

Reflection no. 1

Module 1 Unit 1 – January 12, 2013

I am excited about beginning this learning journey in ETEC 565G, for I feel I am building upon ETEC 521 learning where I examined the influence of Western culture on Indigenous expression of collective memories in cyberspace. After reading course content and objectives, I realize that I have much to learn concerning the meaning of ‘intercultural’ in a technological context. I am particularly interested in how online learning environments are constructed and shared by various individuals with various cultural backgrounds. I believe that this new course should be a core course within the MET program, or at least some components of this course integrated in ETEC 500 perhaps. Even though I have just begun to understand what this course has to offer, based on my experience, I know it is important to become culturally sensitive as an instructor or learner. Although right now I have only a vague idea how this could be applied to online learning platforms, I think that all online courses should be designed with ‘culture’ in mind. This idea fits perfectly with the theme I have repeatedly explored so far on my MET journey: to create a more organic and holistic learning environment and better the learning experience.

As I read ahead and get ready for unit 2 and 3, many questions come to mind. What are my initial ideas on culture? I do agree that there are many ways to look at this word and define it – according to one’s culture and worldview. What about the process of human communication – do these change within online formats? And are there dynamics of intercultural communication that can be applied to online course designs for example?

As I read on, I realize that I will need to introspect about my own cultural identity. I believe I can base my cultural identity on my evolving experience within various knowledge systems where culture was, and continues to be celebrated and shared by groups of individuals found among my family, within my work environment, through my acquaintances, and with the community at large etc. (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003) After studying online for the past ten years, I must also include the online forums that I have ‘interacted’ with for short periods. These are communities of learning, so culture must apply to these types of environments as well. Investigating online culture in this context would be most interesting, for I could really relate my learning to my experience.

So many questions and few answers yet, but I know each unit will provide opportunities for me to share my experiences and build on my knowledge.

References

Gudykunst, W. B. & Kim, Y. Y. (2003). *Communicating with strangers. An approach to intercultural communication*. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Reflection no. 2

Module 2 – Unit 2 – February 6, 2013

If you teach in a culturally diverse environment, try to identify which strategies you adopt in order to obtain best results in the classroom. What do others do to create an inclusive environment with regard to cultural diversity?

Do I teach in a culturally diverse environment? Certainly there are teachers that come from different ethnic backgrounds, but defining culture does not limit itself to ethnicity. Many teachers are from different generations, come from different educational backgrounds, grew up in different parts of Canada. Can one qualify one's culture in being different? If it is important to think of learning styles as dynamic states that result between the learner and his environment, it is important to think that the learning environment very much includes teachers and their distinctive qualities and characteristics as human beings. Parish & Linder -Vanberschot (2010) relate that experiential learning is shaped through the influence of culture. As an educator, it is important for me to understand and realize the influence I may have on my students, because of the 'culture' I bring within the learning environment. Perhaps this explains why it is sometimes hard for both teacher and students to adapt when we rotate student groups three times a year.

This situation is made even more complex, because the military groups I teach come from different elements (army, navy, aviation), as well as different trades and ranks, which means that as a teacher I need to learn to adjust to multiple cultural differences quickly, and take into consideration prior learning and learning styles. When I change groups, I have to start all over again. This has been a wonderful insight into the difficulty for some teachers to adjust to group

changes. It has also brought to light that new teachers, beyond getting briefed on military culture and ranks, do not receive any training about how to adjust to these multiple cultural differences. I think it would be worthwhile to develop a workshop that provides teachers at work with guidance and strategies to adjust to these multiple cultural differences.

References

Parrish, P. & Linder-VanBerschot, J. A. (2010). Cultural Dimensions of Learning: Addressing the Challenges of Multicultural Instruction. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 11(2), 1-19.

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Reflection no. 3

Module 3 – Unit 2 – March 1st, 2013

I found Hewling's (2005) reading nourished my interest for ways of making online environments more holistic. I believe for my research project I would like to investigate the culture within text-based online environments. I am particularly interested in how culture impacts learning within text-based online forums. This means I will need to start to think how different cultures interact with each other when they 'communicate' within asynchronous online forums.

I'm not sure I feel comfortable using the 'High and low context' description to describe how different cultures interact, with high context being cultures that provide 'whole' context when communicating, and low context being more focused and direct. I think communication is much more complex than that.

I will need to further review Kim and Bonk (2002) as possible references for they examined asynchronous discussion board behavior of undergraduate students, and this may be a good guideline for my own research proposal. Will communication methods between groups, such as students that are more social and contextually driven, with ones that are more group-focused, or reflective and driven by theory change how students are able to interact and ultimately change their learning experience? (Kim and Bonk, 2002 as cited in Hewling, 2005).

What is it that shapes culture? Is it the behavior adopted by individuals who identify themselves to a cultural grouping? If so this means that everyone is different culturally. How then can a course designer or instructor predict the needs or behavior of another? How then can collaboration between members of different cultural backgrounds share cultural understandings? Perhaps then it is important to get down to the essentials for it is the 'human being' that is talking to the other be it with voice, text or gestures. I think this is why my research needs to focus on a holistic approach to communicating. I need to focus on the skills and design of addressing the 'human being' in its entirety, considering emotions and spirituality, a learning environment where culturally heterogeneous communication takes place. Is it possible to foster this type of learning environment within text-based online communication forums?

I agree with Hewing that there needs to be a new approach, as most universities now have transnational global online classes. Is the idea to examine interpersonal, intercultural interactions in the classroom a worthwhile endeavor? Yes. And since the first persons that would benefit from revisiting culturality within online asynchronous forums would be participants, then they are the ones that need to be consulted.

How then do I go about examining the intercultural interaction of online learners in communication forums? Perhaps by researching where there is dissonance within these learning environments, then I can find patterns that point to pre-existing attributes. Do the course designer and instructor have a role in creating and nurturing the third culture as described by Raybourn, Kings and Davies (2003)? Hewing describes culture as 'doing'. Perhaps these types of communication forums need to be more organic in nature, where each group of learners is encouraged to define its own culture.

References

Hewling, A. (2005). Culture in the online class: Using message analysis to look beyond nationality-based frames of reference. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 11(1), article 16.<http://jcmc.indiana.edu/vol11/issue1/hewling.html>

Reflection no.4

Module 3, Unit 3 – March 9

Perhaps an element I need to consider as I try to find a focus for my research proposal is how identity making influences intercultural communication within an asynchronous online forum environment. Based on my experience as an online learner for the past 10 years I can't say that I have noted if peers adopt a 'virtual identity'. Rather, perhaps I have noted that peers try to adapt to their learning and communicating identity to conform to communication norms within a forum. It might be interesting to integrate some element within online communication formats that allow the creation of online identities for communicating, such as using avatars in Voki. I can remember a few courses ago, a very shy peer who did not communicate at all until she was able to do so through voice, Animoto or Voki. Would encouraging the creation of online identities be viewed by other peers as a form of deception?

Using a Voki to represent the self, is of course not the only way to create a meaningful, online identity. More questions come to mind. If learners are encouraged to create online identities (in various ways) does this foster a more nurturing and organic elearning environment and thus improve the learning experience? If so, it would mean that this is a worthwhile question to investigate. If I hypothesize that it does improve the learning environment, then the next question is: how does one foster such an environment in cyberspace?

Macfadyen (2006), in her article: *'Virtual ethnicity: the new digitization of place, body, language, and memory, collective identity and memories'*, discusses how groups create collective memory and identity. Since "[...] collective identity is tied to physical space: the land." (p. 3), how can this be recreated within a disembodied space such as text-based online forums? When we communicate F2F, we use voice and body language, and are probably better able to use all of our senses to create collective identities within a specific physical space. I agree that much of the physical body is absent when communicating online, particularly in text-based environments in cyberspace, perhaps that is why it is important to offer learners various ways of communicating that will offer the possibility of 'viewing' and 'hearing' each other. Could providing learners with various ways of communicating in a sense stimulate more senses and provide a more embodied collaborative experience? Language and speech is quite complex and I think online learners would likely benefit if essentially text-based, asynchronous forums were replaced with more organic environments that could provide learners with a place to 'communicate' versus discourse. I am pleased to read that Macfadyen (2006) supports this idea

on page 10. Of course, depending on cultural background, learning preferences etc., certain learners may be quite comfortable with text-based formats to create collective identities, while others prefer an environment that encourages them to use as many senses as a virtual environment will allow. Perhaps the key is to encourage as many forms of communication as possible. I have certainly asked many questions here and this has started to help me understand what I need to focus on as I think of my research proposal.

References

Macfadyen, L. P. (2006). Virtual Ethnicity: The new digitization of place, body, language, and memory. *Electronic Magazine of Multicultural Education*, 8 (1).

<http://www.eastern.edu/publications/emme/2006spring/macfayden.html>

Reflection no. 5

Module 4 – Unit 2 – March 22, 2013

I agree that culture defines every aspect of human life, and here I'd like to focus on how humans create and use technology and think and create knowledge. As such, I think that like Montiel-Overall (2009), I view learning from a sociocultural theory perspective since knowledge can be viewed as a socially constructed phenomenon. Keeping in mind that culture and social practices transform the way we think, acquire knowledge and build on our learning, how can text-based communication forums be designed to foster the right learning environment?

I believe taking into consideration diverse learners when designing and facilitating online communication forums can influence the educational experience. As noted by Charles Ess (2009), there is no doubt online learning opportunities offer many advantages. It is also important to define what a successful educational experience is, and this is a factor I will need to consider in my research proposal. This is a subject dear to my heart since starting this MET program, as I have looked at ways to improve text-based communication forums so they provide a more organic and holistic learning environment. I now need to turn to how these same forums can be designed to foster cultural diversity. Asynchronous, text-based communication forums

can become communities of enquiry (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000), provided that the right balance of social, cognitive and teaching are present.

How does this model work in relation to culturally diverse communicators in asynchronous forums? I think my research needs to focus on what works for learners and what doesn't in light of shared meaning being challenging for culturally diverse learners. Is it necessary to transform these types of formats in global educational communities? Perhaps take a closer look at Garrison et al.'s model is a good start. How do different cultural backgrounds affect the way learners are able to construct meaning through sustained communication. Since the cognitive domain is a vital element in critical thinking and building on knowledge leading to a transformative learning experience, I think it is a key element to investigate. Do culturally diverse individuals demonstrate how they make meaning, think, reflect and especially feel about the world they live in differently? If so, tapping into the 'how' would provide a great way to improve course design and online forums.

Social presence I believe is vital to fostering cultural diversity within communication forums, as this is where cultural differences may come into play, for I believe the right balance helps build a strong community of learning and in turn supports cognitive presence and can greatly contribute to the learning experience.

Course design that respects and fosters culturality is important, and as such need to be more organic in nature, leaving room for emerging and evolving human cultures. Perhaps the role of the instructor is to be culturally sensitive and flexible when supporting cognitive and social presence. Also learners can be guided by instructors to engage in the process of cultural and intercultural learning. Instructors can guide students in developing cultural self-awareness and self and building on their cultural knowledge. This course for example has helped me reflect on cultural values and has helped me build cultural appreciation.

Xin & Feenberg, (2006) outline the challenges the instructor faces when developing social aspects within online courses. Motivating learners through effective communication seems key to building a vibrant learning community. It can however be challenging to create a shared framework of roles and expectations when having to consider course culture in the mix. Also

how can one be culturally sensitive in guiding participants in fulfilling course objectives? Montiel-Overall, (2007) states how important it is to create the right environment, this time stressing the right balance between interpersonal, cognitive, and environmental factors which lead to cultural competence. What strikes me here is the importance of the instructor nurturing cultural self-awareness and self-reflection in order to develop cultural emotions and develop intercultural communication skills.

These readings, have certainly given me food for thought and a focus, as I embark on my research proposal.

References

Ess, C. (2009). When the Solution Becomes the Problem: Cultures and Individuals as Obstacles to Online Learning. In M. N. Lamy & R. Goodfellow (Eds.), *Learning Cultures in Online Education* (pp. 15-29). UK: Continuum Press

Montiel-Overall, P. (2009). Cultural Competence. A Conceptual Framework for Library and Information Science Professionals. *The Library Quarterly*, 79(2), 175-204.

Xin, C. & Feenberg, A. (2006). Pedagogy in Cyberspace: The Dynamics of Online Discourse. *Journal of Distance Education* 21 (2):1-25.

Module 3 – Unit 1 February 17, 2013

How do I feel about Computer-mediated colonization? (Ess 2002; Ess & Sudweeks, 2012) I do believe the Internet technologies are changing the way that people relate to each other. This extends beyond family, friends, and workgroups to within and across cultures. In ETEC 521, we looked at how the influence of the Internet can be negative when the hierarchy of values attached to Western culture overwhelms indigenous expression. However, after exploring Cyberspace, I also found that indigenous populations can use the Internet to diffuse collective memories quite successfully; for

example by providing a bridge for young people and encouraging them to get back in touch with their culture. So I would agree that the Internet may drive social, communicative, and political changes in cultures, but that this is not necessarily a 'bad thing'. That is not to diminish the fact that it is important to study and reflect upon the implications and consequences related to the growing use of media, particularly with the use of social media. This in itself would make a great subject to study.

References

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Ess, C. (2002). Computer-mediated colonization, the renaissance, and educational imperatives for an intercultural global village. *Ethics and Information Technology*; 2002; 4, 1 (11-22).