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Distance Education and Community Learning Networks linked by a Library of Culture

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Distance Education and Community Learning Networks linked by a Library of Culture

Introduction

Governments and businesses today are spending vast amounts of money on distance learning across countries and cultures (Flannery, & Shattuck, 2006). In the U.S. between 2007 and 2008, graduate school applications jumped 5%, and for the first time ever U.S. college enrollments beat out their international counterparts in student enrollments (Clay, 2010). If you walk down any main street and ask people to define education the answers received can be very different from each other. For example, "Education is a means to an end for me so I'll get recognized and get ahead when I get out of college" (W. Stern, personal communication, February 3, 2010). "Education is certified potential that will allow me to pursue my interests and separate me from those who chose not invest in themselves in the same way" (T. Blake, personal communication, February 3, 2010). "Education is something that I am doing because my parents expect me too" (E. Walsh, personal communication, February 3, 2010). For this paper education will be defined as any act or experience that creates a reference point and has an influential affect on the mind, body, spirit, or physical ability of an individual.

While everyone can agree that education is important without a shared definition of what education represents to individuals and the institutions that people will come to embody, it is almost impossible to recognize if the education received is effective or appropriate for individuals to be competitive locally, across the nation, or around the globe until it is too late (Banach, 1995). When referring to education on a large scale it can be linked to globalization itself. Information can be conceptualized no different than commodities that are bought, sold, traded, and even hoarded away

around the globe every minute of the day. Yet even as lifelong learners we cannot be students in school forever and the pace of innovation does not slow when we get our diplomas. Community learning networks (CLNs) are under utilized by universities, governments, and business to work with communities and allow them to become a democratic voice for services and their products. CLNs can be used to more strongly support individuals before, during, and after their learning experiences while filling the gaps between academic and professional engagements (Skrzeszewski, 1999).

Problem Statement

How can education and training practices achieve consistent outcomes with people in various geographical locations and with different sociocultural and environmental needs? Will using Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence (MI) for curriculum development produce a valid way to cultivate common educational practices amongst global learners while preserving cultural diversity in educational endeavors? The projected educational spending by the United States government for 2010 alone is over one trillion dollars (Chantrill, 2010). Distance education has rapidly expanded the learning opportunities available to individuals across the world, but it has never before had the challenge of consistently creating curriculums for a truly global distribution. Increasing globalization requires common educational practices for cross cultural communication, but to have globalized education embraced internationally the common standards of education put forth must emphasize the preservation of the cultural values encountered (Tremmel, 2000). CLNs would be the best way to encourage individuals and communities to support and collaborate with business, governments, and universities around the world to utilize the inherent strengths in the people while specifically being able to tailor education and trainings to community needs.

As people begin to recognize themselves as being part of a multicultural society it's crucial to reach out to individuals who may feel threatened by globalization. Contradictory cultural assumptions can create multicultural conflicts that can lead to setbacks when one culture or a particular population itself is negatively targeted (Erickson, Mattaini, & McGuire, 2004). The resistance to distance education can be seen as growing pains from people who are unsure about globalization and the diminishing importance of their culture or values. While some people may also see the traditions they grew up with and the diversity of their community being neutralized by the standardization in the practices of globalization (Johnson, 2008). Since students in distance education curriculums must meet certain criteria or benchmarks it is very likely that these standards might be seen be as the same imposing neutralizing force to resistant views to concerned individuals globalization and outside education.

Yet today many people at home and abroad do not have access to technology or the internet for a variety of reasons. The causes of this digital divide amongst individuals are as numerous as the divides themselves. Internet use, teacher training in areas of technology, school funding, federal aid, students socioeconomic status (SES), rural vs. urban standards, developing nation vs. developed nation, etc., all these and many more issues may create moral dilemmas for teachers and students who interact in these informational/cultural contact zones (Garland, & Wotton, 2002). The digital divide could hinder or stop individuals from low income households, senior citizens, single-parent children, the undereducated, minorities, and of rural areas residents, etc., from accessing educational resources and technology which would rob them of equal opportunity and the ability to compete in a real world environment (Erickson, Mattaini, & McGuire, 2004).

Distance learning as it is today is unprepared to go into a global environment and fully engage students who come from minority traditions and diverse cultural conditions. Students need educational experiences that will allow them to engage all of their intelligences, and explore information in multiple ways so that a curriculum is meaningful, personalized (culturally appropriate), and relevant to the desires and needs of the students (Özdemir, Güneysu, & Tekkaya, 2006). In every society there will be different individuals and communities that require different environments for education, and as education has increasingly become a prized social concept that demonstrates increased earning potential and a higher standard of living for individuals, more people want it (McIver, & Rachell, 2002). It is not uncommon for individuals who are suffering from inequality to feel they have a lack of community support and no voice to advocate for them. The potential for culture clashes and discrimination can cause disruptions and setbacks when culture or a particular population itself is negatively targeted (Erickson, Mattaini, & McGuire, 2004).

The US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) lists statistics on education from every country as a percent of their GDP. The United States surprisingly spends less on its citizens per GDP then Mexico, South Africa, Malaysia, Kenya, Cuba, and Yemen, just to name a few (CIA, 2010). This is clearly demonstrated through the majority of youth in the United States that have shown a lack of cultural literacy and ethnocentrism on numerous surveys. For example, in spite of extensive media coverage on the war on terror and military battles against the Taliban in Afghanistan after 9/11 nearly 90% of young Americans ages 18–24 are unable to locate Afghanistan on a map. And 63% of those individuals were unable to find Iraq (Carano, 2009). Many people don't realize that they've acquired an ingrained sense of ethnocentrism when it comes to their own culture. Ethnocentric views look often positively towards the culture an individual grows up with as normal and views other cultures negatively or inferior. This

prejudiced view can give a harmful and inaccurate view of the world while effectively cutting them off from any individual that they perceive different (Johnson, 2008).

Integrated Literature Review

In 1997 Bill Clinton stated that his number one priority for the next 4 years was to make sure that all Americans had the best education in the world (CLINTON, 1997). Governments and businesses today are spending vast amounts of money on e-learning across countries and institutions (Flannery, & Shattuck, 2006). Scarino, Crichton, and Woods (2007) have begun to define distance education by including sociocultural education strategies into educating students as globalized learners. Students who enter distance education programs will represent a merging cultural narrative that will have the goal of emphasizing the value of advanced learning, increasing the availability of education to more people, and creating flexible learning environments that support international diversity and collaboration (Bird, 2002). Scarino, Crichton, and Woods (2007) have demonstrated through a case study involving collaboration between an Australian university (University of South Australia) and a Malaysian Islamic institution (Kolej Professional MARA in Kuantan) that students become enriched as learners when their curriculums include sociocultural education strategies.

Scarino, Crichton, and Woods (2007) study combined online education with face to face interactions and is complimented by journal entries and observations from an Australian lecturer's experiences through delivering the course. The authors stated their research purpose was to investigate the degree that on topic learnings mixed with cultural comparisons was needed before students began to discuss openly about what it is they were learning amongst each other and in class. What Scarino, Crichton, and Woods (2007) found was that the diversity of modalities used in international program

delivery suggested that a complex intersection of relationships were being exchanged even as the student learns information as simple as vocabulary words. More plainly put, cultural contexts are being modeled as well and communicated with the information as well.

In defining what cultural education is, individuals will begin to explore complimentary areas of their life which will allow them to utilize multiple intelligences through practical educational skills (Kaplan, & Rinpoche, 2009). The content agreed upon by the host and provider countries can be thought of as informational contact zones that connect international bodies of knowledge and people by the areas thought of as safe to debate, communicate through, collaborate on, and strive for innovation in (Singh, & Doherty, 2004). There is general agreement in the literature on internationalization of higher education but there are gaps in the literature on strategies dealing with intercultural dimensions in either theory or practice for globalized teaching and learning issues between language and culture (Scarino, Crichton, & Woods, 2007).

The large diversity of languages available around the globe is the central tool for transmitting culture and information, but in simple translation much of the cultural elements are ignored or omitted. When learning a topic that deals with information deriving from another culture this can hinder the individual's ability for successful meaning making (Traps, 2009). It's also through language that change is negotiated and incorporated into sociocultural routines by individuals communicating with each other in order to illuminate the contexts in which knowledge and perspectives would be valuable (Tremlett, 2009). Research has demonstrated that individuals who were skilled in perspective taking were seen by others as having a component of empathy. The ability to step into another's shoes is often seen as a

positive individual characteristic that can facilitate communication and interaction between people (Long, & Andrews, 1990).

When individuals recognize their position in their everyday relationships it can emphasis the personal control that they have as individuals to accept or reject perspectives and labels. One of the best ways to openly share information about very sensitive topics that includes prejudice, injustice, discrimination, and everyday dramas is stories. If you've ever fallen in love with a character in a book or a movie you know that there are things that this character says or does that you don't agree with. When learning becomes enjoyable it's often easy to think about topics through different perspectives even if we already have an opinion on the matter. In the end, what's important is that by utilizing stories and examples, students are often able to try on news learnings through becoming part of a character's life and development. The cultural context coming through stories allows individuals to recognize and appreciate perspectives that they may have not done otherwise without a model for it (Bandura, & Jeffrey, 1973).

In Scarino, Crichton, and Woods (2007) article they spend considerable time highlighting the intercultural process that the teacher went through as she recognizes herself as part of the learning process. The authors highlighted the personal challenges met by the teacher's ethno-centric assumptions about how teachers should teach materials, and how the students should learn it. These results demonstrate that ethno-centric assumptions are present and the expectation of both teacher and student is inevitably communicated to each other. Yet communication of any social cue cannot be guaranteed that it may be met with understanding. Implicit western cultural understandings and its associated assumptions do not always translate easily and can guide locally inappropriate knowledge

assessments and applications of knowledge if teachers and learners do not end up educating each other (Winschiers, & Fendler, 2007).

Since perspective taking encourages students to talk about culture along with the information being discussed, it can help provide an intellectual foundation for questioning the status quo that will inevitably build a more just society by educating people to recognize what people need. By utilizing examples of social identity and culture as a place of identity construction students could compare themselves and others as living examples of diversity (Kearney, & Andrew, 2009). By educating students on culture students were more skilled at identifying diversity as part of their own lives and not something that was impersonally shaping it. In utilizing sociocultural education through topical and personal narratives students begin to have the potential to construct cultures incompatible with violence and threats, and this is the most important information conveyed from teacher to student (Erickson, C., Mattaini, M., & McGuire, M. (2004).

As distance education begins to develop global curriculums CLNs are well suited to provide a democratic voice for the populace it is comprised of so that individuals, industries, and nations, might fully endorse international cooperation and collaboration to benefit all parties (Scarino, Crichton, and Woods, 2007). Most state and federal correctional agencies have used CLNs to assist in training staff and inmates as an increasing amount of evidence indicates that increasing education and job specific skills are significant factors in reducing recidivism for Incarcerated individuals (N.A., 2005). By utilizing CLNs with distance education, Gardner's theory of MI will easily come through community standards of assessments because individuals practical use of their talents will be seen and demonstrated throughout their community everyday (Rippel, 2003).

Critical Analysis

Since a multicultural society is a reality for the majority of people in the U.S. today, it is crucial to reach individuals who may feel threatened by globalization in hopes that they will begin to see how contradictory cultural assumptions can create multicultural conflicts that cost time, money, peace of mind, and missed opportunities for everyone. Yet today many people at home and abroad do not have access to technology or the internet for a variety of reasons. The causes of this digital divide amongst individuals are as numerous as the divides themselves (Johnson, 2008). Internet use, teacher training in areas of technology, school funding, federal aid, students socioeconomic status (SES), rural vs. urban standards, developing nation vs. developed nation, etc., all these and many more issues may create moral dilemmas for teachers and students who interact in these informational/cultural contact zones (Garland, & Wotton, 2002). While the content agreed upon by the host and provider countries can be thought of as informational contact zones that connect international partnerships with the knowledge thought of as safe to debate, communicate through, collaborate on, and strive for innovation in (Singh, & Doherty, 2004).

Education's personal cost is often perceived as an investment of time and money. That commitment is a high price for many people and so education has been transformed it into a prized social concept that demonstrates increased earning potential and a higher standard of living for individuals (McIver, & Rachell, 2002). What people recognize when they speak about education is the social capital that education represents to them as an investment in their future (Blaug, n.d). Since the 1980's in America education costs have steadily increased and with higher prices comes a greater scrutiny for maximization of educational resources from Federal and local governments (Du, & Hu, 2008). According to Selingo (2005) between 2001 and 2004 the average cost of a private college

education nationwide increased 17%, and public college tuition rose 26%. These tuition hikes happened at the same time that workers holding a bachelor's degree had their wages cut nationwide for four years.

In a report delivered to the Committee on the Judiciary House of Representatives One Hundred Ninth Congress (2006) in the years between 2001 to 2004 bachelor's educated workers earnings declined and reduced the earnings gap between high school and college graduates. Yet In 1997 Bill Clinton stated that his number one priority for the next four years was to make sure that all Americans had the best education in the world (CLINTON, 1997). Governments and businesses today are spending vast amounts of money on e-learning across countries and cultures (Flannery, & Shattuck, 2006). The projected educational spending by the United States government for 2010 alone is over one trillion dollars (Chantrill, 2010). When governments, corporations, communities, and individuals spend the majority of their funds on remedial steps the pace of innovation, profit, and opportunities for the individual as well as the society itself is diminished (Winthrop, 2006).

There are so many challenges that can rob individuals of education that distance learning itself must be supported as a vehicle to share and preserve cultural diversity so that information can reach the largest possible audience. Information itself must be looked at as if it were contextual contact zones because this is where culture and knowledge intersect to direct students onto further questions and greater distinctions that may affect a student's culture, life, or identity (Singh, & Doherty, 2004). At first glance individuals may perceive the lessons they are teaching or learning as indifferent to culture, but cultural information offering many perspectives is often not highlighted or offered in curriculums (Winschiers, & Fendler, 2007). Scarino, Crichton, and Woods (2007) demonstrated that students picked

up the sociocultural perspectives along with their lessons and this added dimension allowed them to relate and compare their own social behavior to those under scrutiny.

Since Information is another commodity that is bought, sold, traded, and hoarded away by people every day, individuals who are concerned about globalization might begin to look at reaching more people with their values and culture. As more people begin to recognize themselves as being part of a multicultural society it's essential to reach out to those individuals who may feel threatened about diluting their cultural values and perspective. Instead they could be encouraged to share and teach those things that are seen to be important to a particular population or culture. While simple translation of cultural elements in stories maybe ignored, omitted, or even lost, the stories themselves allow us unique glimpses into another's life and perspective. When topics deals with information deriving from other cultures this can hinder the individual's ability for successful meaning making (Traps, 2009).

While communities become cultures all their own, assessments are also not always quite as standardized as you might think. When large groups of students do not meet educational standards those narrow assessment standards are often lowered so that the standards are more attainable by the majority of the students. The narrow focus on one path to demonstrate standards of assessing students often detracts from the value of education for the whole group of students instead of allowing a wider and varied range of evaluations that students could meet (Bohn, & Schmidt, 2008). Gardner's multiple intelligence theory would be well suited for a global distance education at home or internationally, and this model has been working in Rhode Island which uses an adaption of Gardner's work with MI (Nancy Diaz, 2009).

Students at the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (MET) emphasis real world learning settings and examples, internships, individualized learning plans, personalized academic curriculums, and advisories to support and guide students to resources (Nancy Diaz, 2009). The MET's education goals are mastery of quantitative reasoning, social reasoning, empirical reasoning, communication, and personal qualities, which when broken down closely parallel Gardner's MI theory (Littky, Diaz, Dolly, Hempel, Plant, Price, et al., 2004). The MET's experiential approach to education allows students to be active learners and embrace variations in their education that will allow them to be innovative while demonstrating they are able to meet or exceed state and industry standards. Successfully meeting standards should be demonstrated from student's engagement with practical projects that the standards directly relate to instead of abstract benchmarks of academic equity (Roberts, 2008).

Problem Resolution

The resistance to distance education can be seen as growing pains from people who are unsure about globalization and the diminishing importance of their culture and values (Johnson, 2008). If distance education begins to emphasize the development of a library of human, social, cultural, behavior, and experience to draw upon for curriculum development on a global scale so the voices of all people will be assured that they have a valued position in the global environment (Rooney, 2005). Education and cultural diversity would be preserved through the people who care about it the most and would become a community resource to draw upon. In creating a cultural library many topics could be easily compared and contrasted amongst multiple cultures to increase real world knowledge and cultural diversity. For example, how business agreements are made in America, Jamaica, and China will have many similarities but also many important differences. According to Rooney (2005) communication

and collaboration will increase as cultural communication studies promote and preserve culture in a way that will also create economically viable industries of study and tourism. While overcoming the resistance to globalization and education, cultural values and history could be honored and preserved within curriculum development as part of the cultural library as well as the historical records of our global culture and footprints (Drainville, 2008).

Gardner's MI theory will be extremely useful for individuals to select from a library of culture in an attempt to employ and contrast information sources designed to entice learners to develop comparable skill sets and create practical applications on a global scale (Rippel, 2003). Modeling institutions like the Metropolitan Regional Career & Technical Center (MET) who pair established cultural models with experiential learnings to demonstrate an individual's strengths and weaknesses in assessing students on their mastery of quantitative reasoning, social reasoning, empirical reasoning, communication, and personal qualities (Littky, Diaz, Dolly, Hempel, Plant, Price, et al., 2004). While Gardner's MI theory assesses linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential intelligences in such a way to help students understand their lives and experiences as part of cultural diversity (Barrington, 2004).

While Gardner's MI theory assesses linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential intelligences in such a way to help students understand their lives and experiences as part of cultural diversity (Barrington, 2004). The MET has designed environments to promote a community learning for students to explore topics through multiple intelligences (Frank, 2009). The MET combines theories relating to multiple intelligence

and mentoring to structure students experience through real world practical experiences that are exhibited to the community in which they live and work (N.A., 2009).

Informational and cultural contact zones can be created to support CLNs, universities, and individuals in a variety of roles to encourage their interactions so they might design, and challenge the fundamentals of these programs and seek to better cooperation amongst the public itself (Tremmel, 2000). By increasing communication and collaboration of educational systems throughout the community will begin to raise the standard of living for all people (Bohn, & Schmidt, 2008). This will begin to draw people out from the digital divide and increase the access of technology and information available to all people with the community. Utilizing CLNs to support and further education will allow an interconnected web of assessments, standards, and cooperative efforts that has the potential of increasing democracy by empowering people from all communities.

Conclusions

Humans are relational beings with their modeled behavior as practical examples of cultural routines that they hear, see, read, and assemble on their own from communal pieces of information to answer the needs of their everyday lives (Bandura, & Jeffrey, 1973). Yet few researchers have looked at the differing synthesis of culture and generally assume that others share similar ideas/values that lead to particular events and worldviews (Lillard, p.5 1998). Therefore, I believe that collecting together the diversity of human behavior to construct a library of the human, social, cultural, behavior, and experience that surround us every day will allow people to see themselves as part of a larger picture (Biggerstaff, 2007).

In constructing a library of human, social, cultural, behavior, and experience to draw upon for curriculum develop on a global scale the field of knowledge management and the humanities will also quickly expand. Communication and collaboration will increase as cultural communication studies promote and preserve culture in a way that will also create economically viable industries (Rooney, 2005). Gardner's MI theory will be extremely useful for individuals to select from a library of culture in an attempt to employ and contrast information sources to entice learners to develop comparable skill sets and create practical applications on a global scale (Rippel, 2003). To have education be valuable for individuals at the local level and on a global scale, Gardner's MI theory is best suited to allow teachers and students to explore and further information by utilizing the inherent strengths in a culture and the individual (Moran, Kornhaber, & Gardner, 2006).

Distance education could begin to provide learning profiles with student transcripts that would demonstrate an individual's strengths and weaknesses that would be organized through Gardner's MI theory (linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, naturalistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and existential) to display their accomplishments and establish common and advanced skill sets. In using Gardner's MI theory for global distance learning students can recognize themselves as potentially intelligent in a number of ways instead of either being smart or dumb (Moran, Kornhaber, & Gardner, 2006). Community learning networks (CLNs) could be utilized and supported by universities, governments, and business to work with communities and allow them to become a democratic voice for themselves, quality of life, and their education. CLNs could be used to support individuals before, during, and after their learning experiences while filling the gaps between academic and professional engagements (Skrzeszewski, 1999). In establishing a global library of culture that is part of distance education we would be opening the door to have our everyday world be a resource and a learning

experience. Every person having something of value to contribute and every situation there would be an opportunity to better ourselves.

If distance education can utilize CLNS effectively they will empower people to speak up about conditions and standards in their communities. This is important because it encourages individuals to have a voice and communicate not only what their experience is in relating to education, industry, or daily needs, but it starts a motivated culture that will bring more people into CLNs to learn and share. If distance education is to thrive in a global scale it has the best chance of being embraced by creating a library of human, social, cultural, behavior, and experience to draw upon for curriculum development so the voices of all people will be assured that they have a valued position in the global environment (Rooney, 2005). In this way individuals from every community will have a stake in others and will be able to share and mentor each other before, during, and after they get a diploma or degree. I believe that if distance education can do this effectively it will quickly grow and transform the world we live in.

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