so, the more affluent white schools have those resources, so it’s just the barriers that, that they encounter trying to get their students, their children, to these schools with better resources, how there’s zoning issues that try to bar them out, you know, there’re financial obligations that they try to impose to bar out these, you know, black South African children, so just things like that, just the inequalities in resources, it seems like there’s a technological gap definitely, yeah.

(Message ID No. J4-Z5-44E post-course interview)

Freire’s theory of critical pedagogy, specifically authentic education, contributed to the overall structure and development of the class. This course provided an opportunity for students to recognize and discuss oppressive themes. Freire (1970) suggested:
The methodology of that investigation must likewise be dialogical, affording the opportunity both to discover generative themes and to stimulate people’s awareness in regard to these themes. Consistent with the liberating purpose of dialogical education, the object of the investigation is not men [women] (as if men [women] were anatomical fragments), but rather the thought-language with which men [women] refer to reality, the levels at which they perceive that reality, and their view of the world, in which their generative themes are found. (p. 86)

Students described both discrimination and access to resources as two oppressive themes shared by the United States and South Africa. Similar to Freire’s theorizing, students “discovered” themes as they interacted with the chatting, assignments, and readings. Moreover, students explained that learning about oppressive themes encouraged them to examine their own worldviews and the impact they have on the others. The professor used a critical theory orientation in the development and structure of the course, which provided authentic educational experiences reflecting Freire’s critical pedagogy.

Research. Past research has shown (Hiltz, 1994; Schramm, 1977) that learning in online education can be as effective as face-to-face courses. While the online component contributed to the course, students described learning from other more human factors. For example, students described learning from chatting with other students. Hiltz (1994) suggested that “Thus, it is not that ‘media do not make a difference,’ but that other factors may be more important than or interact with communication medium in affecting educational outcomes for students” (p. 20). It was not the medium of textual chat that contributed to learning, but rather hearing about diverse ideas and experiences of others, that led to learning.

Harasim (2000) reported from her research that students described both learning and satisfaction from online courses. Diverse ideas presented in her course provided an opportunity for self-reflection. In this course, most class sessions started with the
professor asking a critical question that encouraged students to present and defend ideas.

At times, after hearing others’ ideas, students would revise their original premise.

Harasim (2000) described:

Articulation is a cognitive act in which the student presents, defends, develops, and refines ideas. To articulate their ideas, students must organize their thoughts and information into knowledge structures. Active learner participation leads to multiple perspectives on issues, a divergence of ideas, and positions that students must sort through to find meaning and convergence. (p. 53)

Similar to this case, her studies revealed that students learned through diversity of ideas and critical dialogue.

The cross-cultural component of the course exposed the students to diverse ideas and experiences. Specifically, the course enabled students from two different countries to interact while situated in their homeland. It expanded their knowledge of other people in cultures. These differences helped them to compare what they were learning to their own culture and ideas. Students described that the online environment provided the framework for a unique global educational experience. Merryfield’s (2003) research found similar results, as she stated:

Online technologies are the perfect tools for social studies and global education, as these fields focus on learning about the world and its peoples. Online technologies provide opportunities for teachers to experience a more global community than is possible face to face. (p. 165)

The online course created a venue for authentic cross-cultural learning. Similar to Merryfield’s results, students learned from experiencing and participating in a global learning environment.
Research Question 2: What Does an Online Environment Add to or Detract From Cross-Cultural Education?

Like many innovative educational initiatives, online environments provide unique benefits. The following section is an interpretation of how the development of trust, openness, and textual communication influenced the students’ participation in this course. The online environment enabled cross-cultural education, in which students described learning from the diverse ideas of the other students and the professor. Dewey (1916) suggests that the quality of the environment is influential when he stated:

To say that education is a social function, securing direction and development in the immature though their participation in life of the group to which they belong, is to say in effect that education will vary with the quality of life which prevails in a group. Particularly it is true that a society which not only changes but which has the ideal of such change as will improve it, will have different standards and methods of education from one which aims simply at the perpetuation of its own customs. (p. 94)

As Dewey’s theory suggests, the interview data demonstrated that the online atmosphere and the students’ culture, environment, and backgrounds influenced their worldviews and the quality of education within the course. Students shared personal worldviews and life examples through chatting, assignments, and course readings. Therefore, the online cross-culture course provided a rich educational environment and experiences within which students participated and learned.

Openness and trust. Developing trust and openness within an online course can prove challenging, since students are unable to see facial expressions and body language or hear voice inflections. In order to promote trust and openness, the professor framed the course in a way that cultivated an atmosphere for students to feel open to discuss
sensitive topics. The open environment contributed to students trusting the professor, as well as the other students in the class. Cindy described:

Cindy: The openness, I think it’s just the way, the instructor was pretty open to talking about just about anything, and even if he disagreed, he’d be like well that’s your opinion, I might not agree, and so I mean, but he wasn’t like no that’s wrong, that’s bad, don’t, I mean, the instructor, you could tell if he might not necessarily have of agreed with what you said, but at least he was open to hearing you out, and letting you say what you thought, and even if he was questioning it, then maybe he would question you a little further, and say okay, I might not still agree with you, but at least I understand where you were coming from, and I think that helped, kind of, set the mood for the rest, for the whole class, in that you felt, felt open to say what you thought, because you knew the teacher wasn’t going to come down on you . . .

(Message ID No. K5-Z5-44P post-course interview)

The professor framed the online environment in a way that promoted trust and openness, while encouraging authentic education. Freire (1970) suggested:

Authentic education is not carried on by “A” for “B” or by “A” about “B,” but rather by “A” with “B,” mediated by the world--a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. (p. 82)

Students, along with the professor, created an evolving collaborative environment that allowed for semi-structured content, which was open to students’ interests and current cultural climates. The professor actively involved the students throughout the evolution of the course, and therefore created an authentic educational atmosphere. The online environment itself influenced students’ feelings of safety partly because they could not see others in the class and they had time to construct more careful responses than they could have in real time in a class. Laura described:

Laura: well, I think people tend to be more honest when they are using online systems simply because you don’t have that intimidation of being face-to-face with someone, like you’re not looking at the professor per se or you’re not looking at the other classmates per se, and so you might be a little more liberal about, about what you say knowing that people aren’t literally staring and focusing in on you visually anyway, so yeah, I would say that for the most part, I think people are able to be more direct and be more up front about what they want
to say without feeling that tension to have to, you know, come up with the right words right on the spot to say I mean you can pretty much think out your comment, type it, you know, spell check it, make sure that it’s right before you post it, it’s a little bit different feel than being in class.
(Message ID No. R2-J5-17E fifth week interview)

Since the course used textual communication (e.g., chatting, bulletin boards, etc.), students had time to think about a response and sometimes revise the response before posting it for others to see. Textual communication provided time to think before responding and gave less talkative students the opportunity to voice their opinions. Susan described:

Susan: So I think one of the good things about it, is that it gives people kind of a chance to think before they blurt things out, um, when you are all sitting around in a classroom, I think a lot of times people are kind of scared to talk, because they don’t know or there’re the talkers and they say too much, and, so it helps I think to think, like as far as the people who are talking.
(Message ID No. U8-J5-51H fifth week interview)

Trust and openness in the course appears to have been facilitated by the ability to think before responding and their sense that participants were more direct and upfront in their responses. Similar to Dewey’s theory about the social influence on experience, the social atmosphere created by the students and the professor in the online environment, appeared to have enhanced “the quality of life” in the group. Dewey (1916) theorized that social environments influence the activities and experiences of the persons who participate in the group.

A being whose activities are associated with others has a social environment. What he [she] does and what he [she] can do depends upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations of others. A being connected with other beings cannot perform his [her] own activities without taking the activities of others into account. (p. 14)

Much like Dewey’s argument, the environment of the online course impacted the experience and actions of the students. Students described that both the professor and the
online textual communication cultivated a trusting and open atmosphere. Online environments in this study produced unique learning and social situations.

*Diversity and experience.* The interview data suggested that students appreciated and grew from hearing others’ experiences. Students expressed that the diversity of experiences described by the students and the professor brought new ideas to the class. In the post-course interview, Elizabeth stated:

Elizabeth: Well I can say that, I mean, I did enjoy like the classes that they [the African students] did come to and when they were bringing up just some points, and I feel like it’s, I think, it’s important in a class like this where you’re learning about a new culture, that you have not just like the research part, but also like the personal experiences and while Dr. Ndimande was able to share his, like it was interesting to hear the students as well . . . (Message ID No. H7-Z5-44W post-course interview)

This cross-cultural online course provided a venue for students to share and grow from hearing diverse experiences described by students online. Dewey (1902, 1915) suggested that purposeful experiences should shape education and overall development. He (1915) argued that interactions with the world help students make connections between the abstract and concrete.

That we learn from experience, and from books or the saying of others *only* in their vital relation to experiences, are not mere phrases. But the school has been so set apart, so isolated from the ordinary conditions and motives of life, that the place where children are sent for discipline is the one place in the world where it is most difficult to get experience - the mother of all discipline worth the name. (p. 27)

As Dewey theorized, students’ experiences are guided by their aims and purposes. He argued that education should include purposeful experiences in order to promote growth. To promote learning this online course drew upon the previous experiences of students and the professor, as well as their participation in an active and purposeful online course.
Research. Students actively participated in the synchronous chat sessions but were not as active in the asynchronous component of the course. The data suggested that students wanted to be more actively involved in the asynchronous section but, for unknown reasons, were not. At times, the instructor suggested students continue a discussion asynchronously, but students still did not. It is possible that students did not use the asynchronous section because it was not required. In the interview data, students reported that they wished the asynchronous component of the course was utilized more, but that they did not take the initiative to use it. The lack of involvement is particularly interesting given past research (Harasim, 2000) and given the many avenues for social networking (e.g., Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, etc.). In Harasim’s (2000) research, she found that in online environments, students were more social than in face-to-face courses. “These students reported online education to be more social and convivial than face-to-face at a time when computer-mediated communications were being dismissed as ‘cold’ and ‘inhuman.’ They also noted superior learning opportunities” (p. 48). In contrast to this course, research has shown online environments to be more social for students than direct contact.

One advantage of an online environment is the ability to think before “talking” (typing). Students in this study described that using a textual communication system provided the benefit of quality dialogue over quantity. The speed of textual communication was slower than that of auditory communication, but offered students the ability to type out a response, revise, and then post it for others to read. Harasim’s (2000) research had similar results, as she stated:

The collaborative nature of the conferences is illustrated not only by the quantity of participation but also by the quality of the interaction. Analysis of selected
contents of the online courses indicates that learners formulated positions and responded to their peers with active questioning, elaboration, and/or debate. (p. 49)

Like Harasim’s (2000) research, the data illustrated that this online course also generated high quality dialogue.

Students described that not being able to see each other contributed to openness and trust. The anonymity created in the online environment helped lessen stereotypes often triggered by visual communication. For example, because students did not see each other, they did not need to be concerned with facial gestures or appearance that can lead to discrimination. Merryfield’s (2003) research found similar results.

The triggers of visual and aural differences often subconsciously make people uncomfortable or otherwise constrain people’s abilities to listen, interact, and learn from others. The facelessness of online interaction frees people to interact without at least some of the inhibitions they have in face-to-face classrooms. Online we all focus on what people write. What people learn changes significantly when they are more able to get beyond triggers of difference and engage in discussions on cultural commonalities and differences, learn from the experiences and knowledge of people from other cultures, and work with them in assignments and projects. When cultural consultants [or faculty] work online, they are better able to counter stereotypes and misinformation and provide easy access to good resources. (pp. 160-161)

Similar to Merryfield’s research, the online course created an environment that encouraged students to focus on learning, and not on what Merryfield described as triggers of differences. As a result, students were able to freely communicate without being as concerned with stereotypes. On the other hand, it may also be the case that students who are working in a second language or do not feel comfortable with written communication may feel uncomfortable in an online environment. There were no indications of this in the data from this study.
Critical Pedagogy

Several aspects of Freire’s (1970) theory of critical pedagogy guided the analyses and interpretation of the synchronous chat sessions. Recognizing oppression and ideology transformation were two valuable concepts used when examining the data. Freire (1970) explained the importance of these concepts when he stated: “To surmount the situation of oppression, men [women] must first critically recognize its causes, so that through transforming action they can create a new situation, one which makes possible the pursuit of a fuller humanity” (pp. 31-32). While the course did not offer a direct opportunity for transformation action, it did offer an environment for recognizing oppression and transformation of personal ideologies. The third and most important Freirian concept in critical pedagogy is evidence of problem-posing education. Freire (1970) defined problem-posing education as: “Problem-posing education bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality, thereby responding to the vocation of persons as beings who are authentic only when engaged in inquiry and creative transformation” (p. 71). One example of problem-posing education is seen below as the professor asked a student to clarify his statement during a synchronous chat:

Jason: I think it would be useful to look at the idea of regional African languages

Brendon: Cool.

Jason: like Swahili lingala Zulu Wolof Arabic
Jason: for scholarship
Jason: of course with consideration to other smaller languages

Dr. Ndimande: Look at them (languages) for what, Jason...say more please

Brendon: But how many “regional” languages would that be??

Jason: I mean in terms of an africanization
Dr. Ndimande: Ohhh, I see.

Jason: that way instruction is in an African language, but also can reach the max. amount of people
Jason: of course this is problematic in terms of choosing which languages,
Jason: but good to consider
Jason: also it is important to remember
Jason: that it plays to the strength of Africa
(Message ID No. L7-S3-19 chat session transcript)

The two minute chat section is representative of most of the synchronous chat sessions. Generally, each class session started off with a question that encouraged critical thinking regarding the weekly reading assignments. Using the hand-raise mode, students and the professor participated in dialogue, and when helpful, the professor asked follow-up questions. Near the end of most discussions, the professor disabled the hand-raise mode and allowed students to talk freely regarding the original question. This method used dialogue in a more structured approach in the beginning of the discussion, and a more open and quickly paced format toward the end. The above example is illustrative of the professor asking a critical follow-up question and the open dialogue between students near the end of a chat session. Like Freire (1970) theorized, reflection and inquiry facilitated learning in the course.

Disadvantages and Limitations

As with most courses, this online class was not without disadvantages and limitations. In this study, students described miscommunication, the speed of the course, and a lack of developing personal relationships as hindering their overall educational experience. The limitations of the online environment, to some extent were due to the restrictions of WebCT. Nonetheless, given the current limitations of WebCT and other
online course management software, some of the limitations could be overcome. Students
offered suggestions to minimize some of the issues they described. Identifying the
limitations and disadvantages associated with this particular course, may be helpful to
future cross-cultural online classes.

Miscommunication during the online textual communication happened a few
times in the course. Students explained that by using textual communication, visual and
audio cues were absent, and therefore at times, it was challenging to convey their
thoughts as intended. When miscommunication did occur, students typically clarified
their statements with follow-up text.

Another disadvantage mentioned was the general speed of the course, which
appeared to students to be slower than a face-to-face course. The speed of the course was
influenced by different factors. The typing speed of the students affected the flow and
speed of the discussion. In addition, the “hand-raise mode,” influenced the general speed
of the synchronous chat sessions. Using this method, only one student, the student with
the “mic,” was able to post comments to the chat session. After the student posted his or
her response, the professor had the option to pass the mic to another student who had his
or her hand-raised. For the most part, students expressed mixed feelings regarding the
hand-raising mode. They understood the need to keep the course on topic and under
control, but felt using the hand-raise mode limited the flow of conversation. At times,
they would have their hand raised, but they would not have a response typed out or the
topic would have changed, so they would need to revise what they had prepared.

A few of the students suggested that a second private or second chat option be
available. This would allow students to privately chat with each other while the
synchronous chat was taking place. WebCT allows for private chat sessions, but during the course, it was disabled by default. Another suggestion was to have color-coded text for each respective topic. Because the conversation often changed topics, since responses to a question might lead the discussion down a different path than the original question, a color-coded text system would have helped organized ideas and topics better.

Students expressed that they did not develop personal and social relationships with others in the course because they lacked of face-to-face time, visual communication, and possibly the lack of group projects. One suggestion to help promote social development was to make asynchronous communication mandatory, as this would require students to communicate back and forth, and would promote outside of class communication (similar to a face-to-face course). Another suggestion was to pair one student from each respective country for group collaborative projects and assignments. Group work would support building social and academic relationships between the students, and create a meaningful learning experience.

Recommendations and Future Research

The results of this study suggest that when designing and implementing an online cross-culture course, one should consider the following points:

1. Utilize asynchronous communication because it facilitates social connections between students as well as offers opportunities for additional communication and self-reflection.

2. Combine course components, such as synchronous chat sessions, asynchronous bulletin boards, reading assignments, written assignments, and group projects to provide students with multiple learning opportunities and experiences.

3. Maintain a balanced number of students from each respective area or country in order to provide diverse worldviews within the class.
4. Create educational environments framed by critical pedagogy perspectives in order to provide opportunities for critical thinking, reflection, and dialogue about oppression.

The overall value of cross-cultural online learning is supported by Elizabeth’s comments in her interview at the end of the course:

Chris: great, how do you think this education will influence you in the long term academically and then both socially and culturally?

Elizabeth: okay, academically, I think I probably would try some more online classes, ah, and also this is my first African studies class as well so, I definitely look forward to taking more. Socially and culturally I think that I’m just more interested in learning about other cultures, but not just, you know, when we think of culture in general we think of like their food and their language, I think, on a deeper level then that, like in terms of like identity and, you know, the deeper issues that are in their country, not just looking at the name or as food or culture, but more than that.

(Message ID No. S8-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Chris: you mentioned you be willing to take another online class, is that directly influenced by this online class?

Elizabeth: I think so, because I had a positive experience, I’ve always been kind of weary about them and not really sure, so I think I had a pretty positive experience in this class.

(Message ID No. O9-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Chris: what really led to that positive experience?

Elizabeth: it wasn’t one of those classes where I felt like I just did the work because I had to, and I’ve had quite a few of those classes this semester, you know, so ah, like I, I actually enjoyed it, I mean this was my favorite class actually, and I felt like I learned a lot, and I think that all that contributed to them.

(Message ID No. O9-Z5-44W post-course interview)

Elizabeth’s described how she learned about “deep issues” regarding culture and describes the online course as a “positive experience.” Cross-cultural and online teaching can be complicated, but when implemented well, it can have a positive and meaningful impact on students.
As this was a case study of a single cross-cultural online class, Yin (2003) suggests it is important to recognize the limitations of generalizations when he stated:

Under these circumstances, the mode of generalization is ‘analytic generalization,’ in which a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the study. (p. 32)

It is fair to assume that the results of this study are relatively constrained to this particular course. That being said, it is also reasonable to presume that the general results are beneficial in understanding cross-cultural online education, as Stake (2005) argued:

But people can learn much that is general from single cases. They do that partly because they are familiar with other cases and they add this one in, thus making a slightly new group from which to generalize, a new opportunity to modify old generalizations. (p. 85)

Understanding the limitations of this case study, future research can contribute to our understanding of the benefits and limitations of cross-cultural online courses. The following questions could be explored: What are the similarities and differences between culturally different cross-cultural online education courses? What are the similarities in face-to-face multicultural classes and cross-cultural online education? What pedagogical strategies enhance learning and cross-cultural awareness?
Overview

As I reflected on the study, I realized that there were a set of “tensions” within the course. On a broad scale, there was a tension between the cross-cultural component and the online component. Dewey’s (1902, 1915, 1916) works suggest that he too recognized tensions in educational environments. For example, his book, *The Child and the Curriculum*, describes the necessary interdependence between the “child” and the “curriculum.” The titles of other books, *The School and Society* and *Democracy and Education* also capture similar interactive tensions. For Dewey these seemingly opposing aspects of schooling and society were in the end interactive and mutually dependent.

The tensions I identified were likewise interconnected, interdependent, and offered both advantages and disadvantages. In the sections below, I explore the tensions in this study--cross-cultural and online, cross-cultural and multicultural, reading and experience, problem-posing education and banking education, quality dialogue and quantity dialogue, synchronous and asynchronous, and a positive participant and a negative participant.

*Cross-Cultural and Online*

The first tension I identified in my research was between cross-cultural goals and online learning. These could be described as two separate ways of thinking about this course. First, the study could be described as a way to conduct cross-culture education (i.e., online), or the study could be described as an online course that was cross-cultural. The
differences between these two are what I initially considered foreground (online) and background (cross-cultural). I struggled throughout this study to determine which component was the foreground and which was the background. Rather than choosing an either/or separation, I concluded from my data analysis that there was a productive tension between the two. It is possible to separate the two components, but when viewing them as tensions, they can be seen as highly interconnected, as the participants did. For example, students described learning from the cross-cultural component (e.g., diversity of ideas and experiences). However, the cross-cultural component would not have been possible without the online component.

It would be possible within this tension to emphasize one component more than the other, that is, focus primarily on the online technology aspects of the course. In this case, there would not be a tension, but rather a focus, or a foregrounding of one component over the other. Originally, I was primarily interested in the technical aspects of the course. As I watched what was happening to the students’ learning through the online course, I began to see the productive tension between the value of the online component and students’ learning. As the tension between these two became more visible to me, I saw a productive interaction between the two and this produced a richer study than just looking at one side of the tension.

Cross-Cultural and Multicultural

The second tension I identified was between the cross-cultural and multicultural components. For the purposes this study, I defined cross-cultural as crossing national borders and defined multicultural as not crossing national borders. The cross-cultural component provided the US students with the opportunity to interact with South African
participants and hear about their experiences. The multicultural component allowed students to learn from their peers in the same country. For example, when discussing the concept of “I” versus “we,” students described learning from the different perspectives of both the US and South African participants. Both the cross-cultural and multicultural components were in tension, but were also essential for student learning, as they each provided ideas and learning experiences that interacted. These two components allowed the US and South African students to learn with and about one another. Freire (1970) argued:

Authentic education is not carried on by “A” for “B” or by “A” about “B,” but rather by “A” with “B,” mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, given rise to views or opinions about it. (p. 82)

In the ideal case, cross-cultural and multicultural education would both be considered “authentic education.” I would argue that in many cross-cultural and multicultural classes, students learn “about” and “with” each other. Even though the South African students did not participate for as long as planned, the cross-cultural component was still an important asset for learning. In spite of fewer numbers of South African students, the professor, guest speaker, and readings provided cross-cultural learning experiences. The diversity among the US participants provided multicultural learning. The way students described learning and the interaction between the professor and the students led me to conclude that authentic cross-cultural and multicultural learning occurred.

While I have maintained a distinction between these terms multicultural and cross-cultural for purposes because they are used this way in the research literature, I want to again acknowledge that multicultural education is currently conceived by most theorists (Nieto, 1999; Sleeter, 1999; Hidalgo, Chavez-Chavez, & Ramage, 1996) to
include cross-cultural and global perspectives, and further cross-cultural experiences are likely to happen for students in many US classroom. In addition, technology and media have brought the world to students regardless of where they live or irrespective of their immediate environment.

Readings and Experience

A third tension I discovered was between reading assignments (informational) and experience. The addition of South African students, a guest speaker, and an instructor who was a native of South Africa, provided students with an opportunity to learn from their different cultural experiences. In addition, the professor selected informative articles, book chapters, and other reading assignments that provided students with essential information. The information that reading assignments offered were essential in building a basic understanding of key issues and, as students reported, the differences stimulated self-reflection. Unfortunately, readings by themselves can be seen as merely factual and disconnected from deeper issues. Having the description of South African persons’ lived experiences offered a deeper understanding of the topics studied. Dewey (1902, 1915, 1916) argued that both the environment and educative experiences are necessary for learning. He stated:

That we learn from experience, and from books or the saying of others only in their vital relation to experiences, are not mere phrases. But the school has been so set apart, so isolated from the ordinary conditions and motives of life, that the place where children are sent for discipline is the one place in the world where it is most difficult to get experience - the mother of all discipline worth the name. (1915, p. 27)

Students were able to read essential background information from a reading assignment and then connect what they read with their own experiences as well as others in the class. This content knowledge and different perspectives were critical in connecting
information with lived experiences. For example, students read information that led to a question regarding how the concepts of “I” and “we” were relevant to 21st century Africa. The instructor posed the question in order to explore the role of individualism (“I”) and collectivism (“we”) in South Africa. The readings offered students fundamental knowledge of Africa, and then talking with the South African students and the professor encouraged a more holistic understanding. For example, one of the US students explained how he thought “we” was romanticized too much in South Africa, and that “I” and “we” were the same. However, a South African student described her experience living in a “we” oriented society and argued that there should be more “we” to help establish a “common cultural” in South Africa. I think one of the benefits of this course was that students were able to connect informational knowledge with their own and others’ personal experiences. Too often this tension is missing, and students then have difficulty connecting what they learned inside the classroom to practical situations.

*Problem-Posing Education and Banking Education*

The fourth tension I identified was with problem-posing and banking education. The problem-posing approach encourages critical thinking through dialogue and self-reflection. Banking education views students as “banks” to be filled with knowledge. The instructor is seen as the giver of knowledge, and he/she provides that knowledge to fill students’ banks. For me the tension was between the foundational knowledge students gained from readings (banking education) and the critical questions the instructor posed during each class (problem-posing). Freire (1970) suggested:

> In problem-posing education, men [women] develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation. (pp. 70-71)
Through the critical questions asked by the professor, students developed ideas and were challenged by others to defend their ideas. This process encouraged self-reflection and often caused students to revise their original arguments. In this study, students gained valuable foundational knowledge from assigned readings, and then later in the synchronous sessions, the instructor implemented problem-posing education. Students described the weekly readings as invaluable and that they could not have participated in the course without them. They also stated that the synchronous chat sessions were a valuable learning opportunity, because they were required to be self-reflective and argue their point of view regarding complex and sensitive topics. After reflection on this tension, I would argue the importance of keeping a productive tension between foundational knowledge and a pedagogy of problem-posing education. Using this approach can benefit students’ learning through authentic self-reflection and critical thinking.

Quality Dialogue and Quantity Dialogue

The fifth tension I identified was between the quality and quantity of dialogue. It is important that students participated in quality discussions, but it is equally important that they had an opportunity to fully explain their thoughts (quantity). Using a textual system along with the hand-raise mode encouraged quality, but also limited how often (quantity) students could talk. Students certainly could type a large amount of text, but there was a limit to the amount due to constraints imposed by the technology. The quality of information exchanged was thoughtful because students had the opportunity to critically think before responding (self-reflection). Freire (1970) argued:

Finally, true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking - thinking which discerns an indivisible solidarity between the world and men.
[women] and admits of no dichotomy between them - thinking which perceives reality as process, as transformation, rather than as a static entity - thinking which does not separate itself from action, but constantly immerses itself in temporality without fear of the risks involved. (pp. 80-81)

I would argue that the use of textual communication in this course encouraged quality dialogue in tension with quantity. Students were encouraged to think before they posted, but they also had to be aware of time and space constraints given the amount of “talk time” they had. In new situations or with sensitive topics, in order to keep dialogue open, it is important that students participate in quality discussions, but also have the opportunity to fully explain their thoughts. It is easy for quality and quantity dialogue to get out of synch and not be in a productive tension. Sometimes the technology complicates communication, and sometimes technology facilitates it. Given the technical constraints, disabling the hand-raise mode would have allowed students more opportunity for discussion. However, there would have been less structure to the chat session, as students would have been free to “talk.” In addition, moderating the flow of dialogue would have been more difficult. To help ensure that both quality and quantity dialogue occur, it is important for instructors to be sensitive to the environment and technology used in communication.

_Synchronous and Asynchronous_

The synchronous and asynchronous components were the sixth tension I identified. The synchronous component of the course was the main medium used for instruction and dialogue. Students gathered for 90 minutes every Thursday and participated in guided dialogue led by the instructor. The asynchronous component, which was similar to an Internet forum or bulletin board, allowed students to post messages online virtually anytime. I viewed the synchronous component of the course in
tension with the asynchronous component because dialogue did not end when the synchronous session was over, but rather could have continued asynchronously. Students did not participate much asynchronously since it was not a required part of the course. As a result of not having an active asynchronous component, discussions in the synchronous sessions did not continue to build once the session was over.

Both synchronous and asynchronous components offered a social environment where students could further explore course themes or other issues they wanted to discuss. Dewey (1916) stated:

A being whose activities are associated with others has a social environment. What he [she] does and what he [she] can do depends upon the expectations, demands, approvals, and condemnations of others. A being connected with other beings cannot perform his [her] own activities without taking the activities of others into account. (p. 14)

In one respect, not utilizing the asynchronous component may have hindered the discussions in the synchronous sessions, as students did not explore topics outside of the class sessions. Dewey described social environments as influential because people take the approval of others into consideration when communicating. Certainly synchronous and asynchronous communication need not occur together. Classes can even consist exclusively of synchronous or asynchronous communication.

Synchronous and asynchronous components are both valuable tools in an online program, but a productive tension between them may have advantages. Having primarily synchronous sessions in a course can lead to open dialogue during class. However, developing a strong asynchronous component can help build upon the synchronous dialogue and might help develop the social environment and student relationships.
Further research is needed to explore the ways in which synchronous and asynchronous online interaction work best in different online situations.

*Positive Participant and Negative Participant*

The final tension I discovered was with the positive participant and the participant that had negative responses toward the course. While all but one of the students described the course as a positive experience, there was both a very positive participant and a very negative participant. These two participants can be seen as in tension with each other, as they are quite different even though they participated in the same course. For example, the positive participant described the course as her favorite class of the semester, and the negative participant indicated she would forget about the course in a few weeks. Interestingly, even though the one participant described the course negatively, she actively participated in the course. For example, she engaged in critical dialogue with other students and challenged their viewpoints. She also displayed a deep knowledge of African history. These two participants offered unique perspectives about the course, and important questions emerged because of both their participation. For example: What pedagogical strategies encouraged the positive response?, What can be learned from her response that can be used in future cross-cultural online courses?, When are critical pedagogy strategies most effective?, and How can we learn from such negative response to better implement online education?. I found it useful to examine what influenced the positive participant’s learning to view culture more deeply and to “think differently” about ideas of identity (e.g., What does it mean to be African?). I also found it beneficial to explore what led the other student to describe the course as unorganized. Interestingly, both participants appreciated and learned from the assignments, which suggested that
well-developed assignments provided an important learning opportunity for students regardless of their response to the class. Given both responses, it could be that the positive participant simply had unfavorable classes for the semester, and therefore when comparing courses, the online class seemed best. The negative participant could simply be a negative person and possessed a negative outlook on everything, or she could have had a specific negative reaction to aspects of the course or the course in general. In most classes, there exists this tension between positive and less positive student responses. The importance of both kinds of responses is that they have helped us to evaluate the course with the aim of meeting the needs of all students.

Summary

All the tensions discussed here were interconnected and dependent on each other for optimal learning. For example, the cross-cultural aspect of the course could not have existed without the online portion. It was apparent from my data analyses that these two broad components were integrated and interrelated and related to student learning. Once I recognized this initial broad tension, I began to see other tensions within the course. The results of my study overall suggested that this cross-cultural online education course supported students’ learning in a variety of way. Using tensions as a construct may be helpful in developing and evaluating of future cross-cultural online courses.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A

SYLLABUS

TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT AFRICA (Online Course Offering)

Department of Curriculum & Instruction and Center for African Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA

In collaboration with the Department of Social Studies Education, Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria, SA

Instructor: Professor Bekisizwe S. Ndimande
Email: ndimande [at] illinois [dot] edu
Office hours: By appointment

Welcome! This course is primarily designed for pre-service and in-service educators in the elementary, middle, and high schools, especially those educators who teach or intend to teach social studies. It will cover historical and contemporary issues in various countries in Africa. It is intended to help students increase their awareness of and develop classroom curricula that represent students of different nationalities and diverse cultural backgrounds. This will help develop the link between intellectual capacity and progressive teaching pedagogy.

School curriculum in most nations has traditionally been Western-oriented in content and perspective. This course will critically examine images, histories, symbols, and representations of Africa in the global/Western media and school textbooks. The course will examine the implication of the way in which Africa is presented in the curriculum and in social discourse in general. Therefore, the course is designed to interrogate these images and representation of Africa. Put simply, the course will increase our understanding of Africa and help us dispel the existing myth of a “monolithic” Africa, thereby helping us to connect classroom curricula to diverse socio-cultural groups. In addition, the course will examine the portrayal of marginalized peoples in Western countries, for example, the portrayal of marginalized communities, such as African Americans, Native Americans, etc, in the United States hasn’t been unproblematic either and this would be examined in this course.

The second half of the course will then turn to focus on contemporary issues in Africa such as African renaissance, new partnerships, the impact of globalization on Africa, privatization, and the influence of markets on social policies. One of the crucial themes will be to understand the impact of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programs (ESAP) on countries such as Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa, and others.
The course is also designed to create meaningful and productive intercultural dialogues on complex issues in African societies between students in the United States and South Africa, for instance initiating a dialogue on the current cultural or political events in South Africa and vice versa, and will not be limited to these two countries only.

While the course will cover various countries in Africa, it will provide an in-depth examination of the socio-political and educational issues in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa. For example, we will look at the policies of apartheid education, including its teacher education programs to evaluate how these created different socio-political conditions for marginalized peoples in South Africa. We will also examine the post-apartheid curriculum and educational policy changes. Since education is intertwined with other social institutions, we will examine the impact of globalization, neo-liberalism, and neo-conservatism on education and on other social institutions.

**Format:** This is a participation-intensive online course which requires **90 minutes per week synchronous format**, i.e. while we can work from our different corners of the world, we will be required to be on our computers together 1 hour, 30 minutes every week. We will meet every Thursday for our synchronous discussion, but will decide on the time just before classes begin. Synchronous sessions are devoted to discussions of our readings and the broader issues, i.e. theoretical and comparative, raised by our literature.

**Course Requirements:** Each student must come to the synchronous session prepared to discuss the required readings. Part of that preparation includes writing a brief (1-2 paragraphs) reaction or response paper. Reaction papers will be posted by students at the end of each session (i.e. on the day we discuss them). These reflection papers will not be graded, but will count toward your participation and attendance in synchronous sessions, which constitute **30%** of your final grade. The response papers will help us raise questions, agreements, and reactions to the material we read for this course. For example, the response papers would reflect on issues you agree or disagree with, issues that puzzle you and what you understand better than before. Additional requirements are aimed at developing your understanding of African issues and teaching and learning of marginalized communities in different parts of the world.

(A) **Project Proposal** (constitutes **20%** of your final grade). You will be required to write a two-page proposal of your final project that you will post so that all members of the course can give you feedback. This is a precursor to your final project. Students are encouraged to perceive the proposal presentation as a workshop where students give each other feedback. Students shall have emailed or posted their proposals to the instructor/website **one week before** the discussion of individual proposals. All students are responsible for reading all of these BEFORE the synchronous session so that the session can be devoted to constructive comments and critique.

(B) **Final Project** (constitutes **50%** of the final grade). The final project for this course requires students to develop an African oriented unit that they can take back and use at school or at college or at a relevant setting. For example, 1) students can design a critical social studies curricular unit/grade appropriate to post-colonial Africa. 2) Students can
also conduct a critical educational profile of one African country: what does the educational system look like and provide a critical analysis of such school policy. 3) Students can also choose an institution (primary, secondary or tertiary) in the United States or any country in the world and find out how the marginalized peoples are positioned within that particular education system/curriculum and whether this is a legitimate way of teaching or not, and why. 4) Students can also propose a topic related to the course and discuss with me first to approve if the proposed topic can count as a final project.

**Consultation:** I can be contacted by email if you have any question regarding the seminar and/or when you need to discuss your research proposals and final paper. You can also contact Christopher Devers at devers [at] illinois [dot] edu and/or e-support at support [at] up [dot] ac [dot] za for any technical problems.

I encourage all members to actively participate in the synchronous session and engage the readings in advance. I welcome constructive suggestions on the class structure and/or the course in general. As I mentioned above, synchronous participation, mid-term proposal presentation, and the final project constitute the final grade for this course. Please feel free to email me if you have any questions regarding the course ndimande [at] illinois [dot] edu Again, welcome!

**Course Themes:**

**THEME 1** - Curriculum Presentation of Africa and of Marginalized Peoples in the United States

**THEME 2** - African Renaissance

**THEME 3** - Africa in the Post-Modern World: The challenges of neo-liberalism and globalization

**THEME 4** - Education in apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa

**ASYNCHRONOUS SESSION**

August 23, 2007

**SYNCHRONOUS SESSIONS**

THEME 1 - Curriculum Presentation of Africa and of Marginalized Peoples in the United States

August 30, 2007
INTRODUCTION

1. Instructor introduces the course, explains course expectations, grading system, etc.

2. Students write and post their autobiographical statements so that we all become familiar with each others’ backgrounds. Keep these within a paragraph. I also encourage students to send an electronic picture of self to be posted next to your profile.

3. Questions about the course in general

4. Short exercise

5. Time Permitting: Students work in tandem for further introduction

September 6, 2007

THE POLITICS OF EDUCATION: AN OVERVIEW

Critical view of school curriculum
- What constitutes education
- Contestation and curriculum
- Class, race, culture and domination in curriculum
- Curriculum and social justice

Readings Due:

- Freire, P. (1971) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Chapter 2)
- Submit response paper

September 13, 2007

Socio-political history of education in the West
- The misleading reports
- Curriculum and Native Americans
- Curriculum and African-Americans

Readings Due

- Any Western history textbook at your nearest library
- Submit response paper
September 20, 2007

Contextualizing African education

- Curriculum presentation in colonial era
- Post-colonial curriculum
- Afro-centric curriculum for revitalization

Readings Due:

- Tedla, E. (1995) *Sankofa* (Chapters 4 and 6)
- Any African history textbook at your nearest library
- Submit Response paper

Some questions

Why is it important to increase our awareness of African perspectives in the US and SA classrooms?
Why is it important to teach a broad multicultural curriculum in US and SA classrooms?
How would the following popular figures be portrayed by the media or history and why?

a) Rosa Parks
b) Nelson Mandela
c) Robert Sobukwe
d) Robert Mugabe
e) Malcolm X
f) Any popular figure of your choice

THEME 2- African Renaissance

September 27, 2007

African Renaissance

Reading Due

- Submit response paper

Instructor points to key issues in this weeks’ reading (power point)
Students from the United States post their views on Africanization
Students from South Africa and other parts of the world respond to students from the United States.
Some questions

1. What is the difference between an African and an Africanist, if any?
2. Who constitutes those categories?
3. Is Mbeki’s parliamentary speech relevant in the present African political and demographic presentation? Why?
4. What is your opinion on More’s presentation of the concept “Renaissance” in Africa?

October 4, 2007

Africanization and Education

Readings Due

-Ngugi wa Thiong’o. (1986). Decolonizing the mind (Chapter 1)
-Response paper

Instructor points to key issues in this weeks’ reading (power point)
Students from the Africa post their views on Africanization and Education
Students from United States and other parts of the world respond to students from the United States.

Some questions

1. Do you agree with the proposals brought forth by Ngugi and Ndimande regarding the language policy in African education?
2. To what extent is Brock-Utne’s argument on African Universities as “copies” of European universities?

October 11, 2007

Dilemma and Challenges of Africanization

Readings Due:

-Submit response paper

Instructor points to key issues in Horsthemke’s article (power point)
Students from the United States post their views on Horsthemke
Students from South Africa and other parts of the world respond to students from the United States.

THEME 3 - Africa and Post-Modern World: The challenges of neo-liberalism and globalization

October 18, 2007

Globalization and its Impact on Africa

Readings Due

-Response paper
-Project proposal
  - Globalization and Africa
  - Main features of globalization
  - The colonial legacy in Africa

October 25, 2007

Proposal Presentations and Discussion

November 1, 2007

A. Neo-liberalism, Privatization, and Markets in Africa

Readings Due

-Apple (2001) “*Educating the “right” way.*” Chapter 2
-Bond (2005) “*Elite transition.*” Chapter 1
-Brock-Utne (2000) “*Whose education for all?*” Chapter 1
-Garson (2000) “*Johannesburg and New Jersey water*”
-Response paper

Instructor points to key issues in Apple, Brock-Utne’s articles (power point)
Students from South Africa post their views on Apple, Bond and Brock-Utne
Students from United States and other parts of the world respond to students from the South Africa.

B. The Impact of Economic Structural Adjustment Programs on Africa

-Impact on education (Read Apple, 2001)
-Role of donors and of African elites in education (Read, Brock-Utne, 2000)
THEME 4-Education in Apartheid and Post-Apartheid South Africa

November 8, 2007

Apartheid Education

Readings Due

- Submit response paper

Guest Speaker: Professor Mokubung Nkomo-University of Pretoria

November 15, 2007

Post apartheid Education

Readings Due

- Submit response paper

November 22, 2007

No Class-Thanksgiving

November 29, 2007

Apartheid and post-apartheid education (Cont’d)

December 6, 2007

Project Presentations

December 13, 2007

Project Presentations and Evaluations

Final Papers Due
PRESCRIBED READINGS


ADDITIONAL READINGS


Desai, A (2002). We are the poors: Community struggles in post-apartheid South Africa. New York: Monthly review Press.

Freire, P. (1971) Pedagogy of the oppressed


APPENDIX B

SCRIPT

Welcome! My name is Chris Devers and this is Dr. Marilyn Johnston-Parsons. We are conducting a research project involving this class in conjunction with the class at the University of Pretoria. You are invited to participate in this study entitled “Learning through online cross-cultural education.” The purpose of this study is to investigate what can be learned about students’ learning through online cross-cultural education. Basically, at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, you will be asked to evaluate this course in terms of its social, academic, technological, and cultural components in both a written and interview format. The interview sessions will be conducted either in person, online, or over the phone, while the surveys will be conducted online. We are excited about what we may learn through this study. Please feel free to be open and honest in your completion of the survey and in responding to the interview questions as we will not be involved in the grading of this course. We are grateful for your participation! In a few days you will receive an email asking if you would like to participate in the study. If you are willing to participate, simply replay back to the email indicating your participation. Your willingness to participate, or not, will not in any way influence your grade in this course. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw at any point without penalty of any kind. Again, only Dr. Johnston-Parsons and myself will be aware of your participation and all responses will be kept confidential. We appreciate your willingness to help us in this study. Are there any questions?
APPENDIX C

ORIGINAL EMAIL

Hello <insert name>!

Welcome to Teaching and Learning about Africa taught by Dr. Bekisizwe Ndimande. Dr. Marilyn Johnston-Parsons and myself are conducting a study called “Learning through online cross-cultural education” between the University of Illinois and the University of Pretoria. The purpose of this study is to investigate what can be learned about students’ learning through online cross-cultural education. At the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, you will be asked to evaluate this course in terms of its social, academic, technological, and cultural components in both a written and interview format. The interview sessions will be conducted either in person, online, or over the phone, while the surveys will be conducted online. Again, only Dr. Johnston-Parsons and myself will be aware of your participation, which will have no effect on your course grade, etc. If you agree to participate, you can withdraw at any point without penalty of any kind and all responses will be kept confidential. The instructor for the course, Dr. Ndimande, will not have access to your responses and will not be involved in data analysis until grades have been submitted. Attached is a copy of the consent form to participate in this study. If you are willing to participate, please reply to this email indicating your participation. Thank you for your time and consideration! We appreciate your willingness to help us in this study.

Dr. Marilyn Johnston-Parsons and Chris Devers
You are invited to participate in a research study entitled “Learning through online cross-cultural education.” The purpose of this study is to investigate what can be learned about students’ learning through online cross-cultural education.

Information:
In this study, participants will be asked to complete three interview sessions during the beginning, middle, and end of the semester, and to complete a series of online questionnaires hosted on surveymonkey.com or WebCT. The interview sessions will be conducted at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, the University of Pretoria in South Africa, or over the phone. The data collection of the study will last from August 23, 2007 to January 01, 2008.

Risks:
In each interview, participants will be asked a series of directed and open-ended questions, and participate in an online survey. Although this may pose some risk, it is not more than one might reasonably experience in interview, class discussion, etc.

Benefits:
This research offers benefits both to the participants themselves and to society. The participants may benefit from a deeper understanding of oneself and others. This study will benefit society by providing potential understanding for cross-cultural online learning.

Confidentiality:
All responses will be kept strictly confidential. Only the investigator Marilyn Johnston-Parsons and her research staff will have access to the data, and responses will be identified only by an ID number. There may be publications resulting from this study, but they will not contain any material that could identify you as a subject.

Contact:
The experimenter will answer questions about your participation now. If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact Marilyn Johnston-Parsons at 325 Education Building, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL 61820, (217) 244-3577, or by email at marilynj [at] illinois [dot] edu. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the office for the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Suite 203, MC-419 528 East
Green Street Champaign, IL 61820, 217-333-2670, or by email at irb [at] illinois [dot] edu.

**Participation:**
Your participation is completely voluntary; you may refuse to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, your data will be returned to you or destroyed.

**Consent:**
I have read this form and received a copy of it. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction. Through this email consent, I agree to take part in this study.

Subject’s initials ________

________________________________________________________________________

Subject’s signature                        Date

________________________________________________________________________

Subject’s name (please print)            Phone Number

________________________________________________________________________

Investigator’s signature                 Date
Dear <insert name>,

This is a letter of amendment to the permission form you signed earlier to allow me to use your surveys and interviews as data for my dissertation study. As you will remember, the focus of my dissertation was learning through online cross-cultural education. Since analyzing the data, my adviser and I have decided that it would be helpful to my study to use the online discussions, reading responses, reflection papers, and other aspects of online course as data to consider the topics and interactions that occurred online. I would like to ask your permission to use all aspects of the online course in my dissertation research. As before, if you agree, all responses will be kept confidential. Again, my role in the course was to help technically, and I had no involvement in grades or evaluations. Attached is a revised copy of the consent form that will allow me to have access to all aspects of the online course. If you are willing to allow me this access, please reply to this email indicating your acceptance. Thank you for your time and consideration! We appreciate your willingness to help us in this study.

Dr. Marilyn Johnston-Parsons and Chris Devers
APPENDIX F

UPDATED INFORMED CONSENT

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Informed Consent Statement

You were invited to participate in a research study entitled “Learning through online cross-cultural education.” The purpose of this study was to investigate what could be learned about students’ learning through online cross-cultural education. The project investigators were Dr. Marilyn Parsons and Chris Devers in the Curriculum and Instruction Department.

Information:
Previously in this study, participants were asked to complete two interview sessions during the beginning and end of the semester, and to complete a series of online questionnaires hosted on surveymonkey.com. Currently, the researches would like to make all aspects of the online course (e.g., online chat discussions, reading responses, reflection papers, etc.) available for analysis.

Risks:
Online course data will be analyzed for research purposes and all reasonable measures will be taken to ensure anonymity. Although this poses some risk, it is not more than one might reasonably experience in an interview, class discussion, etc.

Benefits:
This research offers benefits both to the participants themselves and to society. The participants will benefit from a deeper understanding of oneself and others. This study will benefit society by providing potential understanding for cross-cultural online learning.

Confidentiality:
All online data will be kept strictly confidential. Only the investigator Marilyn Johnston-Parsons and her research staff will have access to the data and names will be identified only by a random ID number or letter. There may be publications resulting from this study, but they will not contain any material that could identify you as a subject.

Contact:
The experimenter will answer questions about the use of the online data. If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, you may contact Marilyn Johnston-Parsons at 325 Education Building, University of Illinois, Champaign, IL 61820, (217) 244-3577, or by email at marilynj [at] illinois [dot] edu. If you felt you were not treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research were violated during the course of this project, you may contact the office for the Institutional Review Board (IRB), Suite 203, MC-419 528 East Green Street Champaign, IL 61820, 217-333-2670, or by email at irb [at] illinois [dot] edu. You may
also contact the Bureau of Educational Research (BER) at 217-333-3023 for any questions about your rights as a research participant.

**Participation:**
The use of your online data is completely voluntary; you can refuse to allow your data to be used without penalty. If you decide to participate, you can withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

**Consent:**
I have read this form and received a copy of it. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction. Through this email consent, I agree to allow my online data to be used in this study.

Subject’s initials ________

Subject’s signature __________________ Date ________________

Subject’s name (please print) __________________ Phone Number ________________
APPENDIX G

EARLY ONLINE SURVEY

Demographic Information:

Participant name:
Age:
Race:
Gender:

Degree seeking (circle): AA/AS; BA/BS, MA/MS, PhD, Other: ______

Social Responses:

1. Do you foresee learning new and unique educational and cultural things from the South African/American/other students in this course?

   unlikely somewhat definitely
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6

2. Do you foresee your understanding of the South African/American/other students evolving?

   unlikely somewhat definitely
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6

3. Do you foresee your understanding of race evolving?

   unlikely maybe definitely
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6

4. Do you foresee your understanding of post-apartheid South Africa evolving?

   unlikely maybe definitely
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6
Academic Responses:

5. As a student, how much do you foresee the cross-cultural component (i.e., interacting with students from South Africa or from America) improving the course?

   not at all  extremely
   0     1     2     3     4     5     6

6. How much do you foresee the online component improving the course?

   not at all  very much
   0     1     2     3     4     5     6

7. How much do you predict you may learn about other cultures from this course?

   nothing at all  very much
   0     1     2     3     4     5     6

8. How concerned are you about the problems that exist in the educational system in South Africa/America/other?

   not at all  extremely concerned
   0     1     2     3     4     5     6

9. How useful do you foresee this course being in your future?

   not at all useful  somewhat  very useful
   0     1     2     3     4     5     6

Overall Responses:

10. Overall, how much do you foresee this course influencing your worldview?

    not at all  very much
    0     1     2     3     4     5     6
11. How positively or negatively do you feel towards this course at this point in time?

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**Short answer:**

12. What are your learning goals for this course?
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________________________________________________________________________
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13. What do you expect get out of this course?
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14. What is it about education and South Africa/America that interests you and why?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

15. Given your current level of knowledge about South Africa, what do you perceive of as the significant challenges facing the educational system?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

16. What do you perceive of as the significant challenges facing the educational system in America? [for US students only]
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

17. Do you think this course may touch on sensitive or emotional topics you believe in (please explain)?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX H

LATE ONLINE SURVEY

Demographic Information:

Participant name:

Social Responses:

1. Have you learned new and unique educational and cultural things from the South African/American/other students in this course?
   
   not at all  somewhat  very much
   
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6

2. Has your understanding of the South African/American/other students evolved?
   
   not at all  somewhat  very much
   
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6

3. Has your understanding of race evolved?
   
   not at all  somewhat  very much
   
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6

4. Has your understanding of post-apartheid South Africa evolved?
   
   not at all  somewhat  very much
   
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6

Academic Responses:

5. As a student, how much did the cross-cultural component (i.e., interacting with students from South Africa or from America) improve the course?
   
   not at all  extremely
   
   0  1  2  3  4  5  6
6. How much did the online component improve the course?

not at all

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very much

7. How much did you learn about other cultures from this course?

nothing at all

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very much

8. How concerned are you about the problems that exist in the educational system in South Africa/America/other?

not at all

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extremely concerned

9. How useful do you think this course will be in your future?

not at all

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somewhat

very useful

10. Overall, how much do think this course influenced your worldview?

not at all

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very much

11. How positively or negatively do you feel towards this course at this point in time?

extremely negative

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neutral

extremely positive

12. What did you learn from this course and was it what you expected, or not?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
13. Did you get what you expected out of this course? Why or why not?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

14. How did your interest in education and South Africa/America change or expand? What aspects of the course contributed to this change (e.g., cross-cultural aspect, online aspect, the readings, etc.)?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

15. Given your current level of knowledge about South Africa, what do you perceive as the significant challenges facing the educational system?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

16. What do you perceive as the significant challenges facing the educational system in America? [for US students only]

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

17. Did this course touch on sensitive or emotional topics you believe in? Please explain and give examples.

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX I

EARLY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Online Response:
1. What do you foresee as the benefits of this online class?
2. How do you foresee the online component as influencing the course?
   a. Synchronously
   b. Asynchronously
3. How do you foresee this class being different if it was a face-to-face course?
   What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing a course like this online?

Technology Response:
4. In what ways do you use technology in your everyday life?
   a. Texting
   b. Instant messaging
   c. Mobile phones
5. What do you think are the potentials of technology?
   a. In learning/school contexts
   b. In American/South African society
   c. In a more global context
6. What technologies do you foresee being most valuable in an online course?
   a. Text, video, audio, etc.

Cross-cultural Response:
7. What do you foresee as the benefits of this cross-cultural class?
8. How do you foresee involving students from another country influencing/changing the course? Do you foresee any challenges in understanding the other students’ viewpoints?
9. How do you think students in the other country may respond to the course?
   a. Academically
   b. Socially
   c. Culturally
10. In what ways do you think that developing trust and openness will be important to this course?
11. What role do you foresee race playing in South African/American education?
12. What do you perceive as the educational issues in South Africa/America?
   a. How would you describe the perspective of a South African/American student on these issues in South African/American education?
Learning Response:
13. What are the most important things you foresee learning or growing from? What do you foresee will cause you to learn these things?
   a. Academically
   b. Socially
   c. Interpersonally
   d. Culturally
14. In your estimation, what do you foresee as the most important component of this course?
   a. Why
15. What do you foresee as having improved your learning or growth in this course?
   a. How do you think an online component could be improved?
   b. How do you think a cross-cultural component could be improved?
16. What educational methods do you think are best suited to explaining theoretical concepts (e.g., lecture, discussion, etc.)?
17. Do you foresee developing existing and new theories within the course?
   a. Online component
   b. Cross-cultural component
   c. What do you foresee being a contributing factor?
18. How do you foresee this education influencing you in the long-term?
   a. Academically
   b. Socially
   c. Culturally
19. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on?
APPENDIX J

LATE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Online Response:
1. What do you see as the benefits of this online class?
   a. Has that changed over the semester?
2. How did the online components influence the course?
   a. Synchronously
   b. Asynchronously
3. How would this class have been different if it was a face-to-face class? What are the advantages and disadvantages of doing a course like this online?

Technology Response:
4. What do you think are the potentials of technology?
   a. In learning/school contexts
   b. In American society
   c. In a more global context
5. What technologies were most valuable in this online course?
   a. Text, video, audio, etc.

Cross-cultural Response:
6. What do you see as the benefits of this cross-cultural class?
   a. Has that changed over the semester?
7. How did involving students from another country influence/change the course? Are/were you able to understand the other students’ viewpoints?
   a. What supported your ability to understand their viewpoints?
8. How do you think students in the other country responded to the course?
   a. Academically
   b. Socially
   c. Culturally
9. How well did you relate to the African/American/other students in the course?
   a. Why
   b. How
10. Were you able to develop trust and open perspectives with the other students?
    a. What allowed you to develop this?
    b. Did you feel like there was a general sense of trust and openness in the course? What encouraged or interfered with this?
11. Do you understand issues of race in South African and/or American education any differently because of what you learned in this course?
12. What do you perceive as the educational issues in South Africa/America?
    a. How would you describe the perspective of a South African/American student on these issues in South African/American education?
Learning Response:

13. What are the most important things you learned or grew from? What caused you to learn these things?
   a. Academically
   b. Socially
   c. Interpersonally
   d. Culturally

14. What was the most important component of this course in your estimation?
   a. Why

15. What could have improved your learning or growth in this course?
   a. How could the online component have been improved?
   b. How do you think an cross-cultural component could be improved?

16. Did you develop existing and new theories within the course?
   a. Online component
   b. Cross-cultural component
   c. What lead to the development?

17. How will this education influence you in the long-term?
   a. Academically
   b. Socially
   c. Culturally

18. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on?
APPENDIX K

FIRST CHAT EXAMPLE

17:53: Dr. Ndimate: How relevant or functional is the concept of “I” and “We” in the 21st century Africa
17:54: Dr. Ndimate: I mean to say “I” versus “We”
17:54: Cindy: It seems like there is too much I and not enough we!
17:54: Jason has raised their hand.
17:55: Cindy: I was really struck by Ch4 in Tedla and emphasis on we (i.e., the community)
17:55: Cindy: I’ll also pass off to Jason
17:55: Dr. Ndimate: Yes, it is like that in most parts of the world, but just wanted to know about it applicability in Africa today, is it feasible?
17:55: Cindy: Hmm... Good question. Let me think about it
17:55: Dr. Ndimate: Thanks, Cindy...good points about the community there..thanks. I will pass to Jason
17:56: Dr. Ndimate has passed the microphone/pen to Jason.
17:56: Jason: I think we is an important conception that western individualism tends to minimalize in the interests of economic and intellectual expediency. These modes of thought can be traced back to Plato and his separation of man from nature, and well as the impact of protestantism. However, I do feel as if in Africa the we is romanticized slightly too much and it needs to remember that individual agency is necessary for creating the realization and action required FOR group action.
17:56: Jason: I am we the same
17:56: Jason: or ought to be and I think they are still analyzed as different and this is problematic
17:57: Jason: c
17:57: Jason: done
17:58: Elizabeth has raised their hand.
17:58: Dr. Ndimate: I like your earlier points, Jason, but I would not agree that I and We are the same. Thanks for these points...let me move on to others...who is ready? Thanks Jason!
17:58: Dr. Ndimate: Yes Elizabeth
17:58: Dr. Ndimate has passed the microphone/pen to Elizabeth.
17:58: Annie has raised their hand.
17:58: Elizabeth: I wish that there were more cultures/communities around the world that put more emphasis on the “we”. That was one of my favorite discussions on the article. I think it’s so important for african culture to maintain that idea of “we” is so necessary in making any kind of significant change. But I think I agree with Jason...although maybe not that I and we are the same, but that the concepts can interact with each other successfully to create powerful movements
18:00: Dr. Ndimate: Great points..Elizabeth, but also should realize that Africa has changed this late. The We is quickly eroding.
18:00: Dr. Ndimate: May be Annie can share with you about the growth of individualism in SA
18:00: Elizabeth: okay
18:00: Dr. Ndimande: Thanks Elizabeth...moving on to Annie
18:01: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Annie.
18:01: Annie: in actual fact there should be more “we” than “i” especially in africa. i dont necessarily think that i and we are the same Chris. atleast not yet. the day we establish 1 common culture, education system etc
18:02: Dr. Ndimande: I am not sure I understand what you mean at the end there, Annie..can you say more, please.
18:03: Annie: individualism in africa, is a fancy way to express “every man for himslf”.
18:03: Dr. Ndimande: Annie, I agree with you that there is a slight difference between the “I” and the “we”, although they may feet onto each oither as Elizabeth and Jason argued earlier
18:04: Julie has raised their hand.
18:04: Dr. Ndimande: Yes, Annie...good points...Now moving on...Do you mind we switch gears to our celebrities..see syllabus.??
18:04: Annie: maybe in some parts of the world. i’m not sure if it applies to africa
17:50: Dr. Ndimande: Is H correct to criticize Ngugi for using English in his work?
17:50: Dr. Ndimande: Mic goes to Julie
17:50: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Julie.
17:52: Brendon has raised their hand.
17:50: Dr. Ndimande: Julie, you have the mic..thanks
17:53: Cindy has raised their hand.
17:51: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Julie.
17:54: Julie, just as a final comment: you can’t expect people to know what you’re talking about if you don’t know yourself. Even in your comment you contradicted yourself in what you meant. It’s not like you were referring to any scholarly “everyone” that I was just too ignorant to pick up.
17:54: Julie: I’m done.
17:52: Dr. Ndimande: Okay, guys, let us go to the next question. Thanks Julie...
17:52: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Brendon.
17:53: Dr. Ndimande: Brendon has the mic.
17:54: Brendon: I guess you have to begin somewhere, so the use of English is okay as a first step.
17:55: Brendon: Just as a first step; I cannot be too critical here
17:53: Dr. Ndimande: Ohhh, I see...can you say why?
17:55: Brendon: We cannot simply dismiss the impact of European rule in Africa...
17:56: Brendon: The use of non-African tongues is a problem that will take time to solve
17:55: Dr. Ndimande: Yes, I agree with you Brendon, but also I would argue that English is okay in a diverse nation like Kenya and of course Ngugi’s work needed to reach out to critical mass out there
17:56: Brendon: in Africa.
17:57: Brendon: Good point Doc N...
17:56: Dr. Ndimande: Good insights, Brendon...Thanks. I am going to hand over to Cindy
17:56: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Cindy.
17:57: Jason has raised their hand.
17:56: Dr. Ndimande: Cindy..you have the mic
17:58: Cindy: I’m not very “aware” of issues compared to Brendon, Julie, & Jason... Yet, isn’t H’s paper written in English? Is it the pot calling the kettle black?
17:59: Cindy: And I agree that in order to get the information out to the masses, it doesn’t seem like a bad idea to use English.
17:57: Dr. Ndimande: You make me laugh...Cindy...that was funny:-)
17:59: Cindy: But where does one draw the line?
18:00: Cindy: Everyone needed a good laugh ;-)
18:00: Cindy: Between getting the information out to the world, and staying true to one’s language and culture?
17:59: Brendon has raised their hand.
18:00: Cindy: I’m done!
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17:58: Dr. Ndimande: Thanks Cindy...you made very good points there.
17:58: Dr. Ndimande: Going to Jason...thnaks
17:58: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Jason.
17:59: Dr. Ndimande: Jason, you are up!
18:00: Jason: I think that first Ngugi came to some of his realizations after he already started in English. Secondly, being that he wrote his critique of the language situation in English, it is obvious he thinks it important to convey this idea to some English speakers, and thus probably in his writings as well. I think it is also good to criticize him to keep him to his own standards, because he could also be writing in Swahili, which would certainly reach more Kenyans than English. I like the idea of his translation institute because it encourages translation into other to read it and his works being written in more languages in general.
18:00: Dr. Ndimande: Brilliant points, Jason. Thanks!! Didn't know about his translation institute? Where in Irvine CA?
18:01: Dr. Ndimande: Irvive=Irvine
18:02: Jason: Yes that was his main project after writing his language critique.
18:02: Jason: It is really a great idea.
18:02: Jason: I often wonder why graduate African language students aren't encouraged at other schools to contribute to this project.
18:01: Dr. Ndimande: Absolutely...I didn't know about it, but yes, it is good, Thanks for sharing this!
18:03: Jason: Even to trans. English works into African languages so more people can read them.
18:02: Dr. Ndimande: I will raise it to SCALI...good point.
18:03: Jason: Oddly enough only the Bible has really succeeded in this on a mass scale.
18:02: Dr. Ndimande: Okay, thank Brendon. I am handing over to Brendon.
18:02: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Brendon.
18:04: Brendon: The push for a true lingua franca is something that must be discussed by Africanists at some point in the near future. The institute is a great idea and overdue...
18:03: Dr. Ndimande: Absolutely, Brendon. Thanks!
18:04: Brendon: I can understand why scholars use Euro-languages, how else could one really begin?
18:03: Dr. Ndimande: Okay, let us move on to our next question, unless you have a question.
18:05: Jason has raised their hand.
18:04: Dr. Ndimande: I will open up the floor for people to say what they want and then go back to the next and last question of the night (morning for you:-)
18:04: Dr. Ndimande has disabled handraise mode.
18:05: Jason: I think it would be useful to look at the idea of regional African languages.
18:05: Brendon: Cool.
18:05: Jason: Like Swahili, Lingala, Zulu, Wolof, Arabic.
18:05: Jason: For scholarship.
18:06: Jason: Of course with consideration to other smaller languages.
18:04: Dr. Ndimande: Look at them (languages) for what, Jason...say more please.
18:06: Brendon: But how many "regional" languages would that be??
18:06: Jason: I mean in terms of an "Africanization
18:05: Dr. Ndimande: Ohhh, I see..
18:06: Jason: that way in instruction is in an African language, but also can reach the max.
amount of people
18:07: Jason: of course this is problematic in terms of choosing which languages,
18:07: Jason: but good to consider
18:07: Jason: also it is important to remember
18:07: Jason: that it plays to the strength of Africa
18:06: Dr. Ndimande: Did you guys know that SA has 11 official languages by the
constitution, yet is is still English and Afrikaans predominately?
18:09: Cindy: I’ve read that
18:08: Jason: because people there are generally gifted with being able to speak and use
multiple languages on a daily basis
18:08: Jason: and from a young age
18:08: Brendon: What about the idea of a regional “Creole,” that included words from
several regional tongues?
18:07: Dr. Ndimande: And in a nation that is 79 percent black!
18:09: Cindy: What languages do the 79% use?
18:07: Dr. Ndimande: And in a nation that is 79 percent black!
18:09: Cindy: predominantly
18:07: Dr. Ndimande: Mostly IsiZulu (the Nguni languages mostly)
18:09: Jason: regional creole would be interesting....
18:09: Jason: ever read about esperanto?
18:08: Dr. Ndimande: Nope, not me, sorry
18:10: Cindy: Interesting, yet in the schools do they still have to speak English?
18:10: Jason: it was a universal European language they tried to invent and implement in
the 1970s
18:08: Dr. Ndimande: Very interesting and yet troubling issue
18:10: Brendon: I meant some young urban school children in Botswana back in 2003
and they could not speak any siSwati. I was stunned!!
18:10: Jason: didn’t really work out\n18:10: Jason: wow
18:10: Brendon: I have not heard of esperanto...
18:10: Jason: that is messed up in Botswana
18:09: Dr. Ndimande: Okay, I am going back to the mic mode so we can do our last
question.
18:10: Jason: talk about alienating the children from themselves
18:09: Dr. Ndimande has enabled handraise mode.
APPENDIX M

THIRD CHAT EXAMPLE

18:36: Dr. Ndimande: Having read the article, would you agree that race plays a constitutive role in school reform in RSA?
18:36: Dr. Ndimande: article=articles
18:35: Laura has raised their hand.
18:35: Julie has raised their hand.
18:36: Dr. Ndimande has disabled handraise mode.
18:35: Laura: I would definitely agree.
18:36: Dr. Ndimande has enabled handraise mode.
18:35: Julie has raised their hand.
18:37: Dr. Ndimande: Say more, Laura
18:37: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Laura.
18:35: Laura: Especially how in your article you talk about parent choice.
18:37: Dr. Ndimande: huummm
18:36: Jason has raised their hand.
18:36: Laura: But it’s really only choice for those black parents who are affluent
18:36: Laura: They legislate rules to keep black children out of better equipped schools
18:37: Laura: Either the black parents can’t afford to send their children to better schools
18:38: Dr. Ndimande: But this is illegal
18:37: Laura: and the ones who can...
18:38: Dr. Ndimande: So, how does this become arace issue?
18:37: Laura: are sometimes kept out due to zoning rules, etc.
18:37: Laura: It’s definitely illegal!
18:38: Laura: Because they are still in essence practicing de facto apartheid
18:38: Laura: in my opinion...
18:40: Dr. Ndimande: You are correct..Laura..I was waiting for you to say that no white parents is deprived of school resources...good points
18:40: Dr. Ndimande: I am moving on, if you are done...Laura
18:39: Laura: Yes, you can move on to let someone else speak.
18:40: Dr. Ndimande: is=are
18:39: Laura: Thank you
18:40: Dr. Ndimande: Thanks, Laura
18:40: Dr. Ndimande: Moving on to Julie
18:40: Dr. Ndimande has passed the microphone/pen to Julie.
18:40: Dr. Ndimande: Julie, you are up!
18:39: Julie: I agree, too. I think a lot of people think that you can reverse many years of institutionalized racism with the signing of a few laws, but changing the laws wont result in the changing of social views and patterns. As Laura pointed out, only affluent black families are likely to be able to send their kids to historically white schools, but I would like to add to that, that even affluent black families would have a strong incentive to stay away from these schools because of racism that still exists within them
18:40: Julie: So even though a few of them can technically send their kids there, I would definitely see why they might not want to if they think it will provide a not-nice atmosphere for their children.
Christopher John Devers graduated from Purdue University in 2000 with a Bachelor of Science in engineering and technology education. In 2003 Chris received a Master of Science from Purdue in educational administration. At Purdue, Chris taught classes in computer technology, mechanical engineering technology, manufacturing engineering technology, and computer integrated manufacturing technology. After graduating, he worked in information technology for the College of Liberal Arts at Purdue. While working on a PhD at Illinois, Chris worked as a research assistant for the digital library research lab, for a study involving transformative principal leadership and professional learning, and for the largest Latina/o study of school administrators in the United States. In addition, he taught a technology integration course for undergraduate education majors and was a technology assistant for a cross-cultural online education course.