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GLIMPSES OF THE GLOBAL CORAL GARDENS: INSIGHTS OF
INTERNATIONAL ADULT LEARNERS ON THE INTERACTIONS OF
CULTURES IN ONLINE DISTANCE EDUCATION

A Thesis in
Adult Education

by

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ABSTRACT

Expanding global communications over the past decade in the form of the World Wide Web and the Internet increased the possibility of cultures meeting cultures within distance education courses taught from American colleges and universities. Cultural differences can be understood as those ways of interpreting and of responding to teaching and learning that have been influenced by a worldview.

The purpose of this study was threefold: First, to provide thick, rich descriptions of insights of international adult learners of the interaction of cultures in online distance courses designed and provided by an American university; second, to provide learners' insights into the emerging discussion of the impact of teaching and learning cultures; and third, to foreground the philosophical discussion of culture, in particular how the dynamically interacting cultural layers might relate to access and equity in postmodern distance education, especially if concerned with meeting the needs of the individual learner. This study was guided by the question: What can international adult online distance learners tell us about the impact of culture on their experiences in online distance education courses designed and delivered by an American university?

In-depth, semi-structured online interviews with twelve participants (ten who identified with specific Asian cultures and two who identified with specific Middle East cultures) were guided by questions developed from the literature. Participants, unencumbered by Western cultural expectations of education, used their vantage point to expose hidden cultural intrusions of broader cultural conflicts. The dynamics of interacting cultures raised by the participants mirrored those described in Holliday's (1994) host culture complex model – classroom cultures, student cultures, host institution cultures, professional-academic cultures, international education-related cultures, and national cultures. All of these cultural conflicts increased their marginalization within the online educational environment.

Further research on cultural distance and multiculturalism within distance education is suggested. The study reveals the urgency of recognition of the cultural issues and training for designers, teachers, and administrators of U.S. online distance education courses and programs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Figures.....	vii
List of Tables.....	viii
Acknowledgements.....	ix
Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
Scene Setting.....	2
Definition of Terms.....	9
Assumptions.....	16
Statement of Purpose.....	17
Research Question.....	18
Rationale.....	18
Research Design.....	19
Significance of the Study.....	19
Limitations.....	22
Chapter Summary.....	23
Chapter 2. REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE.....	24
Ideas that influenced American distance education.....	24
Current State of American Distance Education in Higher Education.....	49
Culture – An Emerging Tension in Online Distance Education.....	57
Chapter Summary.....	88
Chapter 3. METHODOLOGY.....	89
Theoretical Perspective.....	91
The Research Design.....	101
Sampling Procedures.....	107
Data Collection Procedures.....	114
Data Analysis Procedures.....	122
Chapter Summary.....	130
Chapter 4. FINDINGS.....	131
The Participants.....	131
Interacting and Intersecting Cultures.....	150
Chapter Summary.....	170

Chapter 5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS.....	171
Conclusions.....	173
Implications for Practice.....	180
Implications for Research.....	183
Chapter Summary.....	187
Reference List.....	189
Appendix A: Interview Guide.....	224
Appendix B: Access to Interview site.....	227
Appendix C: Sample of the Interview site.....	228

List of Figures

Figure 1:	Saba's hierarchy of interacting subsystems that affect distance education.....	47
Figure 2:	The host culture complex.....	68

List of Tables

Table 1:	Dimensions of potential cross cultural communication tensions.....	71
Table 2:	Western and Chinese educational values and characteristics.....	75
Table 3:	Interview guide related to reviewed literature.....	116
Table 4:	Type and frequency of interactions with participants...	119
Table 5:	Emergent teaching-learning themes as connected to the literature.....	174

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Breen compares the complexity of the classroom [online course] culture with the interrelated myriad life forms found in a coral reef. Little of this life can be seen on the surface of the reef; but beneath the surface, the complexity of life forms is immense. Similarly, what can be seen of classroom [online course] interactions constitutes '*epiphenomena*' – mere surface manifestations of far more complex things going on under the surface. All that we can so far understand of classroom [online course] reality is the 'rim of the socio-cognitive coral reef'

Holliday, 1994, pg. 31 quoting from Breen, 1986, pp. 142, 149

When a critical teacher who doesn't share the culture, language, race or socioeconomic backgrounds of students enters the [online course], he or she becomes not an information provider but an explorer who works with students to create mutually understood texts

Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, p. 12

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Expanding global communications over the past decade in the form of the World Wide Web and the Internet increased the possibility of cultures meeting cultures within distance education courses taught from American colleges and universities. What is unique about this evolving educational environment is that adult learners can increasingly remain in their home cultures while their studies are “delivered” by an American university from a “Western” perspective. (The terms America and American will be using throughout this thesis as referring to the United States of America with full recognition that the USA is only one geographical part of North and South American continents.)

The American approach to distance education and adult education traditionally follows the pragmatic influences of William James (Saba, 2003) and John Dewey (Anderson, 2003). The modernistic influence of James (1907) values a logical, linear, and individualistic learning process, while the critical influence of Dewey (1938) values learning from experience in a reflective collaborative process. The adult education traditions of Dewey’s critical perspective (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) and of 1960s humanism were influenced by postmodernism when reviewing the American distance education

literature. American-generated “best practices” literature on designing and teaching at a distance suggests that learners’ cultural differences *should* be considered.

Cultural differences can be understood as those ways of interpreting and responding to teaching and learning that have been influenced by a learner’s worldview. An emerging international research literature in distance education builds on cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural computer-mediated communication (CMC) research and accounts for other cultural approaches to learning. Learners’ insights, an important adult learning consideration, are missing from the literature. Learners’ insights can be understood as reflective accounting of experiences and include study participants, as well as reflective practitioners (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Lather, 1991; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997).

SCENE SETTING

Beginning in the 1960s, Charles Wedemeyer at the University of Wisconsin began to draw the American distance education field together by emphasizing the use of technology to “articulate” (enable) educational opportunities to adult learners “at the back doors” (Wedemeyer, 1981) of the universities. Some years later, Moore and Kearsley (1996) provided what became

the classic American definition of distance education. Distance education was defined as “planned learning in which the learner and teacher are separated by physical distance and therefore the normal or principal means of communication is through technology” (p. 2). Recently, Saba (2003) applauded Peter’s acknowledgement of “the emergence of a postmodern era in distance education.” Thus, Saba wrote, “*distance education could be defined as a complex, hierarchical, nonlinear, dynamic, self-organized, and purposeful system of learning and teaching*” [emphasis in original] (p.12).

On some levels American distance education has been highly influenced by German Otto Peter’s industrial model of distance education which promoted a delivery system of the educational process. To that model Moore (1973; 1983) added interaction when he put forth the concept of transactional distance. Transactional distance describes the distance in “*relationship*” (emphasis in original) between the teacher and learner (Moore, 1983, p. 155). Interaction, between and among the learner and the teacher, the learner and other learners, as well as the learner and the course content (Moore, 1989), is seen as a variable in the psychological comfort of the independent learner. The original concept is presented devoid of cultural considerations (for example, differing cultural perspectives on learner autonomy and teacher-learner interactions). The concept

of presence, a psychological sense of being “real” and connected with others via technology, has emerged as an issue. Basically, it describes a learner’s sense of engagement and participation in computer-based interactions in online distance courses (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997). Presence can be critiqued as being deeply embedded in political, economical, religious, social, and ideological traditions that mediate connections between the learner and the whole distance education process.

Emergence of Culture as An Issue

In practice, interactions in online distance education are becoming more complex because adult learners can be living in their home cultures while studying courses designed and taught from American colleges and universities. This is further complicated by institution, academic discipline, and faculty cultures, as well as American cultures (and more broadly Western cultures) that are embedded in design and teaching approaches in online distance education. [Interestingly, the computer, the vehicle for expansion of U.S. distance education into global environments is a technology based on a Western rational, linear worldviews (Lauzon, 2002).]

The opening up of the communication world [NOTE: the “wired world,” not necessarily the whole world] by the World Wide Web sets up an awareness

that culture plays an important part in teaching-learning and that other cultures emphasize different dimensions of learning (Collis & Remmer, 1997; Robinson, 1999; Robbins, 1997; Chen, Mashhadi, Ang & Harkrider, 1999; Chen & Mashhadi 1998a, 1998b; McLoughlin, 1999; Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche, 2002; Tu, 2001; Gunawardena, Nolla, Wilson, Lopez-Islas, Ramirez-Angel & Megchun-Alpizar, 2000; Sanchez & Gunawardena, 1998; Gunawardena, Wilson & Nolla, 2003).

The relationship between international learners' cultures and American cultures further complicates the learning situation. In pre-Web distance education days, Michael G. Moore (1994) recognized cultural issues in video- and audio-based distance education and commented:

[W]e [Americans] have tended to be arrogantly unreflective and uncritical about the assumptions that underlie what and how we teach, about whether, as a society, we are culturally fit to be teaching across national borders; we have been unthinking about the effects of our teaching on people in foreign countries. (p. 189)

Saba (1994) alerted distance educators of working within an "emerging multipolar world...[where] unlike in the past, the flow of information will not be

unidirectional from the developed countries to the underdeveloped ones” (p. 111). Recently, culture has been recognized in the procedural American best practices literature, but there are only infrequent, and mostly unexplained, suggestions that culture *should* be considered (for example, Chickering & Ehrmann, 1994; Carr-Chellman & Duchastel, 2000). Polite nods to cultural sensitivity in American best practices literature are not enough. Any suggested strategies for cultural sensitivity must be suspect of being too culturally embedded in the traditional American approach to education without the international online learners’ insights.

Wilson (2001) suggested that cultural distance be considered in online distance education. Cultural distance results from the “cultural discontinuities” a learner experiences when faced with the mismatch of contextual cues in a course designed and taught from another cultural framework (Allen & Boykin, 1992, as cited in Wilson, 2001, p. 52). Education is only fully accessible whenever the learner has a sense of transactional presence, a sense of being connected with all parts of the learning process including the institution, the teacher, and peer learners (Shin, 2002)—in other words, when the learner feels to be considered as an active, respected part of the whole learning situation in which she or he is engaged.

There are instructional design strategies to address cultural discontinuities to be found in the distance education literature from mostly Australian, British, and Canadian researcher-practitioners who have been calling attention to the issue of culture for a decade. The discussion, sometimes referred to in the literature as “cultural inclusivity” (McLoughlin, 2001, p. 12), is not meant to stereotype (McLoughlin, 2001; Chen, Mashhadi, Ang, & Harkrider, 1999), but to suggest ways to build on the strengths of learners’ cultures as opposed to an uncritical modernistic perspective that views their cultural ways as deficits (McLoughlin, 1999, 2001; Collis, 1999) to be corrected through assimilation.

Saba (2003) [see p. 48] included social and global systems (which would include cultures) as one of several interacting systems in postindustrial distance education. Holliday (1994) [see p. 70] provided an exciting model of the layers and interactions of micro and macro cultures within an educational situation. Micro cultures focus on temporary groupings of people (for example, a course), while macro cultures focus on those “permanent memberships or long histories and traditions” (Holliday, 1994, p. 23) that influence learners. Hill and Fay (2003) used Holliday’s model to emphasize the complex nature of interacting cultures in which international learners find themselves when online distance

education courses are designed from one cultural perspective and delivered to learners from another cultural perspective.

This study evolved from personal observations of possible tensions for international learners within a distance education course designed from an American perspective. Those observations were reinforced by a growing awareness of the myriad of descriptive bits of information available on related issues; for example, cultural implications of learner autonomy, of the teacher-learner relationship, and of the Americanization of distance education (Wilson, Qayyum, & Boshier, 1998; Lauzon, 1995; Henderson, 1996; Boshier & Onn, 2000; Champion, 2001). Questions arose: Does access to quality online distance education simply mean the technical availability by the learner to login to a course? Might it not also mean access to learning within the learner's context even if the course is designed and taught from another cultural perspective? Emerging American best practices in online distance education give a polite nod of recommendation that courses are culturally sensitive, but without hearing directly from international learners we are in continued danger of unchallenged, even unrecognized, American perspectives of how online distance education is practiced in a global learning environment.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Humanism refers to an approach to adult education which is prominent within Western cultures of the U.S. and Canada (Brookfield, 1989). The philosophical underpinnings are directly linked from the psychologies of Rogers (1961, 1969) and Maslow (1968) which were the basis for andragogy as professed by Knowles (1980) (see below). The tenets of psychologically based humanism focus on the value of the individual who naturally strives for personal fulfillment; thus, the “root” of humanism is in “felt-needs rationale” (Brookfield, 1989, p. 204). Within education, teachers are to be facilitators, “not authoritarian transmitters of information from the expert to the ignorant” (p. 204).

Modernism refers to a perspective guided by a belief that progressive, rational, linear development of human nature is achievable with enough application of science. Modernism is associated with grand theories or “metanarratives,” such as the “objectivity” of merit as the great leveler of all people regardless of ethnicity, race, gender, religion, or other social influences.

Critical refers to the Dewey and Habermas traditions in which reflection (the processing of experience) is at the heart of looking at “commonly held assumptions” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 329) that hide hegemonic rhetorical (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997) relationships.

Postmodernism is often used interchangeably with poststructuralism (Lather, 1992; Flannery, 1994; Tisdell, 2000; Kilgore, 2001). Postmodernism is the state of questioning that abounds because of the failure of the grand theories of modernism in which science (including the science of psychology) was to provide predicative answers to human dilemmas. For the postmodernist, research is to unveil the layers of reality and interpretation, to expose hidden meanings and the elements of power. Philosophically, postmodernism can only be qualitative research giving meaning, describing multiple realities, using people's own words, and is made possible by intense involvement by the researcher in a particular context. Postmodernism represents the dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable nature of a constantly socially constructed reality. Appreciation is focused on a pluralistic, segmented, and fragmented society.

Poststructuralism argues that human identity and consciousness are historically produced (Kincheloe, 1998, p. 197). Poststructuralism is a “relational focus” on patterns (Lather, 1991, p. 113) emerging from a “never-ending process of inscription” and “becomes a ‘reality’ which can be talked about, systematized, theorized, researched and evaluated” (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 2001, p. 56). Above all, poststructuralism “foregrounds” [emphasizes] (Lather, 1991; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997) the hidden humanly created structures that are

historical and political in nature. These social structures are “hidden” in provocative manners and are promoted by dominant elite as foundational keys to knowledge and education.

Poststructuralists acknowledge that society is “comprised of diverse groups that are positioned unequally in relation to structure of dominance” (Smith, 1994, as cited in Henderson, 1996, p. 93). Poststructuralism denotes an element of power within socially created structures and foregrounds human interactions within those socially embedded structures and broader systems. Culture can be understood as one of the socio-historically created guidelines for human interactions.

Andragogy and pedagogy will be used interchangeably in this thesis. Basically, they refer to issues of teaching and learning. Andragogy is a term coined by Knowles (1980) to differentiate between “the art and science of teaching children” (pedagogy) and adults (andragogy). He built his ideas on four assumptions that are sometimes listed as five or six assumptions (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Van Dusen, 2002). Those assumptions revolve around self-concept (self-responsibility and growth towards self-direction); the role of experience; the readiness to learn (aware what they want to know and when they have been success as learners); and an orientation of

learning that is life centered (task/problem solving). Merriam and Caffarella (1999) offered five orientations to adult learning: behaviorist, cognitivist, humanist, social learning, and constructivist.

Best practices is defined by Inglis, Ling, and Joosten (1999) as “comprehensive, integrated and cooperative approaches to the continuous improvements” (p. 157) that represent a collection of practice-based standards organized by field professionals as promoting exemplary methods. They are outgrowths of particular (but usually unacknowledged) philosophical approaches. Best practices can be critiqued as modernistic, programmatic checklists which are usually divorced from critical concern as to whether or not the desired pedagogical outcomes are achieved (Cherryholmes, 1999).

Culture is a complex idea with roots in anthropology that can be viewed as a groups’ shared beliefs, shared values, norms (Johnson & Christensen, 2000), myths, and structural elements (Watson, Ho, & Raman, 1994, as cited in Collis, 1999) that are passed down from generation to generation (Gunawardena et al., 2001). Sleeter (1996) defined culture as “the totality of a group’s socially-constructed way of carrying on life” (p. 146). Jacobson (1996) wrote that culture “is first and foremost a shared way of making sense of experience, based on a shared history” (as cited in Pratt, 1999). Intercultural communication, a related

concept, is defined as “interaction between and among individuals from various cultural backgrounds.” Cross-cultural study identifies and compares cultural differences in communication between and among cultural groups. Cultures exist in educational environments (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Fay & Hill, 2003). Sleeter (1999) reminded us that “most have very little knowledge of the culture of any group other than that into which they were born... Without some depth of knowledge of at least one other cultural group and of how another group views one’s own taken-for-granted culture, teachers will probably continue to greatly oversimplify the meaning of ‘culture’” (p. 146). Cole and Engestrom (as cited in McLoughlin, 2001, p. 8) described technology as a cultural amplifier. In this study culture represented not a single, but complex intersecting system of political, economical, religious, social, and ideological traditions embedded in a worldview. It is an evolving, but slowly changing system of socio-historical traditions that impact the educational process and is open to critical reflection when not assumed to be an organic entity.

Cultural discontinuities refers to what a learner experiences when faced with the mismatch of contextual cues in a course designed and taught from another cultural framework (Allen & Boykin, 1992; Wilson, 2001). The concept recognizes the element of dominant power in cross-cultural exchanges.

Transaction refers to interaction in an educational exchange. It is often confused with the term transactional as it relates to Dewey's emphasis on the role of experience and reflective thinking. However, in this study the word transaction is used when emphasizing an educational exchange. Moore (1989) identified three types of interaction—learner-teacher, learner-learner, and learner-content. Anderson (2002, 2003) suggested an expansion of interaction possibilities to include teacher-teacher; teacher-content; content-content. Others, coming from an instructional technology perspective, suggested learner-interface interaction (Hillman, Willis, & Gunawardena, 1994) and learner-the virtual world interaction should be considered (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche, 2002). In this study a postmodern perspective was included in the concept of transaction. Types, styles, and rules of interactions were not divorced from culturally influenced worldviews; rather they were understood as embedded and guided by cultural traditions.

Transactional Distance refers to the theory as originally submitted by Moore in 1983 and since expanded by the work of Saba (1994, 2003). Transactional distance “defines the *relationship* (emphasis in original) of instructor and learner” (Saba, 2002, p. 61). Moore (1983, p. 155) introduced the idea that, “...distance between learner and teacher which is not merely

geographic, but educational and psychological as well. It is a distance in the *relationship* (emphasis in original) of the two partners in the educational enterprise. Distance therefore becomes a pedagogical issue to be “overcome by teachers, learners, and educational organizations if effective, deliberate, planned learning is to occur. The procedures to overcome this distance are instructional design and interaction, procedures, and to emphasize that this distance is pedagogical, not geographic” (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, pp. 200-201). Dialogue and structure are teaching behaviors that can impact the transactional distance of the learner. Learner autonomy is seen as the moderating factor in how much transactional distance a particular learner can tolerate.

Transactional Presence is a concept developed by Shin (2001) that added breadth and depth to the discussion of interaction in distance education.

Transactional presence is defined, “as the degree to which a distance learner perceives the availability of, and connectedness with, other parties involved in a given distance education setting (Shin, 2002, p. 121). Transactional presence is a relational construct (Shin, 2002, p. 122) that expands the concepts of educational interactions in distance education from a “micro-approach” (a reductionist approach to the mechanics of a specific educational exchange) to a “macro-

approach...[by taking] into account the socio-cultural and historical background of each instance” (Shin, 2002, p.122).

ASSUMPTIONS

- The influences of postmodernism and poststructuralism provide important considerations for a humanistic theoretical framework. Contemporary humanism therefore is a vehicle for study of fuller human interaction (beyond basic individualistic psychology) and activity by allowing for socio-historical considerations (in the notion of culture).
- Culture is a multifaceted concept that is embedded in the educational experience, not only at the micro level of the course, but also on the broader macro levels within the educational milieu. It is a key concept when discussing a global learning environment.
- Broad “Western”, specifically “American”, cultures exist to the extent that many people can be described (as suggested in the literature) some shared values that represent a general “Western” worldview that values individuality and rationality.
- American values of individuality, linearity, and rationality are so embedded in the American approach to education that it is challenging for most American teachers to do more than superficial *shoulds* when it comes to expanding

educational approaches to be more culturally inclusive. Here, I ascribe to the words of Holliday (1994) who wrote that the purpose of looking critically at teaching and learning across cultures is “not to describe imperialism as inevitable, but to show how lack of knowledge of how other types of people think and do things, from both sides, can create the conditions for imperialism” (p. 4).

- Adult international learners can offer invaluable first-hand information about how their cultures intersect with the American approach to education.

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was threefold: First, to provide thick, rich descriptions of insights of international adult learners of the interaction of cultures in online distance courses designed and provided in an American distance education environment; secondly, to provide learners’ insights into the emerging discussion of the impact of teaching and learning cultures have on the design and teaching of online distance education courses; and lastly, to foreground the philosophical discussion of culture, in particular how the dynamically interacting cultural layers might relate to access and equity in postmodern distance education, especially if concerned with meeting the needs of the individual learner.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This study was guided by the question: What can international adult learners tell us about the impact of culture on their experiences in online distance education courses designed and delivered by an American university? Related sensitivity and questions (1) sought descriptions of tensions that might arise when cultures meet cultures in an online learning environment, especially when one culture is dominant and (2) sought descriptions of learning in a global educational setting.

RATIONALE

Increased access to American university study is made possible as result of the latest communication technologies—the World Wide Web and the Internet. An emerging body of literature, largely from outside of the U.S, discusses the impact of culture in online distance education. Learners' insights of the arising tensions experienced when education is prepared and delivered from one culture to another, especially when one of those cultures is dominant, are missing from that literature. Additionally, a critical discussion of the tensions in an American distance educational approach to the global learning environment would inform the adult learning values of access and equity.

RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative research approach was employed. Qualitative research is a descriptive, naturalistic, process-oriented attempt to uncover themes or patterns in people's words through observation, document and artifacts review, and interviews (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Wolcott, 2001; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). A descriptive research design was appropriate for this study because it allowed the participants to provide their own words to describe their insights on the intersection of multiple cultures in American online distance education environments.

The purposeful sample was drawn from international learners who were currently or had participated in at least one online course with an American university distance education unit or program. In-depth, semistructured online interviews were guided by questions developed from the literature. All electronic interviews were stored electronically and on paper copy. Themes emerged from an analysis of the interviews.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Access to education at a distance is concerned not only with technical capability of obtaining communication connection with the course, but also with access to the learning dimensions within the educational system. Equity in adult

education is concerned with enabling learning to be transferable to differing learner contexts. In general, there is a scarcity of research on access and equity issues in distance education (Berge & Mrozowski, 1999).

The expansion of worldwide communication technology has made access to higher education opportunities **procedurally** open so that people from various cultures can be together in online courses. The anonymity offered by the World Wide Web can be seen as the great equalizer (Lach, 1999; Anonymous, 2000) but only if the political realities of culture and of the connection between knowledge and power are not considered. Cross-cultural communication and cross-cultural computer-mediated communication research are expanding awareness of the potential impact of people from various cultures meeting online, especially in formal learning situations. While there is a myriad of “how to teach online” technical strategies available in the American professional literature there are only infrequent, and mostly unexplained, recommendations that culture *should* be considered.

This qualitative study was guided by the work of distance educators who raised the question of culture as a consideration in designing and teaching online distance courses across cultures. Those researcher-practitioners often approached the issue from an instructional-design perspective and conceptualized strategies

using cross-cultural computer-mediated communication research—an important step in moving beyond the *shoulds* for the professional literature. Recently, Gunawardena et al. (2003) reviewed that research and pointed out, “None of the existing research reached out to explore global perceptions about learning” (p. 770). In other words, the focus was on the “micro-cultural landscape of teachers, students, and classes” (Holliday, 1994, p. 6), not on macro aspects of learners’ cultures that “includes the wider societal and institutional influences on what happens in the [course]” (p. 13). This research, intended to gather insights from adult international learners about the impact of crossing cultures in online distance education, might be considered a beginning step to looking at global perceptions about learning.

Strauss and Corbin (1990) pointed out that the findings of qualitative research might be used to “build research instruments, develop policy, evaluate programs, [and] guide practitioners’ practices” (as cited in Burge, 1990, p. 8). This study offers an expanded approach for future researchers by highlighting adult learners’ experiences with “cultural distance” (Wilson, 2001, p. 52) in online distance education and recognition of the interaction of multiple cultures (Holliday, 1994) overlapping in distance education (Fay & Hill, 2003). Two levels of support for future research evolved. First, the *shoulds* discussion in the

American “best practices” literature can be challenged as procedural and limited. Future research inclusive of adult learners’ experiences with “cultural discontinuities” (Wilson, 2001, p. 52) in online distance education can lead to pedagogical strategies that are pragmatic—not just programmatic and systematic—that include a critical element and are considered with whether or not desired outcomes are achieved (Cherryholmes, 1999, p. 4, 20). Second, teachers and universities are encouraged to consider the findings in this study to provide access to learning (not just technical access) for adult learning situated in cultures other than the dominant “American” culture. Third, the whole notion of interacting, overlapping of multiple cultures in a distance education system needs to be addressed as we work increasingly in a global learning environment.

LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted in the English language by a Euro-American embedded in American higher education. Thus, the very language and embedded values that reflect the dominant American educational culture under review serves as a potential limitation. Gunawardena et al. (2003) acknowledged the difficulty of doing cross-cultural research and suggested that using a cross-cultural team of researchers would assist in limiting bias in interpretation and in overgeneralizations that might border on stereotyping. While reaching out to

explore global perceptions about learning with a research team is well beyond the scope of the current project, this study is a beginning attempt to include international adult learners' insights when online distance education is offered globally from an American educational perspective. Member checks were an active element during the data analysis and provided checks on a Euro-American interpretation. Additionally, research friends (five international Penn State University students) made suggestions for improvement of questions and of the online interview process.

It can be suspected that Asian and Middle-East cultural traditions of respect and honor might have resulted in some or all participants being respectfully cautious with me as the interviewer when describing their experiences in American online learning environments. Additionally, a note needs to be made about the tentative nature of qualitative findings.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented an overview of the study. Broad introductions to the study's philosophical approach and to the setting were presented. Terms were defined and the methodology was briefly outlined. Limitations were presented.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Three aspects of the distance education literature will be reviewed in this chapter. First, the ideas that influenced American distance education in higher education will be reviewed in order to set the scene for this study in a historical frame and to consider the role of learners' contexts in distance education. Next, the current state of American distance education in higher education will be reviewed as related to growing demands for online distance education in an increasingly global learning environment. Lastly, the notion of culture as an emerging tension in American online distance education will be reviewed. A case will be made that the insights of online distance learners who identify themselves as coming from a non-Western perspective are important when considering distance education in a global learning environment. Their insights are missing from the literature.

IDEAS THAT INFLUENCED AMERICAN DISTANCE EDUCATION

In this section distance education will be defined, set in a historical framework, and framed by key ideas in the American approach to distance education. A brief orientation to two particularly important philosophical aspects of distance education-the influence of individualism and the influence of open

education-will be offered. Finally, the section will conclude with application of these ideas in American distance education.

Definitions of Distance Education

Establishing definitions is important in a field of study. Definitions provide a common language to frame discussions and to guide research. In the mid-1980s Keegan (1996/2002) collected and compiled definitions of distance education from “established experts in the field” (p. 14). He pointed out that the broad term of distance education is a “generic term for a range of teaching/learning strategies” (p. 14) used by higher education institutions and corporate training units and “subsumes” a variety of terms including correspondence study, home study, independent study, and external study (p. 15). He identified five characteristics of distance education definitions:

- the quasi-permanent separation of teacher and learner throughout the length of the learning process (this distinguishes it from conventional face-to-face education);
- the influence of an educational organization both in the planning and preparation of learning materials and in the provision of student support services (this distinguishes it from private study and teach-yourself programs);

- the use of technical media-print, audio, video or computer-to unite teacher and learner and to carry the content of the course (this distinguishes it from instructional technology as a content support for classroom education);
- the provision of two-way communication so that the learner may benefit from or even initiate dialogue (this distinguishes it from other uses of technology in education); and
- the quasi-permanent absence of the learning group throughout the length of the learning process so that people are usually taught as individuals rather than in groups, with the possibility of occasional meetings, either face-to-face or by electronic means, for both didactic and socialization purposes (pp. 22-23).

Keegan's last characteristic, the absence of learning groups, needs to be reconsidered with the advent of Web technologies and the Internet which enabled increased interactivity; thus, increased opportunities for learning within groups. This point will be presented later in this chapter in the section on interaction and interactivity.

The type of communication technology used within a given time frame of distance education is often the focus of definitions (for example, correspondence

study or online education), but Holmberg (2002/1995, 2001) suggested the focus should be on the “conversation like dialogue” (communication) between the teacher and learner (2001, p. 171) since new technologies are “evolutionary rather than revolutionary” (2002, p. 10). This focus on singular communication between the teacher and learner can be critiqued as downplaying the role of technology. But, as Postman (1993) noted, “embedded in every tool is an ideology bias, a predisposition to construct the world as one thing rather than another, to value one thing over another, to amplify one sense or skill or attitude more loudly than another” (p. 13). Postman further reminds us of Marshall McLuhan’s famous quote, “The medium is the message” (p. 13-14). Thus, it cannot be forgotten that the selected communication technology for distance education is technology that is embedded with political, economic, and social values. It is not value free. Computers were designed and function in narrow, rational and linear patterns based on an x-o dichotomy.

For the purposes of this study the American-based definition as stated by Moore, editor of *The American Journal of Distance Education*, will begin the definition:

Distance education is planned learning that normally occurs in a different place from teaching,

requiring special course design and instruction techniques, communication through various technologies, and special organizational and administrative arrangements (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 2).

Recently, Saba (2003) applauded Peter's acknowledgement of "the emergence of a postmodern era in distance education." Thus, Saba wrote, "*distance education could be defined as a complex, hierarchical, nonlinear, dynamic, self-organized, and purposeful system of learning and teaching*" [emphasis in original] (p.12).

Historical Framework

Distance education has provided an important lifelong learning opportunity for adult learners for well over a couple of hundred years and can be understood as evolving through five generations (Moore & Kearsley, 2005, p. 25) as defined by the primary technology used:

First generation: Correspondence (including home study)

Second generation: Broadcast radio & television

Third generation: Open universities

Fourth generation: Teleconferencing

Fifth generation: Internet/Web

Home study had its beginnings in skill-based education, for example shorthand perhaps as early as 1728 in England (Battenberg as cited in Holmberg, 2002, p. 8) and mine safety around 1880 in the United States (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 20-21). Home study also provided access to training for those excluded from traditional forms of vocational training. An early example of this can be found in Anna Eliot Tichnor's Society to Encourage Studies at Home that she and eight women ran from her Boston home from 1873 to 1896. More than 7,000 students (mostly women) from all over the United States participated in her correspondence, independent home study (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 22; Mathieson as cited in Holmberg, 2002/1995).

Distance education entered U.S. higher education as early as 1874 with Illinois Wesleyan College "offering courses and degrees—from the bachelor's to the Ph.D.—on an *in absentia* (nonresident) basis" (Pittman, 2003, p. 27). William Rainey Harper, who had taught Hebrew to Sunday school teachers via correspondence with the Chautauqua Institute, established the country's first "extension division" when he organized the University of Chicago in 1892 (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 23; Vincent as cited in Holmberg, 2002, p. 8). That same year, the Chautauqua Home Reading Course in Agriculture was created by

The Pennsylvania State College (Pittman, 2003, p. 27) graduating four students from Oklahoma, Canada, and Pennsylvania.

There are several interpretations to this early history of distance education. In one of the first comprehensive looks at correspondence study in the American university, Pittman (2003) pointed out that Charles Wedemeyer, from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, “focused on nontraditional education as a revolt against the elitism of the established education system” (p. 23). Pittman also reported on the work of Noble who took a critical approach to the early American university extension movement and forms of distance education.

The second generation of distance education evolved with the use of broadcast and teleconferencing. In the 1960s, Wedemeyer became involved with the Articulated Instructional Media (AIM) Project. The project focused on “finding ways of joining [i.e., articulating] various communication media for teaching off-campus students” (Moore & Kearsley, 1996, p. 25).

The third generation of distance education focused on open universities. In fact, Wedemeyer’s (1982) ideas of broadcasting educational opportunities to adults were highly influential in the creation of the British Open University (Moore, 2004). The focus of the open university was to provide flexible opportunities for university-level study to working, nontraditional adult learners.

Much of the instruction was provided via television with learner support provided by a system of tutor support. The ideas of state-sponsored mega-universities introduced by the British Open University added an element of global spread of a systems approach in distance education (Moore & Kearsley, 2005).

The fourth generation—teleconferencing—emerged as the hub of distance education in the United States in the 1980s. Groups or classes meeting in real time, as opposed to independent learners, were the focus. Traditional educators and policy makers found this approach, “a closer fit to the traditional view of education that occurs in ‘classes,’ unlike correspondence or the open university models” (p. 38).

The fifth generation includes computer- and Internet-based virtual classes. This generation emerged with computer technology, in particular with the advent of Web-based technologies and the Internet. The explosion of this form of distance education and ramifications of that explosion will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Key Ideas

Behind all forms of education are ideas that shape the philosophical approach to education. In this section (1) American ideas of liberal-progressivism and pragmatism as exemplified in humanistic psychology, adult learning,

independent study, and practice approaches and (2) the interplay of American-European ideas of open education and of industrialization of education will be briefly discussed.

American Liberal-Progressive and Pragmatism Philosophies

John Dewey's (1938) liberal-progressive ideas on transaction (Moore, 1973, 1983; Boyd & Apps, 1980; Garrison, 2003; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2003) and William James' (1907) notion of pragmatism (Saba, 2003) are important concepts to understanding the American approach to and practice of distance education. They will be reviewed in this section.

Dewey's liberal-progressive ideas

John Dewey is a key figure in the American approach to education. For Dewey, the emphasis of all education was on experience, collaboration, and reflective thinking (Moore, 1973, 1983; Boyd & Apps, 1980; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999; Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2003), whereby the educational experience is to be viewed as "activity-based" and a "transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment (Dewey, 1916, as cited in Anderson, 2003, p. 130).

Liberal-humanist independent study.

Wedemeyer (1981), at the University of Wisconsin from the 1950s through the 1970s, built on his naval career experience with correspondence education and his commitment to develop opportunities for adult learners who at that time needed to enter higher education via “the back door.” Wedemeyer focused on the independence of the nontraditional, off-campus learner, and, as noted above, was interested in using technology to facilitate independent study (Moore, 2004).

Humanistic psychological.

Carl Rogers (1961, 1969), along with Abraham Maslow (1968), were major figures in what has been called the “third force in psychology” (DiCaprio, 1974, p. 230). The third force emerged during the 1960s and was a reaction to the two prevailing approaches to psychology—behaviorism and psychoanalysis. The “fulfillment” (Maddi, 1980) or “growth” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999) models became known as humanistic approaches and are focused on personal responsibility and freedom to choose. They led to the development of self-direction (Tough, 1961) as a concept for working with adult learners (Moore, 1980). The humanistic psychological approaches can be critiqued as taking an apolitical stance on the complexities of the contextualized world.

In the early 1970s, Moore, a student of Wedemeyer who was influenced by the work of Rogers and Tough, expanded on the notion of independent study by including Boyd and Apps' (1980) concept of transactional (which was a direct expansion of Dewey's ideas on transaction). Boyd and Apps had provided a framework that situated adult education in the complex world of individuals interacting psychologically and cognitively, within social and cultural systems. The result was the theory of transactional distance (Moore, 1973, 1983; Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

The term transactional distance was identified to open discussion of the "interplay" of physical, temporal, and educational distance between learner and teacher. Moore believed that such distance could result in a psychological discomfort for the learner depending on her or his level of autonomy (Moore, 1973; 1983). Further, Moore expanded with the notion of interaction and learner autonomy as important "variables" in the transactional process. Thus, Garrison (2000) pointed out, that the focus of distance education began a shift from structural concerns, such as delivery technologies (for example, correspondence, broadcast), to transactional issues, such as interactions.

Knowles' adult learning.

The liberal-humanist perspective can be understood as the American bedrock of education based in experience and linear movement toward intellect and wisdom (Beder, 1989, pp. 44-45). The personal growth movement of the 1970s humanist philosophers, such as Maslow and Rogers, greatly influenced Knowles conception of adult education (Beder, 1989). Knowles (1980) built his ideas of adult education on Roger's notion of self-direction and used it as a pivotal concept in "facilitating" learning for adults (Garrison, 2003, p. 162). Knowles assumptions of adult learners revolve around self-concept (self-responsibility and growth towards self-direction), the role of experience; the readiness to learn (awareness of what they want to know and when they have been successful as learners), an orientation of learning that is life centered (task/problem solving), a need to know (awareness that they want to learn about something before beginning), and motivation (mostly from internal sources of motivation) (Van Dusen, 2002, pp. 239-240).

James' American Pragmatism

"Real life," "practical," "practice-based," and "problem-solving" approaches to education are often attributed to the influence of William James. They frame the American approach to distance education (Saba, 2003; Pittman,

2003). But, the “how to” traditions of problem-solving, utility-based action are complicated when coupled with the pragmatic companion of “disdain for intellectual tendencies” (p. 9). Utility-based action provides results, but a pragmatic non-theoretical stance inhibits the scholarly development of a field. Interestingly, Saba noted that American practice-based pragmatism helped position distance education on “solid epistemological foundation” and poised the work done as “an asset for the development of distance education paradigms in the foreseeable future” (p. 3). Saba concluded that since so much of the work in distance education is from an everyday problem-solving perspective the groundwork or “building blocks” for theory are provided with “exceptional conceptual clarity in understanding core concepts” (p. 3).

Critique of American Liberal-Humanistic and Pragmatic Influences

The American approach to distance education has been almost exclusively influenced by the liberal-progressive and the personal growth (humanistic approach) psychology that coincided with the timeframe in which Wedemeyer, Moore, Garrison (Evans & Nation, 2003) and others were identifying as the American field of distance education. What these liberal-humanistic approaches have in common is a linear-rational and individualistic approach to education.

A critique of these influences would suggest that James's pragmatic emphasis might be seen in a technical-rational focus, while Dewey's ideas on critical reflection might offer exciting directions to address notions of culture in distance education

Interplay of American-European Ideas

American and European approaches to distance education have been interactive, influencing one another throughout their involvements in that mode of education. As noted above, Wedemeyer from the University of Wisconsin was interested in utilizing technology to improve delivery of off-campus independent study (the AIM project). In 1969 he was invited to England where he contributed to the development of the team and system approaches to distance education as the British Open University was being organized (Wedemeyer, 1982; Moore & Kearsley, 1996; Moore, 2004). Interestingly, the American approach, largely under Wedemeyer's tutelage continued to focus on the independent aspects of the "distance study" learner, but was influenced by the British notion of "open" education. Open educational philosophies and systems focus on open access to education for working adult learners—a characteristic of American land-grant universities (Moore, 2002, p. xvii).

Holmberg (2001), working in distance education in Sweden, was greatly influenced by American psychologist Rogers' perspective on facilitation and "self-realization" (fulfillment model) (p.20). In response, he offered the concept of "guided didactic conversation" (pp. 47-50) as a method to be employed by the instructor for communication with the learner. These ideas blended well with the Dewey concept of transaction and with Moore's emerging ideas of the relationship of teacher and learner.

At about the same time, Otto Peters, working in Germany on distance education, put forth the idea of the "industrialization of education," whereby "technology is used to reach a mass audience" (Saba, 2003, p. 5). He suggested that a "division of labor" was necessary to ensure the efficiency of the complex systems necessary when "a large number of student [are] participating in university study simultaneously, regardless of their place of residence and occupation" (p. 125).

European ideas of open education for nontraditional learners, of conversational relationships between teacher and learner, and of an industrial approach to distance education meshed well with Wedemeyer's and others' concept of independent, off-campus study in which the learner was connected via technology to a system of education.

Dimensions of Learning

In this section three dimensions of learning will be presented as key aspects of American distance education: an independent/learner-centered approach, a psychological approach to learners contexts, and a systems approach to support connection between the learner and parts of the teaching system.

Independent/Learner-Centered

The individual learner became the focus of American distance education. As Saba (2003) noted, the “centrality and independence of learner” is unmistakable in the distance education literature and serves as a mark of “why [distance education] is essentially different from other forms of education” (p. 3). Key to this concept of the learner is the relational issue between the learner and teacher. Interaction, thus, is a key feature in facilitation of learning.

Interaction.

Guided by the concept of the independent study and influenced by the work of Apps and Boyd, Moore (1989) identified three types of interaction— student/teacher; student/student; and student/content. Anderson (2002, 2003) suggested an expansion of interaction possibilities to include teacher/teacher; teacher/content; content/content. Others, coming from an instructional technology perspective, suggested learner/interface interaction (Hillman, Willis,

& Gunawardena, 1994) and learner/the virtual world interaction should be considered (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche, 2002).

Related to interaction and technology is the concept of presence. Shin (2001) traced the concept of presence to the notion of telepresence that had been applied to “human-machine interaction” (p. 17). Shin describes “the essence” of presence as “when media users are oblivious of the mediated nature of their experience with media” (p. 16). The concept of “social presence” has emerged in the distance education literature. Social presence (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997) refers to the psychological sense that the learner has of being a part of the virtual group as result of interactions.

Recently, Anderson (2003, 2002) provided a comprehensive review and analysis of interaction as treated in the distance education literature. He suggested that the new Web technologies and the computer-mediated communication that they afford further increased the complexity of increased interactivity. This increased interactivity impacted distance education in various ways including increasing learner control, increasing ability to tailor to learners’ needs based on their input, and enabling meaningful collaborative learning, especially with the creation of online learning communities (2002, ¶5). Finally, the interactive features of an online learning environment allows for reflection

and group construction of knowledge (reality)—a key ingredient in constructivist learning theories (Jonassen cited by Anderson ¶5).

Constructivism.

Constructivism can be understood as those theories that flow from Dewey and cognitive psychologists, such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner (Evans & Nation, 2003; Lynch, 1998) and Rogers who emphasized the proposition that, “learners could learn actively and construct new knowledge based on their prior knowledge [and] construct knowledge through social interaction with others” (Huang, 2002, p. 28). Discussions of constructivism are prominent in the teaching/learning online distance education literature and presented as a learner-centered technique (Hughes & Daykin, 2002) as a course is designed to encourage and allow for learners to bring their experiences to share and negotiate an expansion of knowledge among a group of learners (Huang, 2002).

Schwandt (1994) provided two broad strands of constructivist thoughts—one focusing on psychological (cognitive) aspects of learning and the other focusing on sociological aspects of the process of constructing a world from experiences. The latter can be traced to the work of Berger and Luckman (1967) on the social construction of reality and is concerned with the social process of people organizing, reorganizing, producing, reproducing, and creating a shared

reality with others. The sociological concept of constructivism emphasizes a broad social system of learning, while the psychological concept emphasizes the personal cognitive processes of learning. Social systems and the related learners' contexts are viewed differently in the psychological and sociological approaches to constructivism.

Psychological Approach to Learner Context

Within distance education the primary focus on social systems and learners contexts has been psychological, particularly focused on demographic characteristics of the learners which are viewed as potential barriers to learning (Cookson, 1990). In this section the treatment of learner context will be reviewed within the distance education literature.

Gibson's 1998 book, *Distance Learners in Higher Education: Institutional Responses for Quality Outcomes*, continues to be cited as offering key characteristics of distance learners. Melody Thompson (1998) contributed a chapter by summarizing the literature on demographic and situational characteristics of distance learners and found that issues such as age, gender, personality type, learning style, and life roles were studied.

While characteristics of those who learn at a distance are often described as heterogeneous (Holmberg, 1995; Thompson, 1998), the characteristics are still

clustered around those associated with adult learning principles (Van Dusen, 2002, p. 239) and a preference for self-directed learning is noted as a key feature in characterizing distance learners (Garrison, 2003; Sammons, 2003). Learners' characteristics are discussed sometimes in psychological terms, such as cognitive and learning factors (Hannafin, Hill, Oliver, Glazer, & Sharma, 2003). This can be critiqued as a modernistic or reductionist view of the learner—that is, the shaving of context and diversity in search for universal (and generalizable) psychological factors.

Learner background characteristics are discussed in the psychologically based literature from a success and retention perspective; for example, those traits that are related to success within distance education courses. Thompson (1998) noted the slim, mostly anecdotal information on ethnic backgrounds of distance learners (p. 12). Citing the separate works of Eastmond, Willis, and Holmberg, Thompson suggested that distance education might be, “a particularly appealing way for students from disadvantaged socio-economic groups to enter higher education” (p. 12). Social systems words such as culture, folkways, language, and mores have been discussed, but primarily with regard to cognitive learning process [for example, Gibson, 1998, conceptually connected ecological systems theory to “social context of which the learner is a part” (p. 113)] or where a

learner's "entry characteristics" channel them into successful or unsuccessful outcomes (for example, Hopper, 2000; Kember, 1995). Australian distance educators McLoughlin (1999a, 1999b, 2001) and Collis (1999) labeled this emphasis on psychological barriers always in light of what inhibits people's success a "deficit model." Burge (1990) noted missed opportunities for a fuller literature within the psychologically based distance education literature.

Within the distance education literature there is a dusting of attempts in expanding learner contexts to broader levels. The International Council for Distance Education (ICDE) conferences, in particular one held at Penn State University in 1994, provides an example of attempts to broaden the focus to international learner contexts. Gayol (1994) reported on the role of culture in the integration of distance education in Mexico and of challenges to cooperation between Mexico and the U.S. More specific to learner's contexts, Sanchez and Gunawardena (1998) combined the psychological and social context of the learner when they looked at the "learning style profile of Hispanic adult learners" (p. 47). Gibson (2003) (who had done the work on learner characteristics discussed above) recently recognized the missing adult education concept of learners' context in the distance education literature. In a chapter entitled, "Learners and Learning: The Need for Theory," she noted brief attempts in the distance

education research to acknowledge learners' context although the emphasis focused on psychological supports needed to eliminate or reduce contextual barriers. She used Boyd and Apps' (1980) work on transactional modes to make connections from "learner characteristics," as traditionally used, to "learner context," as a broader encapsulation of a learner's world. Gibson also suggested that, "While there is growing recognition of the importance of context the focus on social context has been confined, for the most part, to dynamics within the learning group." She noted, "research continues to place emphasis on the individual and on personal systems." She continued that, "Sorely missing is research that focus on race, class, gender..." (pp. 156-157). Those larger issues—race, class, and gender—can be understood as components of learners' cultures.

Systems Approach

A theoretical aspect of American distance education is on promoting an efficient working system needed to support the teaching/learning process. This adds a sociological approach to the system of distance education. Moore and Kearsley (1996) described a distance education system as "consisting of all of the component processes that make up distance education, including learning, teaching, communication, design, management, and even such less obvious components as history and institutional philosophy" (p. 5).

Saba (1994, 2003) and Garrison (2000) suggested that a systems approach to distance education can provide more than a focus on the functionality of a working system; it can provide a framework for fuller appreciation and understanding of the complexities of learners' contexts. Recently, Saba (2003) advocated approaching distance education from an expanded view of systems theory. He provided the model shown in Figure 1.

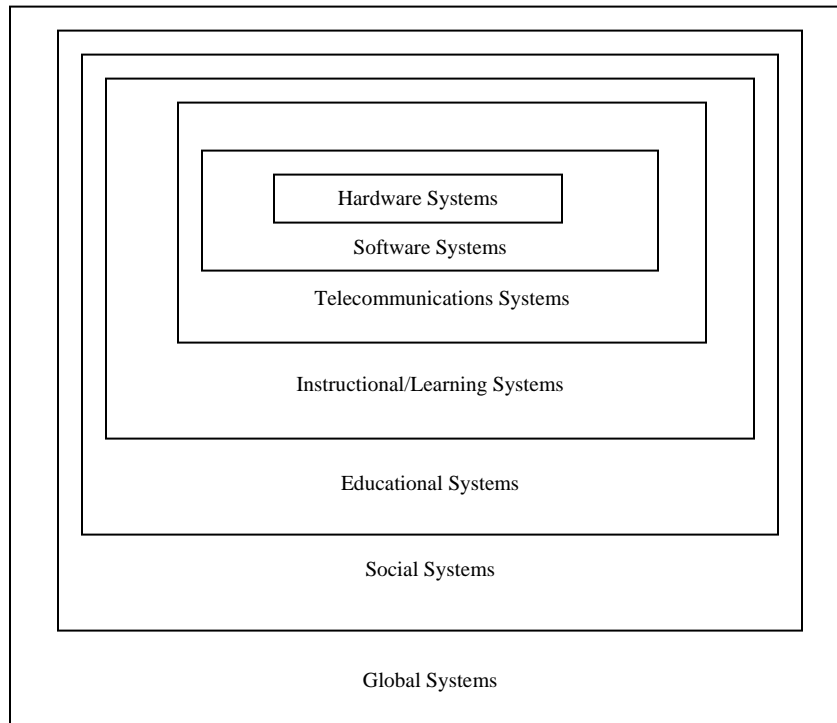


Figure 1: Saba's (2003) hierarchy of interacting subsystems that affect distance education (p. 8)

The model reveals systems beyond the communication technologies (telecommunication systems) and teacher-learner interactive (psychologically based learning systems) which have been the focus of American distance education literature.

Summary of Ideas on American Distance Education in Higher Education

The American approach to distance education follows two educational traditions—humanistic psychological and pragmatic-based education. The focus of

the distance education literature has been built on humanistic psychological foundations and “how-to” pragmatic realities of practice. Unlike a postmodern perspective, learner context is largely ignored or approached demographically as a deficit. Moore and Kearsley (1996) extended the sphere of distance education to a systems approach focusing on holistic support of the interaction of the teacher and the independent learner. Recently, Saba provided a model that recognized the social and global contexts in a complex system. Saba recognized that distance education is not just focused on the psychologically oriented teacher-learner interactions, but that the consideration of broader sociological issues such as social and global spheres is essential.

CURRENT STATE OF AMERICAN DISTANCE EDUCATION

In this section the current state of distance education in American higher education will be reviewed briefly. The literature reveals that, in general, American colleges and universities were unprepared for the ramifications of the World Wide Web and for the exportation of their online courses to expanded social and global markets.

The Unprepared American University

Distance education maintained a marginal status within American higher education (Wolcott, 2002; Pittman, 2003) until recent years when easily accessible Web-based technology encouraged the dream of easy new student markets (Simmons, Pittman, 2003; Gladieux & Swail, 2002). Despite calls from distance educators that higher education needed to “begin to construct the necessary intellectual infrastructure to complement the maturing technical infrastructure” (Hannah, 2002, p. 42), the American university was caught unprepared to understand that distance (psychological, physical, and temporal) is a pedagogy issue (Moore & Anderson, 2003, preface) and is involved within larger communication, social, and global systems (Saba, 2003).

The rush to quickly mount online distance education programs found traditional classroom-based teachers drawn or encouraged to migrate to teaching

online with little direction. Most were unfamiliar with teaching/learning principles and strategies of distance education and thought of distance education as being invented with the World Wide Web and the Internet (Moore & Anderson, 2003, preface). Pittman (2003), along with Saba (2003) pointed out the pragmatic response of unprepared institutions—a scramble to create “best practices” in an attempt to figure out how to teach online.

The Response: Best Practices

The creation of best practices is based on the assumed newness of online learning with little or no awareness of pedagogical issues already revealed in the distance education literature. Pittman (2003) passionately pointed out that such ignorance doomed many to conclude that distance education is “a simple linear progression, with each new medium topping the previous one” (Pittman quoted in an interview by Simpson, 2002, p. 118) and thus to reinvestigate questions and concepts that have been already developed in distance education (2003). The assumptions behind best practices are fraught with notions of “absolutism,” but as Inglis, Ling, and Joosten (1999) pointed out, even when created with “best intentions...[best practices] are subject to the whims” of the new (p. 15).

There is an ever-expanding source of “best practices” for teaching online—for example, U.S. Higher Education Regional Accrediting Commissions, 2000,

available at <http://wcet.info/resources/publications/guidelines.pdf>; Western Cooperative for Educational Telecommunications, available at <http://www.wiche.edu/telecom/>; Goodyear, Salmon, Spector, Steeples, and Tickner, 2001; Thach and Murphy, 1995; Williams, 2000a; Inglis, Ling, and Joosten, 1999; Van Der Velde and Rawl, 2000. In addition, Sloan-C maintains an active Web site of effective practices <http://sloan-c.org/effectivepractices>. The term and concept is so popular that a recent search in Google for “best practices” “distance learning” resulted in 76,000 “hits” (Kuskis, 2003).

A review of “best practices” and “how-to” literature revealed that while there is a myriad of “how to teach online” strategies available in the professional literature, there are only infrequent, and mostly unexplained, suggestions that culture should be considered (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1994; Carr-Chellman & Duchastel, 2000). Despite the tentative state of distance education in most American colleges and universities the movement was afoot to get into the export business to global student markets.

The Reality: American-Made Courses in a Global Learning Environment

In their book, *Delivering digitally: Managing the Transition to the Knowledge Media*, Inglis, Ling and Joosten (1999), devoted a chapter to the “social forces driving educational change” (pp. 13-25). They noted the

postindustrial nature of the era and that, ““Modern institutions differ from all preceding forms of social order in respect of their dynamism, the degree to which they undercut traditional habits and customs, and their global impact”” (Giddens as cited by Inglis, Ling, & Joosten, p. 14). Visser (2003) sees implications of distance education in the perspective of global issues and concerns at the societal, interinstitutional collaboration, institutional/organizational, and most importantly, learning process levels. Mason (2003) clearly sees the “toppling of higher education’s ivory tower unreality” as a result of modernistic online distance education promoting “globalizing trends” which are more “consumer” driven (p. 743). In a 1999 dissertation, *Hegemony Online: The Quiet Convergence of Power, Culture, and Computers*, Dorsher concluded that online communication [so much a part of online distance education] has the capacity to reflect and reinforce hegemony more efficiently than any medium before it.

Concerns of an increasingly global distance learning environment have been noted earlier by a few distance educators: Moore (1994) questioned American teachers’ preparation to teach audio and video-based distance education across international borders, Canadian Bates (1994) expressed concern that “cultural diversities and cultural imperialism [of the United States, in particular] are critical issues” (p. 21), and Saba (1994) alerted us that we are working within

an “emerging multipolar world...unlike in the past, the flow of information will not be unidirectional from the developed countries to the underdeveloped ones” (p. 111). Seven years later British Anita Pincas (2001) proposed opening the discussion of the “hidden international problems that globalisation of education creates” because of “pedagogical and linguistic cultures” (p. 30).

Gunawardena and associates, whose work will be detailed in the cross-cultural computer-mediated communication section in this chapter, have been the primary voices in American distance education in moving learners’ cultures into empirical study. [Two exceptions exist: Tu (2001), who focuses on the issue interaction of Asian students in American distance education, and McGee (2002), who approaches the issue from a cultural learning style perspective.]

Gunawardena and associates moved the notion of culture from a polite mention (as expressed within the “best practices” literature as mentioned above) and proposed a conceptual framework for study of the impact of culture on online distance education.

International distance educators note the importance of culture.

The opening up of the communication world (at least the “wired world”) by the World Wide Web sets up an awareness that culture plays an important part in teaching-learning and that other cultures emphasize different dimensions of

learning (Collis & Remmer [The Netherlands], 1997; Robinson [U.K.], 1999; Chen, Mashhadi, Ang & Harkrider [Hong Kong], 1998, 1999; McLoughlin [Australia], 1999; Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder & Roche [Canada], 2002). By the mid 1990s, Henderson, working in Australia, was calling attention to the possible impact of culture in online learning environments and the “need to respond to increasingly diverse learner populations” (as cited in Collis, 1999 p. 202).

Clearly, non-American distance educators recognized the importance of cultural issues in online distance education. Wilson (2001), writing from his West African practice, called for “cultural distance” (p. 52) to be considered along with the concepts of time and place as important elements in distance education. Cultural distance involves the ramifications of materials produced in one culture for use in another culture—thus, complicating the already existing recognition of time and place separation of learner and teacher. These issues will be detailed in the next section of this chapter.

Critiques of American Distance Education in an Online Learning Environment

A critique of American approaches to distance education comes largely from practitioners in Canada, Australia, and the UK. Mason (2003) explained that, “While America is leading the practice of global education, a good deal of the research about the phenomenon [of global education] comes from those

countries most likely to be affected by American domination of a global market in education” (p. 745). Evans and Nation (2003) writing from a postmodern approach to distance education commented, “the rhetoric of globalization abounds in educational contexts today” (p. 783) and for some “is substantially Americanization in that the dominant influence via the Internet is from the United States” (p. 781).

Various terms have been used to describe the dominance of the United States on the World Wide Web. Boshier, Wilson, and Qayyum (1999) used the term “electronic colonialism” (p. 276) and are “disturbed by U.S. hegemony” (Boshier & Onn, 2000, p. 14) on the World Wide Web and the Internet. Blanchette (1997) referred to “information imperialism” when describing the US dominance of the World Wide Web. The majority of Internet presentations are described as English language dominant (see also Hayakawa, 2000), as the American packaging of culture, as insisting on techno-rational ways of knowing, and as aggravating inequality by a dominant focus on Euro-American individuality. Wilson, Qayyum, and Bosher (1998) concluded their article entitled, *World Wide America? Think Globally, Click Locally*:

In an era of globalisation, cyberspace is vast and seems unconnected to any geographic place. It is everywhere but

nowhere all at the same time...although cyberspace straddles oceans and continents, it is like a boomerang that keeps going back to the U.S. (p. 120)

However, Mason (1998) wrote, “I find no evidence for the emergence of one or even several global players preparing to take over higher education on a global scale.” But, on the other hand, she posited that the most successful will be those who address “cultural differences” (pp. ix-x)—thus, recognizing the importance of the cultural issue.

Summary of Current State of American Distance Education in Higher Education

Despite distance education’s long involvement in American higher education the university continues to be missing basic teaching/learning lessons from that history. Energy continues to focus on narrow instructional/learning systems; that is, learning to teach online despite exposure to new cultural and global systems and markets. The pragmatically focused best practices literature provides polite nods to the issue of culture, but without elaboration. Only Saba (originally from Iran) and Gunawardena (originally from Sri Lanka) et al. seem aware of the urgency in addressing social and global systems (including culture) for the American university. Critiques of American dominance on the Internet raise issues of power and of cultural impact on learning.

CULTURE–AN EMERGING TENSION

The literature pertaining to culture in online distance education will be reviewed in this section. First, culture will be defined. The dimensions of culture will be described with special attention to a postmodern model that conceptualizes the multiple cultures in which international distance education learners are located. Second, cross-culture communications literature will be reviewed, in particular a seminal piece, and related to the emerging cross-culture computer-mediated communication literature. Those literatures evolve into further consideration of differing worldviews that learners bring into the educational situation. Next, the concept of cultural discontinuities will be reviewed, including models developed by non-American practitioners (with the exception of Gunawardena and associates) as they attempt to alleviate the discontinuities in online distance education. Finally, the slim, nearly nonexistent literature on the impact of culture in online distance education from the learners' perspective will be reviewed. This is an important, but missing, piece in the literature.

Definitions and Dimensions of Culture

Culture will be defined in this section. Dimensions of culture will be reviewed. The host culture complex of tutorial group culture (Holliday, 1994)

suggested by Fay and Hill (2003) will be reviewed as it relates to online distance education with international learners who remain in their home cultures.

Definitions of Culture in Distance Education

Culture is a term grounded in anthropology and the subject of endless debate. Culture can be defined from a very deterministic perspective (culture shapes personalities) to a dynamic constructivist perspective (people's interactions create culture) (Lawley, 1994). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of Habitus (culture) provides a sociological perspective. Habitus is "not a mechanistic application of structures and forms to society. Rather, culture is socially embedded and citizen-based" (Piecowyte, 2003, ¶ 16). Bourdieu emphasized historical power relationships (structure), yet provided for the dynamics of a socially constructed culture.

Culture has been defined as "the set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next" (Matsumoto as cited in Gunawardena, Wilson, & Nola, 2003, p. 754), not inherited, but learned, (Hofstede, as cited in Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche, 2002, ¶ 4) and includes a "cumulative deposit of knowledge, hierarchies, notions of time, roles, spatial relations" (Samovar & Poster, 1994, as cited in Ekachai, 1996, ¶ 1).

Others emphasize the dynamics of culture: Bates wrote, “Societies do not possess a culture, societies *are* culture” (italics in original) (1994, as cited in Chen, Mashhadi, Ang, & Harkrider, 1999 p. 219). Hall suggested, “culture is communication, communication is culture” (Ekachai, 1996, ¶3; Gudykunst & Lee, 2002, p. 26).

In this study, culture will be defined as a series of dynamic, interactive ideological, political, economic, social, and religious systems in which groups of people have some shared ways of making sense of the world (Chen, Mashhadi, Ang, & Harkrider, 1998; Gunawardena, Wilson & Nolla, 2003; Johnson & Christensen, 2000; Watson, Ho, & Raman, as cited in Collis, 1999) and are influenced by socially embedded power relationships (Lawley, 1994). Culture is presented not as a unique, static entity, but as a system of socially and historically created traditions, including educational and pedagogical traditions. Saba’s systems model (reviewed on page 48) provides a clear example of the social and global aspects of culture as subsystems of distance education.

Dimensions of Culture within an Online Learning Environment

Culture is discussed within the computer-mediated communication (CMC) literature. That literature is a specific, but much related and increasingly companion to the distance education literature. CMC is an umbrella term for the

usually asynchronous (communication at different times; not face-to-face or in real time) forms of written interactions via computers (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2003). The literature on CMC is broad and scattered and often focuses on the social effects of interactions, including online community building (Winiecki, 2003). The literature reveals:

- “Technology is culture-bound...It follows that groupware [software enabling group interactions] is also culture-sensitive” (Hofstede, Vermunt, Smits, & Noorderhaven, 1997, ¶20).
- Technology itself as a “cultural amplifier” (Cole and Engestrom as cited in McLoughlin, 2001, p. 8) because of the ease of “portability” with today’s educational resources. Such resources can be easily exported from an originating cultural pedagogical framework to another (McLoughlin, p. 8).
- Learners in online courses are involved in multiple cultures (Henderson, 1996; McLoughlin, 2001; Nocera, 2002; Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche, 2002).
- Learners in an online learning environment discover the phenomenon of “cyberspace culture” and that cyberspace “has a culture and is not simply a neutral and value-free platform for exchange” (Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche, 2002, ¶1).

- Learners develop a “third culture” when course materials are constructed by a culture other than the learner’s culture. This third culture, according to Lundin, evolves “outside both cultures but intelligible to participants from both who are involved in the interactions” (as cited in Mason, 1998, p. 156).

Larger and smaller dimensions of culture in education.

Culture is not a new concept in education. For example, learners bring the influence of their own cultures and are immediately involved with a new group of people in creating a culture within the online learning environment (Nocera, 2002); learners recognize that they are “outside of familiar meaning systems” when they find themselves in “new” cultures and “find themselves in situations where familiar ways of interpreting and acting are not reliable, yet others’ ways of interpreting and acting are not fully accessible” (Jacobson, 1996, as cited in Pratt, 1999, ¶ 2).

Dimensions of culture are noted in the literature and refer to larger (societal elements) and smaller (immediate interactive elements). Holliday (1999) identified two ways in which the term culture has been used in the literature pertaining to educational situations:

- The *culturist* [emphasis in original] paradigm in which culture is understood “in ethnic, national and international terms.”
- The *operationist* [emphasis in original] in which culture is focused on “small social groups or activities wherever there is cohesive behaviour” (Holliday, 1999, p. 237 as cited in Fay & Hall, 2003, p. 16).

A culturist focus would concentrate on the larger cultural educational expectations and traditions that a learner brings to the educational situation, while an operationist focus would concentrate on the small group cultures that develop within a particular learning situation. An example of the latter is an online discussion group within a distance learning culture. Holliday suggested the broader culturist cultures are more stable than the operationist cultures.

Gunawardena et al. (2003) identified similar dimensions and dynamics, especially within a global context:

Each of the elements—institution, instructor, individual, and group—brings to the course nonnegotiable factors that exist within their cultures and negotiable factors that are presented as choices and options within the framework of the course.” (p. 767)

Gunawardena et al. (2003) seem to be saying that some fairly entrenched geographically influenced or ethnic cultural traditions—what Holliday would label as a culturist perspective—are nonnegotiable. It would follow that the ethnic and regional, cultural traditions that learners bring to the online learning environment have more constancy than the immediate group-created culture within a specific online learning environment.

The host culture complex.

Fay and Hill (2003) were concerned with understanding the connection or intersections of the larger (culturist) and the smaller (operationist) dimensions of online distance education cultures designed and taught from one cultural perspective to another. They searched for the missing “over-arching conceptualization” (p. 15) for “meaning negotiation” (p. 9) in development of “culturally-appropriate” distance education pedagogies. Their interest in such a construct grew from their experiences during a collaborative venture between a university in Greece and a university in the United Kingdom. A scenario was offered in which experienced language teachers discovered that they are each designing and writing course materials for three distance education graduate programs which would be delivered to learners in another culture. This scenario led Fay and Hill on a path to identify a conceptual framework “to gain deeper

understandings of the cultural complexities of educational realities” (p. 15).

They were aware of the dangers of “the inter-institutional ‘transplant’ of courseware (with inherent ‘tissue rejection’ risks)” (p. 9) and hoped to identify a model to understand the overlap of cultures with online distance education.

Holliday’s (1994) ideas on layers of culture in higher education were adapted as the most appropriate conceptual framework. The host culture complex provided an overview and point of discussion of the layers of culture in which international distance learners find themselves. The model emphasized Holliday’s point that the “system of cultures are not mutually exclusive, but have cultures overlapping, containing and being contained by other cultures” (p. 28). Fay and Hill acknowledged, “In educational terms, the small culture of a distance education located within a host culture complex constituted of a range of overlapping cultural influences and centers of gravity” (p. 16). Further, they suggested that distance education practitioners consider factors such as “geographical, technological, methodological, institutional, interactional, and participant factors” to determine “dominant influences” that determined “the emerging characteristics of the host culture complex” in which the smaller “course” culture was located (p. 18). In other words, from a culturist perspective

the complexities within a distance education environment are relational and interacting and, importantly, have an element of power [nonnegotiable element].

The Holliday model (see Figure 2, page 70) provides a conceptual overview of the complex educational environment in which international online distance education learners are engaged. While the model was developed to visualize the impact of various layers of culture on the classroom experience, it provides an interesting glimpse of broader complexities that international distance education learners might experience—especially if they are living within their home culture and miss the on-campus cues for expected institutional norms. (In 1996, Marin had projected ahead to the impact of tensions that might arise for “foreign” higher education learners in a more globalized computer-connected learning environment. She described the “intercultural journey” to be a “stressful journey.” She suggested that the central tensions would arise around differing educational systems and values, sociocultural and linguistic norms that are part of the particular university and might be understood as the host institution culture as presented in the Holliday model.)

The model provides a vehicle to understand the interaction of the components of the “larger” dimensions of culture. Holliday identified the following cultures and their interrelationships:

- Professional-academic cultures refer to the “professional peer and reference groups, schools of academic thought and practice” that are embedded in practice.
- International education-related cultures refer to the broader “ethos of what constitutes education” that has some general acceptance and enables promotion of crossing ethnic, regional, and national cultures for purposes of “education.”
- National cultures refer to those ethnic, regional, and geographical entities that have deep socio-historical ties.
- Classroom cultures, as Holliday explains, are not the simple, isolated patterns of interaction within a confined classroom [or online course], but “can be understood fully only by looking at the influences of all the cultures outside the classroom [online course] (pp. 30-31).”
- Student cultures refer to learner groups or communities.
- Host institution culture refers to the entity wherever the online course is offered. Holliday carefully pointed out that the “host educational environment provides strong influences which bear on the classroom [online course]” (p. 15).

All of these cultures are embedded within ideological, political, economic, social, and religious contexts. For example, “national” (in the form of regional or ethnic pedagogical traditions of international learners) intersects and interacts with “professional-academic culture” of the host university (which holds pedagogical traditions influencing the design and instructional perspectives of the course). The model provides visual examples of what might be viewed as cultural walls to be negotiated, even with some rather solidly set (“nonnegotiable” Gunawardena, et al., 2003) larger cultural habits and traditions.

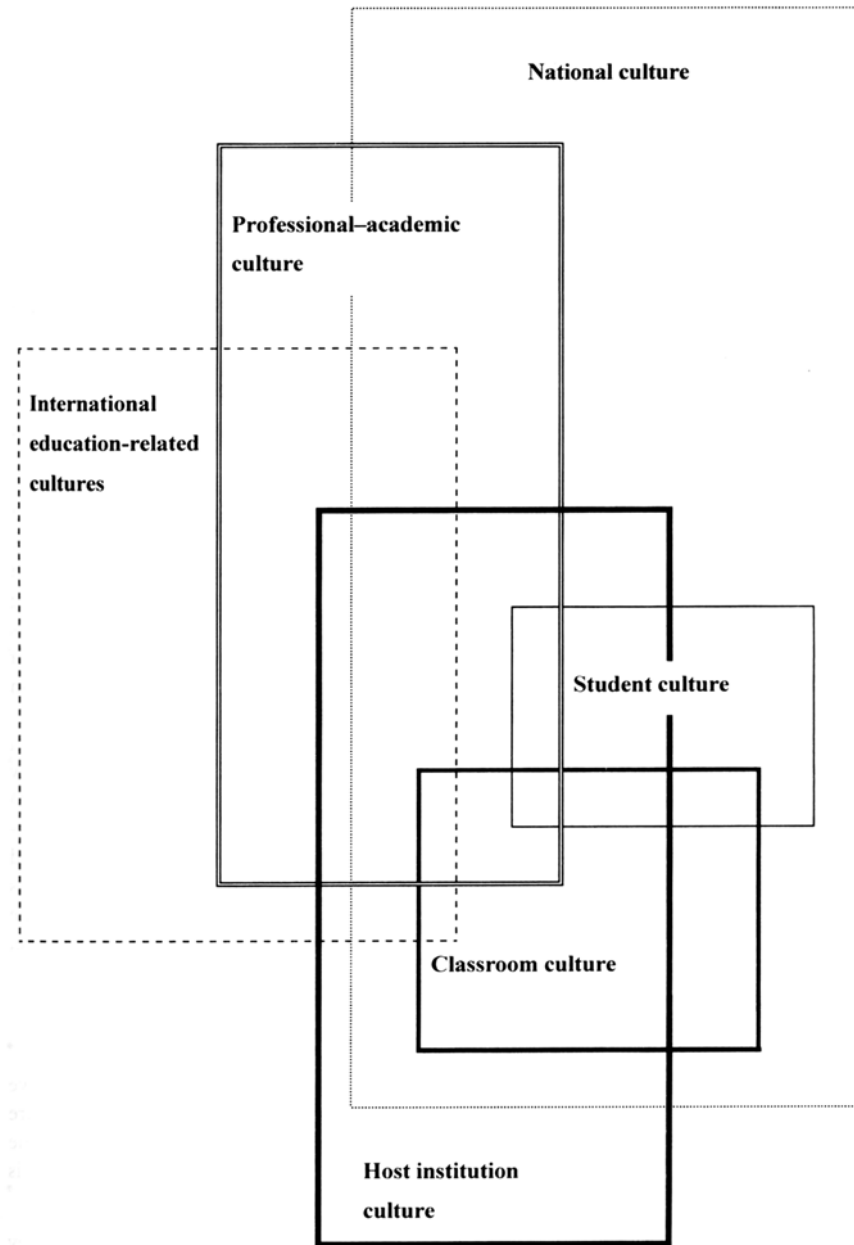


Figure 2: The host culture complex (Holliday, 1994, as adapted by Fay & Hill, 2003, p. 17)

Cross-Cultural Communications

In this section the cross-cultural communications literature will be reviewed briefly. The related literature on differing worldviews and the impact of those on teaching/learning traditions will also be reviewed. This literature review is presented as examples of that to be found within the cross-cultural literature. It serves as a broad presentation of general worldview within conceptual dimensions of culture.

Hofstede's Seminal Work

Much of the cross-cultural communication literature appears to be built on the seminal work of Hofstede (Gudykunst & Lee, 2002). Hofstede identified cultural dimensions that “can be used to study cultural differences between individuals from different nationalities” was based on his work in the 1970s with data collected “from a large-scale study on work-related values of IBM personnel in many countries” (Hofstede, Vermunt, Smits, & Noorderhaven, 1997, ¶ 22).

Those dimensions include:

- power distance (the extent people expect “their superiors to think for them”),
- individualism/collectivist,

- masculinity/femininity (the extent to which “open conflict” or “accommodations” is deemed acceptable),
- uncertainty avoidance (“a culture’s attitude towards deviant behavior”), and
- long-term orientation (“importance of the here-and-now versus the future”) (¶ 23-29).

The Hofstede findings serve as a conceptual anchor in understanding the impact of culture in computer-mediated communication literature (Henderson, 1996). Table 1 is a presentation of Hofstede’s categories as described by Gunawardena et al. (2003). The table represents a culturist perspective (broader, not focused on temporary within course cultures) of potential tensions when an international learner crosses teaching-learning traditions.

Dimension	Explanation of the dimension
Individualism – Collectivism	Focus on self as independent from group or on the group as more important than the self. These concepts are presented in the literature as being so intuitive that they need no explanation. That, “there is congruence in the conceptual understanding of individualism-collectivism across cross-cultural researchers around the world” (Hui & Triandis, as cited in Gunawardena et al., 2003, p. 754).
Power Distance	The concept of power distance highlights the “extent to which less powerful persons in a society accept inequality in power and consider it as normal.” Gunawardena et al pointed out that Matsumoto’s 1996 work on cross-cultural communication also referred to this as status differentiation or the “degree to which cultures maintain status differences among their members” (p. 755).
Masculinity – Femininity	The dimensions of masculinity and femininity have to do with the “degree to which cultures foster traditional gender differences” (p. 755).
High Context – Low-Context Cultures	High-context cultures (for example, Mexican, Japanese, and some Native American cultures) rely on contextual “indirect verbal messages in order to extrapolate meaning” while low-context (for example, the United States) cultures “obtain meaning from the information provided by the explicit code of the message itself” (p. 756).
Uncertainty Avoidance	Uncertainty avoidance refers to the risk and ambiguity tolerated by a culture. Uncertainty, in the form of unstructured or unpredictable situations is not well tolerated then students will, “try to avoid by maintaining strict codes of behavior and a belief in absolute rights” (p. 755).
Confucian – Dynamism	A concept promoted by Hofstede and Bond that suggests the future orientation of “High Confucian” teachings and past or present orientation of “Low Confucian” dynamism. The concept developed from understanding of some Asian cultural orientation to the future and long term.

Table 1: Dimensions of potential cross-cultural communication tensions

While Hofstede's work was particular to the IBM culture in which he conducted his study, the work is often generalized (Gunawardena et al., 2003). Gunawardena et al. acknowledged that, while Hofstede advocated the use of "culture-specific approaches that will provide contextual understanding, his work was not without strong criticism that the measure supporting this model was developed by a single sample composed primarily by middle-class males within a multinational organization" (p. 756). Despite this criticism, Hofstede's work must be considered because of its general acceptance in the cross-cultural communication field. It provides basic awareness for how differing worldviews might develop within cultural groups.

Examples of differing worldviews.

As noted from the cross-cultural communication literature, traditions vary from culture to culture (and at many levels of teaching-learning situations). There are, however, some overarching traditions that mark particular ways of approaching education within cultures. Sanchez and Gunawardena (1998) noted some fundamental differences in "non-Western" and "Western" worldviews when they looked at the learning styles of distance learners in Mexico and other primarily Spanish-speaking cultures. Non-Western dimensions included:

- emphasis and achievement reflected in group cooperation,
- affective expression,
- holistic thinking,
- religion as it permeates cultures, socially oriented.

Western dimensions included:

- emphasize and achievement on individual competition,
- limit affective expression,
- dualistic thinking,
- religion as distinct from other parts of culture,
- task-oriented,
- feel their worldview is superior

A note must be offered here: Frequent notice to the difference in the “Western” approach and other cultural approaches to education is well sprinkled throughout the cross-cultural communication, cross-cultural computer-mediated communication, instructional technology literature, and to some extent the distance education literature. While the term “Western” is frequently used to describe a cultural perspective it is an inappropriate descriptor. For example, South American cultures are geographically located within the Western

Hemisphere, but have a very different culture than the U. S. culture. However, “Western” is accepted terminology in the literature that describes Euro-United States and other Anglo-perspectives and is used in the literature to identify possible tension points for learners in a cross-cultural situation. [Anderson suggested that the complete, individualistic perspective associated with a Western perspective is better described as characteristics of primarily Euro-American males and acculturated minorities (cited in Sanchez & Gunawardena, 1998, p. 53).]

The discussion of Western emphasis on individualism and Eastern emphasis on collectivism is cited frequently in the cross-cultural literature (see Hofstede, 1980; Robbins, 1997; Chen & Mashhadi, 1998a, 1998b; Tan, Weis, Watson, & Walczuch, 1998; Walker-Fernandez, 1999; Pratt, Kelly & Wong, 1999; Bates, 1999; Gunawardena, et al., 2001; McGee, 2002; McCarty, 2003; Chan, 2003). More particular to a teaching-learning situation, Robinson (1999) provided a chart of Western and Asian (Chinese) educational values and characteristics (see Table 2).

Western models and values espoused in distance education	Chinese education and learners
More open curriculum	More closed curriculum
Multiple sources for course content	Restricted approved sources for course content
Several ideologies & perspectives (goal of impartiality and avoidance of bias)	Single ideology & partiality
Course provision & access determined mostly by market demand & personal choice or circumstances	Course provision & access determined by economic & social development goals & manpower planning norms
Meeting individual needs given a high priority	Meeting individual needs given a low priority
Higher teacher autonomy over content & methods	Lower teacher autonomy over content & methods; heavy reliance on approved texts & curriculum
Challenge to teacher or tutor seen as part of self-development process. Dialogue & interaction encouraged. Questions interpreted as signs of interest	Respect for teacher or tutor, shown through silence. Questions interpreted as rudeness to the teacher or challenging the teacher's authority
Tutor as facilitator or mediator, one source of information among several	Tutor seen as teacher & source of information, conforming to book & curriculum
High learner autonomy & choice. Ideal of "independent learners"	Low learner autonomy, little choice. Learner dependence on teacher
Low reliance on face-to-face teaching	Heavy reliance on face-to-face teaching
Attention given to processes of learning. High value placed on skills for learning, low value given to memorization. Repetition not encouraged as a learning strategy	Emphasis on content of learning. High value given to memorization. Repetition frequently used as a learning strategy
Intrinsic motivation more evidently valued	Apparent dominance of extrinsic motivation
Focus on learning outcomes	Focus on student effort & attitudes
Analytical skills expected & valued. Divergent or "original" thinking encouraged	Learners like to have good spatial & numerical skills; weaker on divergent thinking & verbal skills. Less use of analysis in problem solving & thinking, more use of synthesis
Values of individualism & self-development. Interrogation of materials & teachers as part of learning process. "Constructive confrontation" valued	Values of conformity & compliance, conflict avoidance (social harmony). More emphasis on collective & community relationships
Teacher has high level of responsibility for managing the learning of students	Learner carries main responsibility for succeeding at learning because of learner-effort

Table 2: Western and Chinese educational values and characteristics as presented by Robinson, 1999, pp. 6-7

Robinson (1999) noted the difficulty in presenting non-Western concepts because most of the research is based on Western psychological assumptions and methods. An example of the limitations of exporting Western developed assumptions and concepts to other cultures can be found in the work of Chan (2003). In attempt to explore the relationship between a teacher's personality and teaching effectiveness in distance education in Hong Kong, Chan assessed personalities of 59 teachers using the Western-based Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (CPAI). She found certain scales on the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory [for example, harmony; *Ren Quid* (social favors that are exchanged according to an implicit set of rules); Ah-Q mentality (mild degree of defense mechanisms is accepted as a protective mechanism against defeat and disappointment); graciousness; veraciousness-slickness (trustworthiness); and face] were significantly related to teaching performance, but were not identified by the MBTI.

Examples of literature regarding cross-cultural computer-mediated communication.

- Tan, Weis, Watson, and Walczuch (1998) found that the effects of status were reduced during computer-mediated group work between learners at a university in Singapore and in the United States.

- Ruksasuk (2000) found that Thai students had a low frequency of using the social interaction features in Web-based instruction.
- Tu (2001) used participant observation to discover that Chinese online distance education learners must be nurtured to develop a sense of social presence when interacting online because of the high cultural value of privacy.
- Gunawardena, Nolla, Wilson, Lopez-Islas, Ramirez-Angel, and Megchun-Alpizar (2001) used observation, survey and focus groups to study online group development with 100 learners (50 in Mexico and 50 in New Mexico). They found that country differences rather than age and gender differences accounted for differences in group interaction and development.
- Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, and Roche (2002) used discourse analysis to identify themes that emerged in 424 discussion postings (six online course assignments with 23 intercultural learners, five facilitators, and two moderators during a twelve-week period). They found that differing cultural communication patterns increased miscommunication. Additionally, they found that the greater the perception of cultural

differences between the “speakers,” the greater the incidents of miscommunication.

- Jacobson (1996) recognized that learners know that they are “outside of familiar meaning systems” when they find themselves in “new” cultures and “find themselves in situations where familiar ways of interpreting and acting are not reliable, yet others’ ways of interpreting and acting are not fully accessible” (Jacobson, 1996, p. 16 as cited in Pratt, 1999).

Cultural Discontinuities

Wilson (2001) suggested the concept of *cultural discontinuities* [emphasis in original] as useful for the study of distance education courses designed and taught from one culture to another. The term appears to have been coined by Allen and Boykin in 1992 in their work on “cross-cultural educational interfaces.” Cultural discontinuity is defined as ““a lack of contextual match between the conditions of learning and a learner’s socio-cultural experiences”” (p. 587, as cited in Wilson, 2001, p. 52). Cultural discontinuities become obstacles in cross-cultural education and can hinder learning. The concept of cultural discontinuities raises the notion of global characteristics of various national/ethnic cultures and of the issue of dominance within online distance education.

Wilson (2001) provided an example of cultural discontinuity in his research with a correspondence-based distance education course with West African adult learners from four different ethnic groups “whose French-language instructional materials had been designed and written by Westerners.” His methodology was interviewing and “think aloud protocols” (p. 58). He found that cultural discontinuities can take the shape of differing worldviews of the course authors and the learners, “culturally specific knowledge and conceptualizations,” linguistic intrusions of the learners’ “first language,” and “reading cognition profile” [the cognitive process of “putting together the new information in a way that allows it to be woven into existing knowledge”] (pp. 59-60).

Model to Address Discontinuities

The literature revealed a few attempts by distance education practitioners to address cultural discontinuities:

- Henderson (1996) was interested particularly in dimension of cultural sensitivity as suggested by a model of fourteen pedagogical dimensions for effective computer-based education developed by Reeves (1996). Henderson, because of her work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in a remote area teacher education program in Australia, pulled out cultural sensitivity from Reeve’s list of dimensions and wrapped it around the other dimensions.

In doing so, she provided a model that she called an “*eclectic paradigm* [emphasis in original]” (p. 89). The gist of the model, which she described as a “multiple cultural pedagogical model of interactive multimedia instructional design,” is to suggest questions (from Reeves’ other dimensions) for instructional design that would encourage strategies to promote a computer-based learning situation in which multiple cultures maintain their identities while having their respective cultures accommodated (1996, p. 89). In other words, the model would emphasize the importance of making all design decisions in light of students’ cultural approach to education; thus it would reduce cultural discontinuities.

- McLoughlin (1999a, 1999b, 2001) developed a “culturally inclusive” approach from her work with indigenous learning. McLoughlin build on her experience with the online Aboriginal University Orientation Course at Kurongkurl Katitjin (Edith Cowan University in Australia). She focused on the need to consider indigenous learning when designing Web-based courses. Indigenous learning provides a broader look at learners’ characteristics and contexts by addressing, and valuing the ethnic characteristics of learners. In an abstract from a refereed paper presented at the Australian Indigenous Education Conference, McLoughlin and Gower (2003) wrote of a growing

- awareness of “different cognitive styles and approaches to learning” that is developing because of the “broadening of educational delivery mechanisms...[that allows] the education design process to be planned to increase access to relevant and culturally appropriate learning experiences” (¶ 1). McLoughlin (1999a; 1999b) believed that in order for instruction to be culturally appropriate the designer must know and consider the cultural values, learning styles, and cognitive preferences in designing learning “tasks” that would enable deep learning (p. 231) and suggested “getting to know learner” activities. She suggested building on the strengths of particular groups or a mix of learners’ pedagogical traditions within a particular course, thereby not devaluing those pedagogical traditions as deficits to be corrected through assimilation.
- Collis (1999), working in the Netherlands, noted the power of Web sites that are used to support an online course. Based on a literature review and personal experience, she elected to apply Henderson’s model to the creation of a set of dimensions to be considered when selecting a Web site that will be used to support a particular course to ensure they are culturally appropriate and not solely based on dominant, American-based sites.

- Gunawardena et al. (2003) suggested that a more comprehensive view of cultural variability to be included when designing an online distance course. They developed a model based on constructivist and participatory course design that included consideration of cognitive processes, including perception, thinking patterns and expression styles, language, and nonverbal communication; online communication environment; diffusion of technological innovations; the online teaching learning process; and instructional design. They call their conceptual model AMOEBA: Adaptive, Meaningful, Organic, Environmental-Based Architecture for Online Course Design. The model is a nice attempt at a systems approach, but is somewhat vague and untested.

Summary of cultural discontinuities in global communication

A review of the literature indicated cultural discontinuities (tensions) in a global online learning environment as based on cross-cultural communication research. Culturally specific traditions, based on the widely accepted Western and Eastern values, were reviewed. Teaching-learning issues arising from cultural discontinuities, along with instructional design models to reduce the discontinuities were presented.

What International Online Learners Have to Say about Culture

Only one study could be found in which learners' perceptions were sought about the impact of their cultures on their online distance education experiences with an American university. Walker-Fernandez (1999) looked at the impact that socio-cultural backgrounds of "culturally sensitive graduate students" (she referred to them as CSGS) might have on their experiences in a distance education program at an American university. The sample was composed of 12 (five males, seven females; ages from 25-45) learners still living in their home cultures on four different continents as they participated in an online graduate degree program education at an American University. A qualitative case study methodology using a hermeneutic approach was used. In-depth interviews via e-mail, in person, or combination were used. The underlying issue of her study "was whether education designed and provided by educators of different socio-cultural backgrounds from that of the learners could be content relevant and instructionally appropriate and results in educational enhancement and/or prepare students to function adequately in their own communities" (p. xiii).

Themes that emerged and were confirmed by participant checks included program benefits, communication, technology, culture and methodology, and reflectivity. Walker-Fernandez found that CSGS's perceptions of whether or not

and how their learning needs were being met by their American distance education program were highly impacted by their “cross-cultural encounters” (p. 175) within the online graduate program. Most importantly, perceived cultural differences complicated the transactional distance that the learners experienced (the perceived or psychological distance that results from physical culture should be added to the transactional distance discussion and temporal separation from the teacher and teaching institution) and limited success in the program. (This would support Wilson’s suggestion; noted earlier in this chapter, that cultural distance should be an important consideration in distance education.)

Additionally, Walker-Fernandez found:

- Detailed, supportive communication that is relevant to the context and directly from the instructor was important. Miscommunication resulting from the asynchronous nature of computer-mediated communication was a tension.
- Evaluation was a particularly sensitive source of tension, especially as the participants were aware of, but unable to be sure of the cultural variances between themselves and their teacher and program. Most believed that the instructor was unaware or uninterested in the

complexities that context and culture can bring to the learning situation.

- “Extended identities” were created by the participants as they were keenly aware “of their position and the American rather than global context in which they were participating.” However, “their local cultural identity was not compromised in any way” (p. 182). Most were disappointed in the ethnocentric course material and had hoped for a more global learning exposure. The extended identities (as a form of acculturation) allowed them a measure of short-term success within the course.

Overall, Walker-Fernandez’s findings supported a number of tensions that had been noted in the cross-cultural communication literature. Further, her work demonstrates what the Holliday-Fay-Hill model of host culture complex makes reference—the need to consider the dynamics of intersecting cultural layers.

First-hand experiences with cultural pedagogical tension.

One example was found in the literature of first-hand experience with cultural pedagogical tensions. Simone Conceição (2002) wrote of her experience as a Brazilian learner, then teacher in an online distance education course. In a reflective piece written for general adult education literature, Conceição offered a

glimpse into a learner's perspective of the impact of her own non-Euro-American culture on her experience. She recognized the impact of the instructional design on the interactive dimension and the impact of gender, national, and ethnic "origin" on the "structural dimensions" (pp. 42-43). Conceição wrote:

Social and cultural factors such as gender and national origin had an impact on the outcome of my learning experience in cyberspace...My perceptions of behavioral norms of a woman in Brazil included being a listener and nurturer, rather than a critical thinker...I held assumptions about learning that were characterized by a teacher-centered approach with the design of instruction controlled by the instructor and learner performance influenced by the consent of the authority figure.

This small piece is important because it reveals the tensions still apparent for a Brazilian woman who is living within an American academic culture and is admittedly somewhat acculturated to American education.

Summary of Culture as an Emerging Tension in American Online Distance
Education

Culture is a term used to describe group-based values and traditions, including national and ethnic pedagogical traditions. Culture is not a single entity; rather, multiple cultures are intertwined. The Holliday host culture complex (as suggested by Fay and Hill) provides a conceptual overview of the relationship and intersection of the cultures in which international online distance education learners find themselves. Cultural discontinuities has been suggested as a useful concept to understand the tensions created for learners when they study courses designed and taught from another cultural value system. Culturally specific pedagogical traditions centering on non-Western and Western worldviews were reviewed. Cultural tensions in an online distance education environment were outlined. A review of the literature indicated that interest in the impact of culture in online distance education is in early stages of evolvement, and for the most part, conceptual. The slim empirical research is commendable, but comes largely from a practitioners' perspective. Only the work of Walker-Fernandez and, to some degree, the journaling of Conceição provided the learners' perspective on the impact of culture in online distance education experience.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Three aspect of distance education literature were reviewed in this chapter. American distance education in higher education was overviewed to set the scene for the proposed study in its historical frame the ideas that influenced. The literature reveals liberal-humanist psychological traditions. Next, the current state of American distance education was reviewed in light of the increasingly global learning environment. The literature reveals the struggles of the American university to come to term with growing demands of online distance education with little solid awareness of possible impact of culture in the online teaching/learning environment. Notable models of communication systems impacting distance education as a system (Saba) and of educational cultures impacting distance education (Holliday) were reviewed. Finally, culture as an emerge tension in American-generated online distance education was reviewed. Missing from that literature is the perspective that those experiencing the tensions—that is international online distance education students still living in their home cultures—can bring to the understanding of the impact of culture.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology used. The theoretical perspective and research approach are described. The research design, data collection, and data analysis are outlined.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

A humanistic perspective guided this study. It was, however, influenced by postmodernism. In this section humanism will be reviewed briefly. For clarity and continuity the socio-historically based eras that give rise to postmodernism will be presented and poststructuralism will be briefly reviewed. A brief orientation to postcolonialism will be offered as it contributes to the notion of a Western practice to education. Justification will be offered for the appropriateness of this particular theoretical approach for the study.

Socio-Historical Emphasis

This study used a contemporary humanistic theoretical lens. Traditional humanistic psychology emanating from the 1960s is a key feature in the American study of adult education (Brookfield, 1989; Tisdell & Taylor, 1999/2000). The humanistic lens guiding this study was influenced by postmodern thought which allows for socio-historical influences to be considered. Therefore, it is necessary

to briefly introduce the socio-historical philosophical milieus of modernity and postmodernity as reference points for a postmodern approach to human interaction and activity.

Modernity

Put simply, modernity refers to the Western historical period from the "Enlightenment" to today (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997, p. 2). Modernity is associated with grand theories or "metanarratives," such as the "objectivity" of merit as the great leveler of all people—unimpacted by race, nationality, gender, religion, or other socially ascribed designators. English (1998) explained that grand theories are "transcendent explanations that are no longer seriously questioned, but are simply accepted as true" (p. 427). The focus within social science research was on stripping context in attempt to locate a common human trait that could be generalized and used to predict human behavior.

Postmodernity

Postmodernity is an extension of modernity (Hargreaves, 1994). It is the socio-historical era that we live in and "comprises particular patterns of social, economic, political and cultural relations" (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 38). The complexity of a pluralistic world, the confusion of overwhelming amounts of

information, and the technologically induced compression of time and space (Unger, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997) set the stage for postmodernism.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism “is an *effect* (italics in original) of postmodernity” (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 38). It is the state of questioning that recognizes a diverse and complex world beyond the tenets of modernity. Postmodernism expands modernism to describe the dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable nature of a socially constructed reality. Establishing all encompassing points of knowledge are not the mission of postmodernism, rather broader recognition of diversity and complexity are. Learning from a postmodern perspective is “creatively and productively opening the discourse of a field to an eclectic mosaic of many truths” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 60).

Humanism

Humanism is a prominent philosophical approach to adult education within Western cultures, especially the United States and Canada (Brookfield, 1989), which are directly linked to the psychologies of Rogers (1961, 1969) and Maslow (1968). Knowles’ (1980) ideas of andragogy were built on assumptions that revolve around self-concept (self-responsibility and growth towards self-direction); the role of experience; the readiness to learn (aware what they want to

know and when they have been success as learners); and an orientation of learning that is life centered (task/problem solving).

The tenets of psychologically based humanism focus on the value of the individual who naturally strives for personal fulfillment; thus, the “root” of humanism is in “felt-needs rationale” (Brookfield, 1989, p. 204). Within education, teachers are to be facilitators, “not authoritarian transmitters of information from the expert to the ignorant” (p. 204). Psychologically based, modernistic humanism can be critiqued as disregarding, if not ignoring, dimensions of culture.

Poststructuralism

Poststructuralists argue that human identity and consciousness are historically produced (Kincheloe, 1998, p. 197). They profess, “Reality is composed not of Things, but of Relationships” (Palmer, 1997, back cover). Poststructuralism is a “relational focus” on patterns (Lather, 1991, p. 113) emerging from a “never-ending process of inscription” (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 2001, p. 56).

Above all, poststructuralism “foregrounds” (Lather, 1991; Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997) the hidden humanly created structures that are historical and political in nature. These social structures are “hidden” in provocative manners

and are promoted by dominant elite as foundational keys to knowledge and education. Poststructuralists acknowledge that society is “comprised of diverse groups that are positioned unequally in relation to structure of dominance” (Smith, 1994, as cited in Henderson, 1996, p. 93). For example, postcolonialists (to be reviewed below) focus on educational nuances and structures that reinforce the Western approach to education at the expense of other cultural and ethnic approaches (Mulenga, 2001).

The notion of essentialism is an important consideration for the poststructuralist’s understanding of power relationships. Essentialism can be identified as species, biological, gender, racial, or ethnic generalizable experiences (Lather, 1991) and is critiqued as the modernist search for “universal truth” (Flannery, 1994, p. 18). For example, Flannery (1994) wrote, “Anglo European values of self-sufficiency have been generalized to all adults as ‘universal’” (p. 17). This search for universal truths has resulted in errors of reasoning (including generalizations, circular reasoning, mystified concepts, and partial knowledge) and importantly, to power relationships where, “Those who gather, determine, and disseminate universal truths exercise an exclusive power” (Flannery, 1994, p. 19).

Poststructuralism denotes an element of power within socially created structures and foregrounds human interactions within those socially embedded structures and broader systems. Culture can be understood as one of the interactive, socio-historically created guidelines for human interactions.

Postcolonialism.

Continuing the poststructural lens on power, the postcolonialism movement is reviewed briefly. Postcolonialism had its origins in literary studies and can be defined broadly as “discursive practices” or “writing or texts grounded in societies whose subjectivity has been constituted in part by subordinating power to European colonialism” (Mulenga, 2001, p. 447). Postcolonialism offers further acknowledgement of historically created and significant Western power and its impact on education. Revealing the social traditions and structures that are in place to build and to maintain the “naturalness” and “progressiveness” of patterns of dominance by colonializing “Western” counties is the focus. Postcolonialists look at issues of dominance and power associated by Euro-American historical expansionism—first territorially, then educationally.

Contemporary Humanism

The traditional humanism of the 1960s has in recent years been influenced by postmodernity and postmodernism. While the focus of humanism continues to

be on meeting the needs of the individual learner, the influence of postmodernism is evident in the addition to humanism that notions of cultures can, and often must, be considered when considering the development of the whole person. This allows fuller recognition of cultural plurality of online distance learners, especially within a global learning environment as afforded by the wide use of Web technologies. Poststructural and postcolonial influences encourage awareness of the elements of broad socio-historical power relationships—in this case, between “Western” and “non-Western” worldviews. These socio-historical relationships influence the cultural traditions as they in turn influence establishing the learner's unmet needs.

Summary and Justification for a Contemporary Humanism Theoretical Approach

This research project is an attempt to acknowledge the cultural plurality of online distance learners with cultural traditions and identify possible tensions with the dominant American traditions of education. International learners are not embedded in the American educational culture in ways that American distance educators are, and as such can provide invaluable information that can add breadth and depth to the discussion of quality online distance education and pedagogical accessibility for all online distance education learners.

The purpose and research questions are restated here:

1. The purpose of this proposed study was threefold:
 - a. to provide thick, rich descriptions of insights of international adult learners of the interaction of cultures in online distance education courses designed and provided by an American university;
 - b. to provide international adult learners' insights into the emerging discussion of the impact of teaching and learning cultures have on the design and teaching of online distance education courses;
 - c. to foreground the philosophical discussion of culture, in particular how dynamically interacting of multiples cultural layers might relate to equity in postmodern distance education. That is, one that is concerned meeting the needs of the individual learner
2. This study was guided by the question: What can international adult learners tell us about the impact of culture on their experiences in online distance education courses designed and delivered by an American university?

- a. Related sensitivity and questions:
 - i. sought descriptions of tensions that arise when cultures meet cultures in an online learning experience, especially when one is dominant and the influences of those experiences in meeting the needs of the international learner;
 - ii. sought descriptions of learning in a global educational setting.

Justification for a contemporary humanistic perspective to guide this study

Humanism is a set of philosophical tenets which highlight the self-responsibility and meeting the needs of the individual in education. Of course, if one is interested in the success of the individual learner today, a specific socio-historical era and culture must be taken into account. This study was set in a specific socio-historical era. Distance education, a specific evolving system of education, is acknowledged within the phenomenon of the compression of time and space due largely to advances in communication technology. While technology is only one system of distance education (Saba, 2003), it is an interactive system within other systems of social, cultural, and economic forces

and “has the potential to act on those social, cultural, and economic forces which led to their creation” (Lauzon, 1995, p. 6).

Humanism as professed by Rogers and Knowles is a guiding philosophy in American adult and distance education. The focus is on meeting the needs of the individual learner. The conversational interactions between teacher and distance learner (so well established in the distance education literature by Moore, 1973; Moore & Keasley, 2005; Holmberg, 2001, 2002; Anderson, 2003) make humanism a good match. **Poststructuralism** offered a sensitivity to the study of “human science” (Lather, 1991), in particular, the dynamics of socially constructed habits and traditions. These habits and traditions constitute values and approaches to education and to relationships that evolve into systems with clear tones of dominance. Poststructuralism allows for consideration of some notion of power (such as the teacher/learner relationship) based in traditions and seeks to identify historically, socially constructed traditions that maintain an existing power relationship (such as the dominance of a particular worldview within a course design). **Postcolonialism** provided a guide to seeking Euro-American historically constructed traditions that are maintained by socially constructed structures of education. Therefore, this study was guided by a contemporary humanistic perspective.

The theoretical perspective as a guide.

The theoretical perspective as described above guided this study by the following actions:

- Acknowledging the researcher as a “multicultural subject” complete with influences of research traditions, of a concept of self and others, and of a grounding in the ethics and politics of research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 20). Therefore, the background of the researcher is briefly presented later in this chapter highlighting cultural aspects.
- Following postmodern research tenets suggested by Alversson and Skoldberg (as cited in Merriam, 2002); in particular, the study was guided by:
 - Pluralism—A broad and deep approach with careful inclusion of those ignored by previous research, as well as awareness of “who is being represented and who is excluded from representation” (p. 187). It was important to understand that culture is a complex concept, that if viewed with a modernity lens could suggest generalization of worldviews and behaviors, by looking for similarities

[essentialism] at the expense of socio-historical influences on education.

- Avoidance of ‘totalizing’ theory—Resisting the temptation to revert to simply grand theories labels and theories by being open to other interpretations.
- Cautious processes of interacting with empirical material—Sensitivity of the researcher to let participants speak for themselves, while remaining sensitive to theoretical interpretative guides.
- Authorship and linguistic sensitivity—Care that the researcher’s authoritative voice does not overwhelm the words of participants in the final write-up; making sure that a focus on linguistics does not overwhelm what “lies beyond language.”
- Sensitivity to the micropolitics of the text—Recognition by the researcher that the interpretation is inherently political (p. 193).

- Appreciation of the chaotic nature of study [not everything will fit into nice, tight support for a foundational theory] and keep open for the “eclectic mosaic of many truths” (Kilgore, 2001, p. 60).
- Look for hidden assumptions as they relate to cultures and educational systems.
- Application of rigor by “stepping outside of the conceptual framework, starting off research projects, starting off our thought about any particular phenomenon, from outside the dominant conceptual framework” (Hirsh & Olson, 1995, ¶32).

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

This section provides further justification for the use of a qualitative research methodology.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a descriptive, naturalistic, process-oriented attempt to uncover/discover themes or patterns in people’s words through observation, document/artifacts review, and interviews (Patton, 2002; Merriam, 2002; Wolcott, 2001; Merriam & Simpson, 2000; Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Patton (2002) suggested three areas of focus in qualitative inquiry: design strategies including naturalistic inquiry (the natural unfolding of real-world situations); emergent

design flexibility (the researcher lets the inquiry go wherever it goes and is not bound by rigid designs); and purposeful sampling (focus inquiry on a small sample of “information rich” people). Burge (1990), in calling for “fair representation of qualitative research in distance education,” wrote of the need for research “that is holistic, not reductionist: cumulative, not repetitive” (p. 15). The real-world learning environment in which international students find themselves, the postmodern/poststructural influenced humanistic theoretical approach of the researcher, and the purposeful sample that international online distance education students present supports the justification of qualitative research.

Patton (2002) suggested that qualitative research is a natural response to a researcher’s observations which inductively present in the “real world rather than in the laboratory or the academy” (p. 11). The dynamic growth of online distance education in higher education and the resulting global access to online distance education makes the issue of non-Western pedagogical cultures a timely issue.

Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested three qualitative genres: (1) the individual lived experience, (2) society and culture, and (3) language and communication. The study of international online distance education students was reflective of the second genre—society and culture—growing out of a humanistic needs/met assumption. It is a study of the impact of society and

culture within a particular learning environment—the focus of the inquiry is on the group made up of international online students engaged in studying at a distance with American universities during a particular timeframe. Further, Guba and Lincoln (1989) noted the importance of stakeholder in any naturalistic study. Stakeholders in the study included the international students engaged in online distance education, distance education practitioners, as well as distance education administrators. Burge (1990) noted the importance of the student as a stakeholder in qualitative distance education research. Saba's distance education system (see chapter 2 p. 47) provided an overview of the layers of stakeholders who are involved in the system of distance education.

Common to all qualitative research is the notion that the researcher is the research instrument. Thus, the researcher is able to grasp systematically and reflect holistically on the phenomenon under study while remaining sensitive to the influence of a personally shaped history (Rossman & Rallis as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 3). Denzin and Lincoln (2003) described the qualitative researcher as *bricoleur* [emphasis in original], “a maker of quilts” (p. 5) who weaves together research techniques and data into a useable, whole pattern. Further, Marshall and Rossman (1999) identified the *circle of inquiry* [italics in original] as a way of describing “the dialectic relationship between

theory, practice, research questions, and personal experience” (p. 25). The circle of inquiry recognizes that the guiding assumptions of the researcher impacts where, how, and why the researcher enters into the web of observation, discovery, understanding, interpretation, analysis, explanation, or intervention (Marshall & Rossman, pp. 25-28 cite and build on the work of Crabtree & Miller). This particular study evolved from the researcher’s personal experience [as an “enquiring self” (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997, p. 217)] with international students and notions of culture in an online learning environment.

Qualitative Research Design

A qualitative research design was employed. A descriptive research design was appropriate for this study because it allowed the participants to provide their own words to describe the interaction of cultures in an online distance education course or courses from an American university.

An online interview technique was used. Kvale (1996) described interviewing (“Inter View”) to designate “an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” (p. 14) and saw a clear research connection of qualitative interviewing and postmodern:

The *qualitative research interview* [italics in original] is a construction site of knowledge. The knowledge generated by

interviews is related to five features of a postmodern construction of knowledge: the conversational, the narrative, the linguistic, the contextual, and the interrelational nature of knowledge. These intertwined features are taken as a starting point for clarifying the nature of the knowledge yielded by the research interview and for developing its knowledge potentials. (p. 42)

Online interviewing is a valuable research technique (Crichton & Kinash, 2003; Selwyn & Robson, 1998). Practical benefits of online qualitative research include ease in recruitment of participants via e-mail, travel costs and time savings, transcribing costs and time savings, and elimination of time-zone barriers (in asynchronous interviewing). In addition to those reasons, “rich and interactive” online interviewing was appropriate in this particular study because it “honors the field in which the participants are working—the online environment” (Crichton & Kinash, ¶ 8).

Background of the Researcher

I am, by training and clearly by preference, comfortable in analytical discourse—internal or external discourse. For me, analysis allows a divergence to capture the essence of a particular phenomenon under consideration. I am also trained in the skill of logic, a socially required Western skill to sequentially isolate

ideas from context for pragmatic justifications, thus reducing complexity and enabling a process to continue.

My training in psychology reflects the humanist era. However, the Rogarian empathic listening skills that I had to learn fit well with my interest in hearing others' insights. Rogarian-type listening skills translate well to an online learning environment. My practice also includes use of reflecting connecting skills as I see themes in weekly discussion boards and weave them together for the students' review and feedback. As a distance educator interested in how to culture learners' experiences, I was able only to get a glimpse of their experiences through the work of other distance educators, most often from a narrow instructional design perspective or from conceptual of non-contextualized pieces of information.

As result of my experiences I believe:

- Human interaction evolves into habits and traditions and shared cultural perspectives that influence worldviews.
- Worldviews impact approaches to education.
- Socially created systems and structures of traditions have elements of dominance and power.

- Movement outside of one's cultural framework is challenging because of socially embedded assumptions, but is possible when engaging in Rogarian-type reflective listening skills.
- Adult learners are self-reflective in regard to their own learning and, as suggested by the work of Knowles, can be engaged to tell their own story.
- Adult learners offer important insights for practitioners and researchers.
- Learning directly from others enables better understanding of other perspectives.

As a result of my own history, I recognized that my biases are influenced by my culture and experiences. Bates (2001) reminds us that it is easy to be lured into using "a high moral tone when discussing social and cultural issues" (p. 122), but I made conscious efforts not to impose my bias on the participants in the study nor on the final write up of the study."

SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Site selection is an important preliminary step in sampling (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). In this study it seemed logical (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) that the site would be a distance education unit or program within a university in the United States. Patton (2002) highlighted "the logic and power" in a purposeful sampling of "*information-rich cases*" [emphasis in original].

Purposeful sampling provides access to “in-sights and in-depth” information focusing on the research question under consideration (p. 230).

Establishing potential sample prior to study.

During the proposal stage of this project the following were done to assess the availability of potential study participants:

- Contacted directors of distance education units at two large U.S. dual-mode universities about sampling possibilities for this particular study. Outcome: Director of research of the distance education unit of a large U.S. university gave preliminary approvals to solicit participants based on approved research proposal. Director of a distance education program at another large U.S. university committed to post a call for volunteers once the study was ready.
- Posted message on two international distance education listservs seeking contact with international students taking online distance education courses at a U.S. university for future study. Outcome: Five instructors in distance education programs or units that typically have international students living “at home” responded with interest in announcing a call for volunteer participants
- Contacted director of distance education unit of large US university

regarding possible negative impact of USA Patriot Act, SEVIS (Student Exchange Visitor Information System). Outcome: Student services representative of the distance education unit of a large US university responded via email that the number of international students had not significantly changed as a result of SEVIS

Initially, the goal was to locate enough international students taking online distance education courses while living outside of the geographical United States to develop a purposeful sample. This was seen as important because, with a focus on the intersection of teaching and learning cultures, it was assumed that campus-culture (as experienced by a residential student) might be a mediating factor. Additionally, the historical roots of distance education are with nontraditional (non-residential) adult learners.

Criterion sampling.

Patton (2002) suggested a number of strategies for purposeful sampling. A criterion sampling strategy was employed in this study. The key to criterion sampling is the consideration of all cases that meet predetermined criterion. Establishing a purposeful sample for this study included two rounds.

Round 1: An email, with the status of the study [approval from the dissertation committee and from Penn States' Institutional Review Board (IRB)],

was sent to those distance education teachers and to directors of three distance education units or programs [a third program had been identified from a posting on a distance education listserv] who had responded favorably to assisting identifying a purposeful sample for this particular study. A letter of introduction for potential participants and a copy of the IRB approval was attached. The stated criteria for participation was as follows:

- citizen of any country other than U.S.A.;
- currently taking or have taken within past 24 months an online distance education course with an American university, preferably while living within their home cultures (not within an American university campus environment);
- willingness and able to discuss your online distance education experiences
- comfort in communicating online in written English;
- have an e-mail address.

As result of those efforts the research office of a distance education unit in a large dual mode U.S. university agreed to email introductory and invitational materials to about 250 international students who had taken at least one online course from the fall 2002 to the summer 2004 semester. The sample pool contained U.S. citizens living abroad [those are included in the unit's definition of

international students], as well as campus-based (residential) international students. The emails were sent by the distance education unit's student support to email addresses used by the international student when registering for the course. There was a mix of university, commercial, and Yahoo-type email addresses. Additionally, the director of another distance education program at a medium-sized university provided contact information with Eastern and Middle European instructors who might be able to solicit participants. Contact was made with those instructors.

Outcome of Round 1 efforts: Twelve international students replied and volunteered to participate in the study. Six were Canadian, two Japanese, one Italian, one Swedish, one Australian, and one Filipino. These international students were taking or had taken an online distance education course with a U.S. university while remaining in their native cultures. The letter of introduction and implied informed consent form [approved by IRB] was sent to each. Online interview sites were created. Nine of these volunteers engaged in the online interviewing process. Only the Filipino and Japanese students were able to see culture as an issue in their experience in online distance education.

After discussion with the dissertation committee co-chairs, it was decided to expand the sample pool to campus-based (residential) international students

who were currently taking or who had taken an online distance education course and who identified as from “non-Western” cultures. The letter of introduction was modified to reflect this change.

Round 2: A research friend from China volunteered to send a call to participate in the study to three different—a Chinese, a Japanese, and a Taiwanese—international student listservs. The message stated:

“Hi friends - If you are an international student and have the experience of taking any online courses in [university] or from other universities in the U.S., please considering helping Kay Shattuck with her thesis research project....Kay needs to find participants from a "non-Western" culture so I guess students like us from Asia may be able to help...”

Additionally, a snowball or chain sampling technique (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1999) was used to identify more “non-Western” international students. Ten participants—each from a non-Western culture emerged from these efforts. Nine fully engaged in the online interviewing process. Twelve interviews were completed with non-Western international students.

Summary of sampling procedures

Originally, the intent was to identify and to gain access to an adequate sample pool of international students who were living within their home cultures while taking online distance education courses from a U.S. university, and who could discuss the notion of the impact of culture on their experiences. When that proved not to be the case, the sample pool was expanded to residential international students who had taken an online course; at the same time it was narrowed to students from non-Western cultures to encourage the discussion of cultures in an online teaching/learning situation.

Informed Consent

All participants in this study were informed of and presented with an electronic implied informed consent form for social science research approved by The Institutional Review Board of The Pennsylvania State University for data collection from June 25, 2004 until June 9, 2005. The consent form stated the purpose of the study, provided contact information, allowed the right of the participant to withdraw from the study at any time, and gave permission to include the results of this study in future publications. Potential participants were

provided a description and explanation of the study prior to giving the electronic informed consent.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Open-ended, semistructured online interviews were the method of data collection. In-depth, open-ended, semistructured interviews were guided by questions emerging from the literature. Participants were given access to a private Blackboard Web site (a widely used course management system). Two participants completed the interviewing via e-mail.

Kahn and Cannell (1975) called interviewing, “a conversation with a purpose” (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 108). The interviews were conversational (Kvale, 1996) and in an electronic environment familiar to online distance learners. Walston and Lissitz (2000) found that using computer-mediated interviewing was effective and “appeared to reduce anxiety about what the moderator thought of [participants], making it easier for [participants] to share...information” (as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 389).

Designing the Blackboard interview site

Blackboard is a course management system similar to WebCT and Angel. As the Blackboard administrator for a community college in Maryland, I had access and permission to create Blackboard sites to gather data for this project.

Initially, the plan was to have all participants login to the same Blackboard site, but to have access to separate discussion boards where the interviewing would be completed. A model was created with 14 forums to match the interviewing schedule. Three research friends reviewed the site and made suggestions for improvement. As a result of the research friends' feedback, it was determined that each participant should be given her or his own Blackboard interview site, thus removing one extra click to get into the actual interviewing. The 14 open-ended questions were consolidated into six forums (series of questions). Two of the forums were given sublevel questions. A model Blackboard interview site was created. This site was copied and personalized for each participant (see Appendix A).

Working with an interview guide

Patton (2002) suggested the interview guide approach in interview instrumentation is a systematic approach. The initial interviewing guide (see Appendix B) was developed from the review of the literature. Table 3 references questions to the literature.

Question	Referenced to	Rationale
# 1, #2, #14	Theory of Adult Learning Theory of Transactional Distance Theory of Social Presence Theory of Transactional Presence	Adults are self-reflective learners (Knowles, 1980) Learning at a distance (in this case participating in the study) is influenced by course structure (the online interview site) and dialogue (interaction between the interviewer & participant). Since it is moderated by the learner's sense of autonomy (Moore, 1973, 1983; Moore & Kearley, 1996, 2005) the introductory questions allowed for the participant to engage at a personally comfortable level while experimenting with the "human-machine interaction" (Shin, 2001, p. 17) (the online interview site). Researcher's feedback was meant to encourage social presence (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997).
#3, #4, #5, #6, #7, #8, #11, #12	Empirical studies identified the following as cross-cultural issues in distance education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of the teacher • Role of the learner • Interactions • Structure • Course interface • Transferability of concepts • Assessment of learning • Cultural discontinuity 	Researchers have identified cultural considerations in the pedagogical aspects of distance education courses (Henderson, 1996; Robinson, 1999; Collis, 1999; McLoughlin, 1999a, 1999b; Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche, 2002; Walker-Fernandez, 1999; Stoney & Wild, 1998). These pedagogical issues served as a typology for further consideration of cultural discontinuities (Wilson, 2001). Cultural discontinuities introduces the notion of socio-historical power relationships as informed by a post-colonialism perspective (Henderson, 1996).
#9, #10, #13	Global learning environments in distance education Host culture complex	Moore (1994) & Saba (2003) provided rationale for expanding the focus of distance education to a global learning environment. Understanding the intersection of various cultures (Fay & Hill, 2003) in which learners find themselves when taking an online distance education from another cultural perspective can provide important new information for consideration in improving distance education.

Table 3: Interview guide related to reviewed literature

The interviews were approached as “an interaction” (Patton, 2002, p. 375) and were “conversational” (Kvale, 1996). Prompt reinforcement and feedback was provided to any posting from a participant. The purpose of reinforcement and feedback was to provide a sense of presence within the empathic listening framework and further the depth of the interview.

Interviewing online

Once a participant had volunteered, was contacted with an overview of the study via e-mail with a letter of introduction attached, and was responded to on any initial question about the study, a Blackboard user account was created, and the master Blackboard interview site was copied then personalized for that particular participant. (See Appendix C for a sample.)

Collection of data from volunteer participants was approached in a focused, structured way. Just as the design of a distance education course should include good structure, clear objectives, small units, planned participation, completeness, repetition, synthesis, stimulation and variety, open-endedness, feedback and evaluation (Moore & Kearsley, 2005), the online interview site, along with supportive interactions, was focused on providing opportunities for participants to tell their story about the impact of their culture in the online course

or courses taken. Reflection on follow-up questions expanded the discussion of both the participant and the interviewer.

The volunteers in this study were not part of any course or any university sponsored study; therefore, energy was sometimes required to encourage their engagement once they had begun the interviews. Participants who were slow to respond to original or follow-up questions were asked if they would want to complete the interview via e-mail. While the majority of participants completed the interviewing primarily within the Blackboard interview site, three participants responded positively when asked if they would prefer to do or complete the interview via e-mail. One participant reported that she was using a public computer that would not allow cookies (necessary to use Blackboard), one participant reported that it was easier for her to respond directly via e-mail, while another asked to respond to some follow-up questions via e-mail instead of going into the interview site. All electronic interviews were stored electronically and in paper form securely in a locked file.

Types of interactions with participants

Table 4 provides an overview of the number and types of interactions with participants. While the table does not provide adequate information on the quality

of each interaction, it does indicate a level of prolonged engagement with the participants.

	INTERVIEW SITE ACCESS	INTERVIEW SITE HITS	E-MAIL FROM RESEARCHER	E-MAIL FROM PARTICIPANT
Participant #1	10	232	8	5
Participant #2	1	58	18	10
Participant #10	6	217	18	10
Participant #11	5	215	13	8
Participant #16	2	34	6	3
Participant #17	4	189	6	4
Participant #18	5	137	11	7
Participant #19	2	73	9	7
Participant #20	7	171	3	10
Participant #21	0	0	9	8
Participant #22	3	122	8	2
Participant #24	5	279	3	3

Table 4: Type and frequency of interactions with participants

Journaling

Campoy (2000) suggested the use of Schön's reflection-in-action for teachers in a postmodern era. Therefore, an electronic journal was kept to capture observations, impressions, and feelings as they evolve throughout the data-collection process.

Several things surfaced that might be noteworthy. Initially, I was shocked by the difficulty of locating (non-American citizen) international learners who were participating in online distance education programs while remaining in their home cultures. (I could locate a lot of American citizens who were living "overseas" and were considered "international students.") For all of the talk about global learners it was very difficult to locate potential participants who fit the study's original criteria. I began to wonder how much hype there is about the numbers in this group of learners, then began to wonder if calling them a "group" was even appropriate. It seems as though these are individuals scattered around the world (the parts of the world that have easy access to the World Wide Web) who have little connection to the educational systems in which they are taking graduate online programs.

As the interviews progressed, I had moments of checking my behavior and wording with the participants. During the interviews most of the participants were

describing frustrations with the boldness and aggressiveness of the typical American who had been in an online course with them. As a result, I found myself laboring over the intensity and timing of responses. I even began counting the number of times I began sentences with “I” and frequently rewrote sentences in an attempt to make them softer.

Another dilemma arose while I was attempting to moderate my task-orientation (that can come across as aggressiveness). I puzzled over how quickly to respond to participants once they began answering questions. In one of the earliest interviews I quickly responded with a follow-up question when the participant had answered only the first two questions. She responded by saying that she had not finished the questions and was doing only a few per day. That alerted me to back off a bit to give participants some breathing room. The dilemma was that I wanted them to know I was interested and present, but not “pushy.” I began allowing a day if it seemed that a participant was working on a question. I would then just e-mail a note saying, “I see you are working on the question...please let me know if you have any questions.” I was reminded of the issue of restrained presence (Vandergrift, 2002) when facilitating an online discussion during a course.

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

Data represents “undigested complexity of reality” (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Data analysis is the process of transforming data into findings (Patton, 2002, p. 432) by bringing order, structure, and interpretation to the mass of collected data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 150). The process is about “reducing the volume of raw information, shifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal” (Patton, p. 432).

Patton (2002) suggested three levels of qualitative data analysis: description, analysis, and interpretation; while Marshall and Rossman (1999) suggested six phases: (1) organizing the data, (2) generating categories, themes, and patterns; (3) coding the data; (4) testing the emergent understandings; (5) searching for alternative explanations; and (6) writing the report (p. 152). Baptiste (2001) outlined three phases common to all qualitative data analysis that are appropriate for the postmodern/poststructural perspective of this study:

- Phase One: Defining the analysis involves the embeddedness and impact of the philosophical and ethical paradigm that guides the researcher.

Fitting a postmodern analysis, a modified template analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) was used. The analysis was guided by

notions (a vague template) of overlapping, interacting, fluid cultural systems as drawn from the literature review. Patton (2002) refers to this as a sensitizing concept approach to organizing data.

- Phase Two: Classifying data involves tagging, grouping the tagged data, and labeling it.

An inductive analysis (Patton, 2002) utilizing editing strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) was used to classify the data. Interactive, prolonged engagement with the participants allowed me to begin the inductive analysis during the data-collection phase by seeking definitions and clarification of emerging “key phrases, terms, and practices that are special to the people in the setting studied” (Patton, 2002, p. 454).

Marshall and Rossman (1999) refer to this strategy as editing as these “categories then become buckets or baskets into which segments of text are placed” (p. 154). Because many of the interviews were taking place during the same time frame, a cross-case approach (Patton, 2002) was used to group together responses from the different participants; thereby adding breadth and depth of perspectives to the question of the impact of culture in their collective online distance education experiences with an American university.

Sensitizing concepts refer to categories that the analyst brings to the data and involves “examining how the concept is manifest and given meaning in a particular setting or among a particular group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 456). The use of analyst-constructed typologies through inductive analysis allows the researcher to “identify and make explicit patterns that appear to exist but remain unperceived by the participants” (Patton, p. 459).

Each transcript was analyzed and emerging themes were grouped. Electronic note cards were created by copy-paste into Inspiration [a mind mapping software]. The transcripts on each participant’s Blackboard interview sites were reviewed against the electronic note cards for accuracy. Once confirmed for completeness, the Inspiration file was transferred into a Rich Text Format (rtf) file and sent to each participant for feedback. Next, each set of electronic note cards was color coded [a different color for each] and printed. The note cards were cut apart and grouped as themes emerged.

The notions of convergence and divergence (Guba, 1978; Patton, 2002) were employed in the coding and classifying phases of both levels of analysis. Convergence focuses on figuring out what fits together by

looking for “recurring regularities” (Patton, 2002, p. 466). A divergence strategy was utilized whereby connections were bridged to information that already surfaced and whereby newly surfacing information will continue to emerge. Once sources of new information were exhausted and categories were saturated to the point of redundancy (Patton), closure was brought to the analytical process.

- Phase Three: Making connections – Constructing stories and theories is more than constructing a glossary of concepts and definitions that surfaced during the analysis. Baptiste (2001) sees it as a creative conclusion whereby the researcher ensures that the theoretical focus of the research meshes with the presentation of the findings.

During the analysis it became clear that participants were describing interacting cultures that might be organized by Holliday’s (1994) host cultures model.

Trustworthiness and Authenticity

Marshall and Rossman (1999) noted that applicability, consistency, and neutrality as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) address the question of rigor in the “systematic inquiry into the human condition” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 192). While Lincoln and Guba related those terms mostly to quantitative research

methodologies, they proposed four constructs to establish trustworthiness or what Patton (2002) called rigor (p. 546) for qualitative research. A qualitative study must be credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable. In qualitative research, “The researcher purposefully avoids controlling the research conditions and concentrates on recording the complexity of situational contexts and interrelations as they occur naturally” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 195).

Credability refers to the researcher’s ability to demonstrate that study participants are accurately identified and described. Patton (2002) suggested rigorous methods, credibility of the researcher, and the researcher’s philosophical belief in naturalistic inquiry are key elements to credibility. The competence and skills of the researcher; prolonged engagement with the participants; persistent observation; triangulation; peer debriefing; participant checks; journaling; thick descriptions; and purposeful sampling are some strategies to establish credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The credibility of this study was addressed by the rigorous methods as described in the data collection and data analysis section and by the researcher’s prolonged immersion [seven months] into the interview process with the participants and the data analysis. This author having had coursework in qualitative methodology supports skill development in rigorous application of

qualitative methodology. The interview process was conducted in an online environment. I was trained and supervised in facilitating an online distance education by an internationally recognized expert in distance education; thus, I practiced with “astute pattern recognition” (Patton, 2002, p. 553) in online interactions. Additional information on this researcher’s background is included in a previous section.

Triangulation is based on the notion that “multiple methods can be combined in order to test the same phenomena” (Denzin cited in Bowker, 2001, ¶2). Kelle (2001) suggested that triangulation also might be viewed “as a means to produce a more complete picture of the investigated phenomena” (¶ 3). Bowker (2001) extended this idea by suggesting that triangulation can either be used to verify a single reality (a very modernistic approach) or to increase our awareness of the many layers of constructed reality (as associated with postmodernism and poststructuralism).

Member checks were used so that each participant could respond to the author’s analysis of themes that emerged from the interviews. Additionally, investigator triangulation was supported by the use of a peer reviewer while analyzing the data.

Although transferability or generalization is not consistent with the layered reality of a contextualized experience, the concept of transferability in this study referred to the opportunity for the reader to decide if the concepts or themes can be useful for another setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Marshall and Rossman (1999) noted the “practical utility of research” (p. 98) as a valued postmodern research criterion. Strategies to strengthen the transferability of a qualitative study include explicitly detailed methodology and analysis, rigorously argued relevance of research questions and data, situating the study in scholarly context, and keeping detailed records (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). To strengthen the transferability of the proposed study, thick, rich descriptions for the readers’ conclusions are presented. A well-organized and easily retrievable audit trail was stored, both electronically and printed versions, and outlined in the final write up. Additionally, references are made in the final chapters to situate the findings of this study with other distance education and instructional design/cross-cultural literature. The final chapters are written with improvement considerations for practices in American online distance education.

Dependability refers to the researcher’s attempts to account for changing conditions in the phenomenon and changes in the design to continually refine understanding of the study setting. Qualitative researchers do not control study

environments; they report on it. Dependability techniques to ensure that the findings can be trusted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) are supported by an audit trail which includes raw transcripts of the online interviews in the form of electronically archived and printed copies of the complete Blackboard interview sites, categorization system of the data, and the researcher's contact and field notes, as well as a reflexivity (Patton, 2002, p. 64) journal. The reflexivity journal was kept electronically during the study. This study began on a narrow focus of cultural discontinuities [teaching-learning conflicts more or less within the course] and was expanded by participants to other layers of interacting cultures.

Confirmability refers to whether the general findings lead to the implications as suggested by the researcher. The confirmability of a study rests squarely on the data itself to provide enough concise evidence to the reader that the conclusions, interpretations, and recommendations can be traced back to the data and supporting analytical resources. Qualitative researchers gain entry into the participants' world to "describe the complex social system being studied" and need to ensure that researcher bias in interpretations is checked and limited. Strategies to strengthen confirmability included checking and rechecking the data, as well as purposeful examination of possible alternative explanations. Those will

be debriefed with the theses advisors and be evident in the researcher's journal and field notes.

The trustworthiness and authenticity rests on the skills of the researcher as the research instrument, by prolonged engagement with the research project, by participant checks, by advisor debriefings, by thick descriptions, and by purposeful sampling.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented and justified poststructural theoretical perspective as guidance for a qualitative methodology. The research design, data collection, and data analysis were outlined. Strategies used to address the trustworthiness and authenticity were presented.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The findings of the study are presented in this chapter. In section one, the participants in the purposeful sample are portrayed from their own words. Their cultural backgrounds are briefly introduced. In section two, themes that emerged as the participants described their awareness of the interaction of multiple cultures are presented. These dynamics described by participants mirrored those described in Holliday's (1994) host culture complex model; therefore, that model is used for organizational purposes.

SECTION ONE: THE PARTICIPANTS

The unit of analysis in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Patton, 2002) was a voluntary purposeful sampling of international learners who identified themselves as being from a non-Western perspective and who were currently taking or who had taken at least one online distance education course from a U.S. university. The focus of the study was on the intersection of the various cultures in which the participants were involved (Henderson, 1996; McLoughlin, 2001; Nocera, 2002; Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche, 2002).

Twelve international learners who identified themselves as being from non-Western cultural perspectives were interviewed. During the data analysis

participant identifiers were developed using an alphabetical formula and a numbering code. For the final write-up those were too impersonal, so each participant was contacted and asked to provide a fictitious name.

Ten participants identified primarily with specific Asian cultures, while two participants identified with specific ethnic and religious Middle Eastern cultures. Two participants also identified closely with South American cultures because they had lived within those cultures. Nine were current graduate students; two were graduates with doctorates; and one was an undergraduate student. Nine were female and three were male. Of the twelve participants, four were living within their native cultures while participating in distance education, while eight were living within a campus culture. All provided insights into the interaction of multiple cultures that they saw occurring during their online distance education experience.

Sakura is a female adult learner who was born and raised in Japan. Sakura began participating in a master's program online with a U.S. university while living briefly in the U.S. with her expatriate spouse. She "cannot decide which was 'the worst experience' because they were equally bad experiences." Sakura returned to Japan over a year ago and probably will not complete the program with the U.S. university.

Sakura sees changing “values in the Japanese society.” She says that when she was in high school she “was just rebellious” to her parents who like other Japanese parents, “were not so enthusiastic about higher education for girls.” She does, however, recognize the impact of her Japanese culture when discussing education. She pointed out that, “In the Japanese culture, we cannot imagine calling a teacher by first name.” She also pointed out the cultural value on the community when she wrote, “Japanese put team first before ourselves.”

For Sakura, the best experience was that a few former course mates have stayed in touch with her. She described three critical incidents: The first emanated from “a terrible statement to the instructor on the bulletin board on the first week” by a student who was dropping the course. “There were so many aggressive and rude postings (students attacking students) in that course. I finished the course by the support from a few classmates” [via private e-mails].

The second critical incident—a “personal attack”—occurred when an older American classmate who had an Asian spouse directed comment with cultural emphasis to Sakura on the discussion board. [The incident will be discussed further later in this chapter.] The third incident revolved around her being the only team member of a course project living on the West Coast, when one of the East Coast team members “abandoned his work on the night before the deadline

and asked ‘some one’ to take over. I had no choice to finish that up until the morning to meet the deadline.” She attributed this to her Eastern diligence.

Interviews with Sakura were conducted primarily via the Blackboard interview site with some initial interactions via e-mail.

Maryrose is a female adult learner who was born and raised in the Philippines. She is currently participating in an education master’s program. She emphasized that Filipino culture has a “colonial mentality” and pointing out that “our educators take their advanced studies from different countries to have our schools at par.” Maryrose noted that studying with an American college is “helpful in status and occupation at home” because “most companies give credits to applicants if they graduate from the U.S. or Europe.”

To Maryrose, Filipino culture highly values education. She says that, “Most parents’ belief in our country is that no matter how hard life is” they sacrifice to financially support their children through higher education because, “education is the most important treasure they can give their children...the best inheritance...[because]...EDUCATION is something that cannot be taken away by other people.” Perhaps this is a reference to the history of the colonized Philippines.

Maryrose wrote that she was pleased with her experience with U.S. distance education, but also volunteered that, “It would have been better if all examples ask in my lessons [she later mentions “case studies”] are based on our perspective however, doing it from the western perspective give me the opportunity to learn more how western do it. It leads me to research and learn more about the ways the west does it.”

Maryrose is happily involved in her family life and works full-time in the family business in a large city in the Philippines. Maryrose has never been a residential learner within the U.S., but has done business travel in the States and Canada. She searched for a graduate program online so that she could remain in the Philippines while “widening relationships” (as offered by the Internet).

Maryrose did not login to the Blackboard interview site. E-mail was a better option for her because that was more convenient than a separate login into the interview site.

Amal is a female adult learner who wishes to be identified as coming from the Middle East or the Arabian Peninsula. She identified her home country as “a bit more conservative than other parts of the Arab World.” She is currently a residential graduate student at a large American university. She has taken several online courses as part of her degree work in education.

Amal's Muslim culture influences not only a value of education ("Mohammad said seek knowledge even if it is in China [a far away place she explained later] despite difficulties and investments"), but also a strong sense of "my collective culture." Social and family responsibilities are strongly guided by the Muslim culture.

Amal's social and educational experiences prior to coming to the U.S. were mostly in gender segregation situations—"This is the cultural norm." Amal noted that in, "an Islamic country, there is a lot [of] segregation between men and women...my interactions are limited to males in the family and perhaps neighbour." However, Amal's higher education at home was coed "with some cultural restrictions in interacting with the other sex." Additionally, "at work or co-working environments the situation is slightly different. So, you'll have these co-meetings and work transactions between genders. The idea is that this is justified by "work". Amal thinks that interactions between genders while taking online courses seem to fall "somewhere in-between those two norms.... However, it is culturally hard to make it work." Discussing the importance of teachers' understanding cultural differences, Amal wrote, "[for example if] an American professor teaching two students (a male and a female) from [a Middle Eastern country] would think that this is a perfect opportunity for group work

because two people are from the same county and can meet f2f [face-to-face]. But it doesn't work that way.”

Amal recognizes that “interactions are set by culture” and finds some comfort in the anonymity that taking an online course offers, particularly with the current political stressors between her “part of the world” and the U.S. Amal wears a religious head dress that is invisible in an online environment—“at least people don't stare at you and you wonder what they're thinking of you, your culture and consequently your academic abilities...,” because “being an Arab, Muslim person...makes me feel vulnerable.” She is aware that while the online environment offers some anonymity her or his surname provides a clue to her cultural background.

Interviews were conducted within the Blackboard interview site and e-mail.

Hacchi is a female Japanese international student by traditional definition when focusing on country of birth, but Spanish and South American cultural experiences as an adult heavily influence her. She is a graduate online distance education learner studying community development with a large U.S. university.

Since Hacchi has had multiple cross-cultural experiences, she thinks often of culture. She wrote that she is “comfortable being in a foreign culture” and

“proud of being a rolling stone because I could see many different things in the world,” but struggles with no “attachment to one particular culture” and is alert to ethnocentric prejudices. For her, “culture [is not limited] to borders, languages, etc. It might mean something value unique to [the] individual...Maybe myself having experiences in various countries, cultures and interactions with different people is my culture.”

She served as a Japanese community development worker in a South American country and learned of the “Spanish” philosophy, “that life should be enjoyed.” A concept she likes because, “in contrast to the Japanese scarifying [sacrificing] of private lives.” But, she writes, “I am Japanese, but compared to other Japanese people living there, I am different. But if I compare with Spanish, South American and U.S. people, I am different from them, too.” Later, she wrote, “I am in agony trying to explain that my true figure is different.

Hacchi lived briefly as a residential international learner on a U.S. campus, but now lives within an Asian community in a large U.S. city. She currently struggles with Asian community’s expectations professed by her Asian friends for how teaching and learning should work as she practices learning within a Western perspective. She has “learned that interaction with instructors and other classmates is also important in the U.S. education system...but I see the

Asian authoritative education and learning ways. And I conflict with them [her Asian friends and neighbors] in regard to how to study, and do the team project. Sometimes I feel I am wrong for how to learn.” She noted, the “Culture is important in learning and education” and “if I knew the [limited American focused] contents of the [course she is taking from the U.S. university] in more detail, I would not take it.” She is unsure if she will finish the program.

Interviews took place within the Blackboard site. On several occasions Hacchi needed to use a friend’s computer to access the Blackboard site because, when using public computers she was unable to enable cookies.

Sumi Lee is a female Korean graduate from a large U.S. university with a doctorate in education. She worked as a teaching assistant in online courses with the distance education unit of that university.

Sumi Lee defined culture, “as collective knowledge and understanding about my relationship with myself, others, and the environment [and continues]...I have been socialized by various aspects of Korean culture, which regulate how I need to think and act. I would say that in my culture, age, gender, or both of these have been strong criteria that put people in certain hierarchical positions.” She was keenly alert to the difference between Korean and American educational traditions, especially the relationship between teacher and learners. Korean

learners are to always “polite” to teachers and would never call teachers by their first name (this comment is shared with most interviewees).

Sumi Lee’s Korean culture “regulates how I need to think and act.” Issues of age and gender factors determine human relationships. Sumi Lee explained, ...both have strong criteria that put people in certain hierarchical positions....When I was a child, it was very common to see that in most families, sons, especially eldest son sat with the father and was given "good" food. Girls and their mother usually sat at a separate table with some less quality of food (how sad!). I know now this is changing in my culture, especially because now people don't have many children enough to make the hierarchical and discriminative distinctions among the children.

Sumi explained that Korean interaction begins with an assessment of age and gender.

Interviews were conducted online within the Blackboard site.

Yuehan is a male student from China at a large U.S. university. He is in a residential doctoral program in education and keenly interested in distance education. He has taken an online distance education course and sometimes acts as a teaching assistant in other online courses.

Yuehan is cautious in ascribing cultural traits to the whole of China. He places all references into his North China cultural experiences. He is strongly influenced by the North China culture—“people from my area are kind of masculine style—in the family the male is always the ‘king’...because of its impact, I am kind of independent of external world. I like thinking about things myself and make the decision after self-thinking. I rely less on other people’s opinions.”

Yuehan is strongly aware of the impact that he feels of the different cultural teaching-learning approaches between his cultural expectations and his experiences with American-based education. Yuehan wrote that “my culture circumscribes my online study”—that is, he is constantly aware of his cultural background even while studying across cultures. Mostly, he discussed the differences in terms of the “banking model” which he suggested is the primary approach in Chinese education. He shared a belief that the teacher-focused “banking model” is not just a Chinese approach to education, but that “it’s an educational system that services a specific state of social development.”

Interviews were conducted online within the Blackboard site.

Sunny is a female residential student at a large U.S. university. She was born and raised in China. She is a graduate student in instructional systems and

keenly observant of some differences in teaching-learning from her Chinese culture. She wrote that, “in the courses in China, we don’t know the objectives, the time line, and everything is based on the instructor’s decision...syllabus is sometimes nonexistent in our culture...in our culture, only tests are the valid [and the most recognized way of accessing students....[doing] a project collaboratively is very rare in our culture because the instructor wants to give an ‘objective’ grade to each of us to differentiate one from another by grades, collaborative work will never achieve that goal.”

Interviews were completed within the Blackboard site, although at one point Sunny asked about the possibility of audio responses to some of the questions. But the idea was abandoned by her because of technical problems with her microphone.

Miao is a female graduate from a U.S. university with a doctorate in education. She can “see the difference between western and eastern cultures are big...just like the black and white...for example, if the stock goes up, in US, it showed in green color, whereas in China showed in red...[she continues] I agree with someone said, the culture difference between western and eastern culture is just like the black and white.”

As a graduate student, Miao took some online courses “out of curiosity to see how a course could be delivered through internet.” She also acted as a teaching assistant in an online course which gave more opportunity to see how online distance education courses use communication. She also thought that she would not like to take online courses at a distance from China because of missing the campus-based cultures and would not have the opportunity “to know US people, understand their kindness, friendly, and much more.” Miao selected an American first name that she continues to use in English when communicating in English.

Miao returned to her home county, China, and is the principal trainer and consultant with a company specializing in “leadership development, successful life experience, and learning and performance.” She has conducted training in more than 40 countries around the world.

Interviews were conducted online within the Blackboard site and via e-mail.

Yu is a male graduate student from Taiwan in instructional systems at a U.S. university. Yu came to the U.S. and completed a master’s degree program and is now pursuing a second master’s degree. Yu has taken “10 asynchronous

web-based courses” (one of them was self-paced course and the others were basically learning collaboratively).

Before coming to the U.S., he had been involved in “web-based learning” in Taiwan and pointed out that in Taiwan online education is a “lecture format– which was “one-way, read or watch only.” Yu says that seems to be “acceptable in Taiwan,” although some students would complain. Yu appears to be very social and he was clearly interested in interacting with people.

In discussing his experience with American-based online learning, Yu wrote, “my expectations were met beautifully.” However, while Yu says his needs were “met beautifully,” much of the interview revolved around feelings of isolation. Yu wrote, “I also felt not all good about being online learner” because “interaction for learning purposes was good enough, but relationship among instructors and learners were so ‘virtual’ that friendships only existed when I turned on my computer.” Yu selected and sometimes uses a Westernized first name.

Interviews were conducted online within the Blackboard site.

Tien-wen is an undergraduate student at a U.S. university who is studying economics. She was born in Taiwan, but grew up in Argentina. She “grew up facing both cultures.” Although she grew up “as a trilingual [Taiwanese,

Argentinean, and English] child,” she does not feel “fully fluent in any of them.” She interacted at home within a Taiwanese culture, at school within an Argentinean culture, and later within a multicultural environment by attending an American International school in Argentina. To Tien-wen, “culture is very important...not just in teaching and learning...we have to know how to interact with the different one having a sense of how is his or her culture.”

Tien-wen was happy with the one online course that she took primarily because she previously knew the instructor from her involvement as an international student at a large university. She feels that instructors are “now a days...aware of the cultural differences that may exist between learners.” Perhaps this is a reflection on her involvement in a multicultural campus situation. She selected an Anglo name to use when interacting online.

Interviews were conducted online within the Blackboard site.

Katya is female graduate student who is participating in her first course in an online master’s degree program with an American university. She identifies “with Russian (my ethnicity) and Uzbek (the country I was born) cultures.” Katya described herself as “inheriting Russian directness and Uzbek politeness and respect for the elders.” Regarding education, she wrote, “In my country, teaching and learning don’t allow and encourage much creativity and critical

thinking. Students do what the teachers tell them...As a result, I think I am a very obedient student.”

Katya’s spouse is American born and works in diplomatic services. She was taking her first online course in a distance education master’s program with an American university during the interviewing. When the interview began she was living near a large U.S. metropolitan city—the only time she has lived within the U.S. During the interview she moved to a large city in the Philippines. Participating in an online distance education program seemed to be her only way to pursue a master’s degree because of the family’s diplomatic lifestyle.

Katya’s husband provides invaluable translations of Western ideas into her cultural framework—“He understands my culture, speaks my language, and does a great job explaining things to me so that I can understand.” She pointed out that, “Without my husband it would be really difficult financially and logistically...it would be impossible to transfer money from me [my] bank account in Uzbekistan to [the university]...the banking systems of Uzbekistan and the US are not compatible.

All interviews were done via e-mail at Katya’s request since she was initially relying on public computers in which she could not enable cookies.

Firat is a male graduate student at a U.S. university studying education. Firat wishes to be identified as a Kurdish learner from Turkey. He described that country's culture as "traditional and authoritarian...Moreover culture of violence is dominant." Under that system all levels of education are used "as a political apparatus" with the goal to "create people type that will fit into the official [Turkish] ideology as a racist, blind-nationalist, obedient, and conformist (absolute indoctrination)." Firat believes, "This political suppressions and indoctrination leaves a kind of existential dilemma...to be a 'good citizen' or a 'subversive'".

Firat took two online distance education courses, but completed only one. He felt "welcomed" and "comfortable to share my perspective" in the first course, but the second course experienced a cultural conflict. The "conformism among learners to the new technology [Web-based instruction] and the instructor" who "was so authoritarian" that there was no "respect to other ideas that learners could [bring]." He dropped the course. He was not expecting to find such teacher authority in an American course. Additionally, he was "bothered" by the naivete of the teacher and students who approached "this new online base technology like a panacea" to the world's problems. Firat works within a Web-based field.

Interviews were conducted online within the Blackboard site and via e-mail.

Summary of Participant Descriptions

Of the twelve participants, ten identified primarily with specific Asian cultures, while two identified with specific ethnic and religious Middle Eastern culture. Two participants also identified closely with South American cultures—one had grown up within a very international educational school environment there, while the other had worked there and was intrigued by what she saw as a more relaxed culture than her Japanese culture. Nine of the participants were female, while three were male. Participants described their own cultural background in varying levels of detail. Implications of their cultural backgrounds on their experiences in their online distance education courses will be covered in section two.

Four were living within their native cultures while participating in distance education, while eight were living within a campus culture. Two of the four participants living within their native cultures indicated the possibility of not finishing the distance education degree program because of the cultural conflict they experienced.

Most of the participants were drawn to study with an American university for career reasons because of the global influence of the U.S. culture. Yet, they, in particular those still living in their native cultures, away from a campus culture, hoped for acceptance in social and academic interactions with others that they might meet during the process. It should also be noted that participants who were residential international learners clearly saw online courses as a secondary delivery system while they enjoyed an American campus culture. None would take a fully online distance education program. All participants easily recognized cultural tensions framing their experiences.

SECTION 2: INTERACTING AND INTERSECTING CULTURES

The responses from the participants were full of descriptions of interactions of multiple cultures. Those cultures, for the most part, mirrored Holliday's (1994) educational host complex model. Therefore, I will use terminologies, definitions, and categories from that model to present the data. (See pages 65–70 for review of basic information on the Holliday model.)

Holliday's (1994) model describes interacting, intersecting, and overlapping cultural influences as they impact the traditional classroom. Holliday borrowed Breen's 1986 reference of a coral reef to describe, "the interrelated myriad life forms...Little of this life can be seen on the surface of the reef; but beneath the surface, the complexity of life forms is immense" (p. 31). This is not to suggest that the traditional campus-based classroom hosts all the same dynamics of an online course environment, but the model proved useful in laying out the insights of interacting cultures that participants provided.

CLASSROOM CULTURES

Holliday (1994) pointed out that classroom cultures are not the simple, isolated patterns of interaction within a confined classroom, but are really "a microcosm" (p. 16) of the complex societal cultures in which learners, teachers, and all involved in education live. He suggested that if we really want to learn

about the dynamics of the classroom, we must consider “overriding cultural influences [which] may be well attributable to the wider society” (p. 48).

Participants were quick to recognize broader cultural impacts on their “virtual” classrooms. They clearly volunteered the interaction of different cultural traditions to teaching and learning; often by making connections between Western and their cultural values. The most immediate themes to emerge from the interviews related to the participants experiences with the teaching and learning dimensions. Three general themes emerged: (1) the role of the teacher, (2) the course structure, and (3) cross-cultural communication tensions.

Role of teacher

Notions about the role of the teacher were mentioned early and often in the interviews. Sakura described her images of good and bad distance education teachers:

[a good teacher is imaged as]...a Japanese policeman (Omawari-san) in the police booth (Koban). They patrol the district by riding their bicycles, and people who are stranger in the district casually drop by the booth to ask the direction when they get lost... [Then, based on her experience in American online courses she described]...The image of a bad teacher, an invisible man, does

something. We feel something was changed, but do not know what they were. Sometime we even do not feel if someone is near us.

Most were startled by the informality of the teacher role. Sumi Lee wrote what others echoed, “I couldn’t believe I could call the first name to some of my teachers.” There was surprise in the level of feedback from the teacher, but also fear, for as Hacchi wrote; “[it was] awful to ask questions and reply [to] messages from instructor since [they] had the right answers.” Sunny noted that teachers from their non-Western perspective were never to be “challenged in public.” Others were frustrated. Sakura wrote, “I am from the country where teachers are supposed to ‘teach,’ I have some Hong Kong influence, so I ‘pay’ for education because I expect that teachers teach me the things I want to know.”

Course structure

The structure of the courses was mentioned, often as a positive. Being presented with a syllabus and awareness of grading policies were new to participants and although surprised, they appreciated that. While Yuehan was the only participant to label his cultural experiences as coming from “the banking model,” other participants noted expectations that reflect teacher-centered approaches to teaching and learning. Katya wrote, “[at home], there was, only

one right answer [and only the teacher determined the right answer], participation doesn't score much as accuracy does."

Tensions experienced when involved in constructivist, learner-centered learning environment emerged often in the interviews. The newness of interacting with other learners in the course while being unsure of the role of the teacher was troublesome. There was a sense that participation in the course discussions had a staged feature and was done only because it was required by the teacher, necessary for points, and for some, meant primarily for the teacher's watchful eye. Tien-wen envisioned an online teacher: "It's like the sense of "Big brother is watching you, in the novel from George Orwell, 1984...the whole society is monitored by one person." It was not comfortable, real interaction among peers.

The whole idea of interacting with other learners was new and stressful, but it went beyond that. Culturally it was a new behavior, but the conflict was increased because these students were to interact with American students who were used to interacting among themselves. Yuehan wrote about interacting with American course mates:

Making the first step to joint **their** [emphasis added] discussion needs some courage because you don't know whether your

words will hurt them or not, whether they will look down upon you or not only because your first sentence having a grammar mistake...you will see that American students will do their discussion freely while international students are very cautious and trying to meet the minimum required posts...and their posts' formats are mostly formal, in good structure, and seldom colloquial.

Group activities or projects were another cultural tension. While a few participants noted that they had been involved with group projects in their native cultures, the difference of group activities in their U.S. course was pronounced. For example, Sukura wrote,

the concept of 'team/group project' was quite different from what I expected. I have learned about how to work in a team or how to be a team member ever since I was an elementary school student in Japan. [But] Teachers were usually monitoring teams very closely, so grading was usually fair. Japanese put team first before ourselves because each contribution affects on a grade for the team.

The tension came from the lack of teacher involvement in the process. There was great concern that the teacher could not possibly know the quality of their individual work and that everyone in the whole group would get the same grade no matter what work they put forward. American groups appeared to be too process-orientated. None of the participants who raised the issue of group projects was happy about it.

Cross-cultural communication tensions

Language barriers to full participation were noted frequently. The required level of interaction became stressful because of struggles with the English language (although it was often noted that working in a written format was better than speaking in a classroom setting). Confusion by misinterpretation of English words and American colloquialisms were problems. This caused distress during interactions and was most troubling as it pointed out exclusion as participants struggled to figure out the meaning without asking American course mates for fear of showing ignorance. Yu “felt embarrassed to express my confusion” when he discovered that he had interpreted a word or phrase differently than the instructor or classmates. Yuehan wrote, “I sometimes raised my question, sometimes not. It all depends on whether it will prevent my understanding of the essence of the sentence. Once I raised my questions, most time my ‘American’

classmates couldn't say it in another way but a few just repeated the same one to show off his/her ignorance which I didn't care at all." Hacchi noted that there are, "some words that just Americans understand from their common culture and social perspective." She "wonders if my English usage is not familiar and my comments particularly based on my experience in South American don't fit them." She attributed it to colloquialism ("command English as natives use")—"It is not whether my English is grammatically correct." For example, she wrote of being confused by use of the phrase "flip flop" which can mean a type of sandal, but "also means the quick change of opinion."

STUDENT CULTURE

Holliday considered the dynamics of "different interest groups" as a way of looking at the "social contexts" (p. 53) in which classroom cultures are set. He suggested that student cultures in Western education are impacted by Western educational reference groups (which are included in the professional-academic culture to be reviewed below) which essentialize the "notion [of] the *learning group ideal* [emphasis in original]" whereby the "learning group ideal is set as the norm" (p. 54). The cultural tensions arising from being expected to actively participate in constructivist course design bridge Holliday's classroom and student cultures.

Holliday suggested the importance of reference groups as they can provide connection and identity for students and found that cultural identity can provide a sense of reference, especially in “the lives of people in dynamic, complex situations” (Holliday, 1994, p. 27). Participants in this study had little, if any, identification with the other—largely American—learners in the courses. They struggled with the lack of a reference group.

Yu saw himself as “an Asian struggling to express self...sometimes not part of learning community.” He described a period of a year and a half when, as an online learner, he “still did not feel that I was part of the learning community.” He was disappointed with the lack of opportunity to “know the personalities of my instructors and classmates... [and] have a chance to share my feelings about the things other than study.” All of this “made me felt my study was no [not] complete.”

A sense of being different—of being separate from the majority of learners in the course—was a prevailing theme in the interviews. Most noted feelings of isolation or alienation by virtue of being a non-Western international learner in a Western online learning environment. They had a sense of being outside of the American student culture. For example, when asked to provide an image of herself as an international learner, Sakura described herself as a bat:

... a bat claimed as a bird because he can fly, and other occasions as a mammal because he grew up with milk. In this case, the bat manipulates his way of being for his benefit depending on the situation. I thought the perception of international students by Americans was somewhat similar to this. They count an international student when they needed, but ignore when not needed because **he is not in the same category** [emphasis added].

Being largely invisible to a dominant reference group (American course mates) was one thing, but two of the participants described alienating experiences.

Sakura described a “personal attack” which occurred when an older male American classmate who had an Asian spouse “objected my thought and opinion.” When asked about the role that gender and age played in this incident, Sakura responded, “that not only gender and age, but also nationality involved...I had the impression that I made him upset because I was not an obedient young woman from a poor country where many girls want to marry with American to get out of their country.” Miao identified a critical incident that occurred in one of the online courses when “a US learner put some words are very unfriendly to our international learners on the discussion board.” The incident was so negative and powerful that she “would not like to mention that in detail” when asked about it

several times. In neither incident did a teacher show presence or intervene, which was further isolating. Sakura or Miao were expecting teacher control based on their cultural traditions.

Continuing on with the notion of reference groups as keys parts of what Holliday calls student cultures, an interesting theme emerged during the interviews. It became obvious that while most of the participants were describing marginalizing experiences within the course cultures, those participants who lived within a campus environment volunteered a sense of connection to a student, perhaps an international student, culture outside of the online environment. The question was raised with the eight participants who lived on campus about how different it would be if they would be living, not within the campus culture, but within their native home countries while participating in online distance education. Overwhelmingly, the participants spoke of the positive impact of campus life—of being a part of an acknowledged international culture. Miao wrote,

It would be much much less valuable if I took all of the courses online in China. I would like to say, for me, the most important is not the degree itself, it not what I learned in these years, all of these are less important then the experience to know US people,

understand their kindness, friendly, and much more...Without being physical to be there, I could not imagine I could experience all these through internet.

Sakura (who was not involved with a campus culture while participating in American distance education) wrote of the differences she experienced in being a learner at a distance and a residential international student (she had completed her BA at an American university). As a residential student she,

...learn and gain many things from actual campus other than subject matter itself (e.g. friendship and ways Americans do). I felt that it was still worth to come to study if I could meet good friends or improve English, even when I had a terrible course. In online education, it seems that the differences within the quality of courses/programs itself had a great meaning. When I was not learning much from a course, I was so frustrated. After all, I paid a lot as an out-of-state student.

Participants had selected study with an American university largely for career reasons, which were couched in issues of U.S. global influence (for example, most participants noted the value of degree from the U.S.), but they were also deeply interested in “connecting” (getting to know) with American

learners whom they met in courses. (For example, Maryrose had imagined herself as a “Nokia phone” in her hopes to connect with others in online distance education.) There was recognition that online distance education was more than just a course. They had hoped to interact with Americans beyond the course. Amal volunteered, “I watch a lot of American TV...now know not real America, but could not have learned that without living within that culture. Would not have known that if online as an online student [living at home in the Middle Eastern].”

HOST INSTITUTION CULTURE

In Holliday’s model, the host institution culture refers to the educational institution in which the classroom is situated. Holliday carefully pointed out that outside influences (for example, community and national sentiments and political forces) impact the host institution and impact the classroom (p. 15).

The sense of being different, of being marginalized, and even of being alienated which most participants felt rang clearly when they noted an unawareness—even disregard—by their American teachers and course mates for anything outside of American interests. Hacchi thought that her image as an international learner could best be described as a “student from China” (although she was from Japan!) because to her American teachers and learners “tend to describe all Asian people as Chinese” and have little sense of the world outside of

the U.S. Hacchi was frustrated since she had selected the particular online distance education program because of her interest in community development, but has been disappointed because the focus of the program has been on narrow American rural community (“maybe white 4H community...People living in rural [state] can understand easily, but I don’t know”). She was particularly frustrated because, “American people or instructors...who think all values and academic standards, and approach prevailing in US is also found in other counties.”

As Holiday noted, the overlaying of cultures is a dynamic of the host culture complex. Participants in the study provided insights into an overlay of course and student cultures with U.S. national (to be reviewed next) culture that impacts the host culture complex. Sakura noted, “American teachers and students think America is best... [they were] not interested outside of U.S... American students [are] not interested in examples outside of the U.S.” She continued later in the interview, “I have been feeling that many students are not interested in what is going on outside the USA...[and] even if an alternative assignment was provided, if American students did not show their interest in other countries, there is little way to involve in discussion.” Additionally, she offered her experiences with a distance education program offered by a UK university. (She had received a first master’s degree with that program while living in Hong Kong and was

interested in comparing American distance education courses with UK distance education courses.) She noted the UK instructors in that program understood cultural differences (for example, they set rules in the first session that reflected their knowledge of culturally different educational styles and behaviors of the diverse learners in the group) and were more focused on “local learners” than viewing learners “as British citizens in their former colonies.”

Hacchi was frustrated with the pride Americans seem to have in diversity, yet there are “still prejudices in education providers’ side how to see foreign people.” Hacchi and Firat noted prejudices—even ethnocentrism—in regards to assumptions of easy availability of Internet technologies outside of the U.S. Yuehan noted the impact of a dominant culture when he wrote, “most international students’ cultures are different from the dominant culture here and culture differences make these international students silent.”

Two participants in this study pointed out the issue of embedded religious values as being directly connected with education. This theme is presented in terms of the Holliday model as bridging the host institution culture and the professional-academic cultures (below) as embedded values. (A reference point might be helpful here. Sanchez and Gunawardena (1998) pointed out that religion permeates many non-Western cultures.) Amal matter-of-factly wrote that she is

from a Muslim culture and that “Mohammad said to seek knowledge.” She also wrote of religious/social obligations that would potentially interfere if she were participating in online distance education program while still living in her home culture. Yuehan, writing about exporting American online courses globally, noted, “American distance education programs...need to analyze the culture of a specific country if want to target students...for example, [if an institution] wants to provide course to Arabian countries, designers may want to be sensitive to religious issues.”

PROFESSIONAL-ACADEMIC CULTURE

Professional-academic cultures in the Holliday (1994) model refer to the “professional peer and reference groups, schools of academic thought and practice” (p. 30) that are embedded in practice that, in turn, impact the host institution, student, and classroom cultures. In this study, professional-academic cultures are those philosophical approaches and concepts embedded within Western education. Here, adult and distance education represents “communities of practice” (“a consensus among knowledgeable practitioners”). This dimension is useful in presenting two additional themes that emerged from this study: (1) embedded cultural traditions surrounding the “learning group ideal” in the form of

cultural conflicts in the nature of interactions, and (2) embedded Western concepts as a conflict in connecting issues into non-Western cultural framework.

As if to move beyond the somewhat procedural dimensions of the teaching-learning exchange, participants described cross-cultural tensions emanating from embedded cultural traditions surrounding the nature of interactions. This becomes an important issue when the learning group is set as the ideal (above). Participants' were conflicted with the forced nature of their interactions. Such a required nature of interactions can be understood as a key part of a course based on constructivist principles, but was unfamiliar to most of the participants.

Amal described dilemmas of communicating across gender in her Islamic culture. Sumi Lee commented on Korean cultural protocols of interaction. For her, all interactions begin with an assessment of age and gender. Honor and deference are the basis of interacting with someone older. A sense of responsibility for offering something is the basis of interacting with someone younger. Within a classroom setting, Sumi Lee addressed learners who were older with more formal and polite expression. In online courses the issue of age is complicated because it is not easy to determine, "although I know it's still

there...once I know I tend to change the way I act.” These cultures traditions promoted distress when clashing with embedded Western academic fields.

Connecting Western embedded concepts in their cultural framework also proved programmatic for participants. Sakura wrote of her struggles to understand the concept of self-directed learning.

I’m still not sure of the concept of self-directed learning...I could at least find a Japanese translations for ‘self-efficacy’ in the counseling dictionary, but I have no idea how I can translate ‘self-directed’ into Japanese term. I know little about the theories on the Japanese concept of ‘self,’ so I do not have much to say. However, I remembered that one [Western trained] Japanese psychiatrist said that the self of Japanese people, regardless of gender, is other-oriented; Japanese people find their way in the form of ‘for the sake of such and such’ ...So I came across a thought that ‘self-directed’ learning could be learning for the sake of teachers or parents...I am still not sure of the concept of ‘self-directed’ learning, even though I have completed my undergraduate study and master’s studies

abroad. So this fact itself must make me feel less capable to be
'self-directed.'

Amal called it "challenging" to understand the individualism that she sees as being the key in the Western concept of a self-directed learner. Even the concept of community was difficult for some participants. Hacchi, who was studying community development, "was very surprised that community in US includes all kind of organizations...even church interaction with other civic organizations as one of them."

As noted earlier, the dynamics of Western-based group projects was challenging to most of the participants. It also raises the notions associated (from a Western perspective) of collective cultural values and independence as a learner. Participants, who identified themselves as coming from collectivist cultures, expressed great discomfort and displeasure in working on required group projects, yet had identified less with "individualistic" values attributed to learners from a Western perspective. These were provocative dilemmas.

In addition to struggles with embedded Western educational concepts, such as self-directed learning and goals of group work, what might be called the blindness of modernistic belief linear technology was noted. Firat wrote with despair about the non-critical belief that online distance education is a modernistic

“panacea” for the world’s problems–“Everybody was in a kind of primitive virtual ceremony (primitive drums tum-tum sound goes here) and they were motivating each other about how technology was great. As if by internet base instruction we will be able to solve the entire world’s problems.”

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION-RELATED CULTURES

International education-related cultures refer to the broader “ethos of what constitutes education” that has some general acceptance and enables promotion of crossing ethnic, regional, and national cultures for purposes of “education.” Participants were aware of being in higher education despite culturally imposed restrictions to full participants. As noted previously, they had expected a more international perspective.

NATIONAL CULTURES

Holiday admits that the notion of national culture “is very broad and conjures up vague notions about nations, races and sometimes whole continents, which are too generalized to be useful” (p. 21), but can be an important socio-historical concept of influence when “building up a picture of the various features” of overlapping and intersecting cultures. Participants often mentioned their cultures in terms of geopolitical boundaries. But, they were also calling attention to their notice of the impact of “American” culture within their

experiences during the courses. The conflict of these “national” identities was unmistakable.

While participants often identified strongly with their national cultures (perhaps, as suggested above, more strongly in this situation because of the stress of exclusion from the American student culture), their draw to education with an American university was couched in U.S. global influence. Participants noted desire to study with U.S. as “the key to knowledge” or career advancement in recognition of the U.S. global influence. Amal wrote, “You also have to understand that most of what is taught in the Arabic world even in countries like Egypt and Jordan (which as considered like having the best higher education systems in the Arabic World) is actually imported in forms of translations and interpretations of Western ideas. Unfortunately we/Arab world have not yet reached a point of being primary producers of knowledge; we are still more of consumers of the knowledge imported from Western countries. When asked to explain this further, she continues, “historically Arab world was major producer of knowledge which can still be seen in many areas, but went into a great deterioration in that regard.” She came to the U.S. to study because, “I wanted to go to the source of knowledge instead of an interpretation of that knowledge.”

Amal was not alone in pointing out the socio-historical impact Western cultures. Maryrose emphasized Filipino “colonial mentality” by pointing out that “our educators take their advanced studies from different countries to have our schools at par” and that “most companies give credits to applicants if they graduate from the U.S. or Europe.”

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Participants in this study began answering my interview questions about what can now be understood as micro aspects of interacting cultures in an online course. As the interviews progressed, participants expanded on this by describing multiple interacting cultures. These dynamics described by participants mirrored those described in Holliday’s (1994) host culture complex model—classroom cultures, student cultures, host institution cultures, professional-academic, international education-related cultures, and national cultures. Therefore, the Holliday model was used to present the findings.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study originated from notice of the cavalier mention in much of the American best practices professional literature that online distance education courses *should* be cultural sensitive. At the same time, I was observing tensions that some international learners experienced when taking American online distance courses. A review of the literature revealed culture emerging as an issue in online distance education, but often from a somewhat procedural perspective.

With these considerations in mind, the aim of the study was to locate a purposeful sample of international adult learners who could describe the ramifications of cultures on their experiences in online distance education. To review, this study was not created to look at the experiences of international learners from only Eastern cultures. However, it was discovered in pre-study interviews that learners who came from a non-Western perspectives were better able to articulate cultural issues than learners coming from Western perspectives. (This is not to suggest that conflicting cultural values in distance education environments is only an east-west dichotomy, but that for the purposes of this study the issue was clearer to participants from Eastern cultures.)

Implications of Theoretical Perspective on the Analysis and Findings

Calls for the hard work on discussing cultural and ethical issues when distance education program cross national borders are sprinkled in the literature. Perhaps initiated when Moore (1994) posed the question in pre-Web days—“Are we [American] culturally fit to be teaching across national borders?” (p. 189)—the issue is at heart a philosophical one. Bates (2001) reminds us that exporting distance education across national borders “raises questions concerning values and beliefs...[and] that everyone who enters into the process of teaching has to operate on the basis of a set of values and ethics” (p. 122).

Contemporary humanism, as influenced by postmodernism, provides recognition of diversity and of the connection between people’s identities and needs with their histories, cultures, and other complex socio-historically influenced interactions. It is a launching pad that expands research by seeking information on dynamic, chaotic, unpredictable interactions in a postindustrial/postmodern world.

The analysis in this study was approached with recognition that the participants’ identities (and mine) are rooted in our own different cultures which might very well be described as modernistic and even have connections to a colonial experiences. The goal of the analysis was not to categorize participants’

statements as being modernistic or not, postcolonial or not, but to let their words paint a picture of the complexity and multiple layers of cultures that impacted their experience in online distance education. In doing so, the study presented multiple dimensions of overlapping, sometimes overwhelming, cultures in education.

CONCLUSIONS

By allowing themes to emerge from the twelve participants' words, the study identified five conclusions.

First, while the literature reveals that cultural discontinuities and other teaching-learning dynamics occur in online distance education when provided from one cultural perspective to learners from another, this study shows the strength of those tensions from the learners' perspective.

It was overwhelming to them. They consistently and clearly volunteered tensions between their culturally influenced expectations of how teaching and learning works and what they experienced in American online courses. The participants focused on the role of the teacher, on the confusion of working within a learner-centered, constructivist design, and on the type and amount of interactions required.

Participants noticed teaching and learning tensions and identified them with cultural values and educational traditions. Table 5 connects emergent themes with the literature.

Dilemma	Reference
Associating with values frequently characterized as coming from a collectivism culture; for example, different concepts of working with a team and challenges of understanding the Western notion of self.	Hofstede (1980); Gunawardena et al. (2001; 2003); Robinson (1999); Sanchez & Gunawardena (1998); Chen & Mashhadi (1998a, 1998b); Tu (2001); McCarty (2003); McLoughlin (2003)
Differing role of teacher	Robinson (1999); Henderson (1996); Collis & Remmers (1997); McLoughlin (1999); McLoughlin & Gower, 2003)
Confusing implications from constructivist course design	Robinson (1999); Henderson (1996); Tu (2001); McLoughlin (1999); McLoughlin & Gower (2003)
Crossing communication traditions	Chase, Macfadyen, Reeder, & Roche (2002); Hofstede (1980); Gunawardena et al. (2003); Tu (2001); Wilson (2001); Collis & Remmers (1997); McLoughlin (1999); McLoughlin & Gower (2003)
Feelings of isolation	Pratt, Kelly, & Wong (1999); Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzalez, & Mason (2001); Tu (2001)

Table 5: Emergent teaching-learning themes as connected to the literature

Participants described tensions as evolving from differing teaching and learning cultural expectations and practices. But, they expanded on that literature by rising deeper and broader (macro aspects) of their cross-cultural educational experience.

Second, participants in this study unencumbered by Western cultural expectations of education used their vantage point to move the interviews from micro levels (course based) of culture to expose hidden cultural intrusions from broader cultural conflicts.

Initially this study was focused on questions evolving from the distance education and the related cross-culture computer mediated literature which largely focuses on course-design issues. But, participants quickly began connecting teaching and learning issues with isolation from the whole distance education experience. They were not just describing nonpolitical, procedural differences. They were exposing impositions of another cultural framework in fact they were describing the interaction of multiple layers cultures on their experience.

Third, the intrusion of dominance in the interacting cultures resulted in marginalization from the learning environment.

More often than not, a sense of marginalization, sometimes even alienation, from the American learner group was palpable. On a personal level they were experiencing dissonance out of conflict with the dominant educational culture (Lauzon, 2002). Constructivist-based pedagogy couched in the highly interactive communication world can be a lonely place for an international online learner whose cultural experiences are different from the dominant educational

cultures. Goodfellow, Lea, Gonzalez, and Mason (2001) made some reference to “cultural otherness” (p. 65) that seems to fit the participants’ experiences.

While this study strengthens the cultural discontinuities literature, the issue of isolation and alienation for international adult within a “global” learning system offers an expanded emphasis. Participants in this study did not experience a virtual “third culture” (as suggested by Lunden in Mason, 1998), but recognized that they were “outside of familiar meaning systems” (Pratt, Kelly, & Wong, 1999) and struggled with clashing of their deeply embedded, “non-negotiable” cultural traditions (Gunawardena et al., 2003) theirs as well as unspoken Western educational traditions. They experienced increased “intercultural stress” (Marin, 1996), but they did not create “extended identities” (Walker-Fernandez, 1999) to use within the online distance courses or find the virtual world to act as “a veil to shield” (Merryfield, 2003, ¶2) from the discomfort and isolation. In this study participants witnessed an American learner culture in action, but they felt excluded. Participants found that they are really only joining a traditional American-focused course in an online environment.

Fourth, the existence of global learning environments gives an interesting update to Wedemeyer’s “at the back door” aim of distance education.

In the 1960s, Wedemeyer recognized that adult learners of the day were not accepted as a legitimate part of American higher education. He looked at technology to assist in connecting these **individual** learners, who symbolically were admitted through “the back door” at American higher education institutions.

Stepping back into the literature during the interviews, I could recognize that much of the previous studies that looked at culture in online distance education had revolved around the dynamics of design and teaching from one cultural perspective **to a group** of learners from another cultural perspective (Wilson, 2001; Gunawardena, Nolla, Wilson, Lopez-Islas, Ramirez-Angel, & Megchun-Alpizar, 2001; McLoughlin, 1999; Collis, 1999; Henderson, 1996) or on the processes of a cross-cultural group exchanges (Romanoff, 2003; Merryfield, 2003; Andrusyszyn et al. 2000; Cifuentes & Murphy, 2000; Abu-Fadil & Gafke, 1999; Bates, 1999). Participants in the current study were individuals who found themselves voluntarily sprinkled across courses dominated not only by Western teaching perspectives, but by American learner cultures. American-based online distance education offered globally to independent learners sets up that possibility.

As noted above, the notion of individual adult learners is not a new idea in distance education. Open learning situations that provide higher education

opportunities for independent, nontraditional learners is a bedrock theme in American distance education and adult education (Moore, 2002). Decades ago Wedemeyer (1981) and Moore (1973; 1983) called attention to independent learners and recognized the need for a whole coordinated educational system to surround the learner for effective delivery of education. That education system was to be in place to optimize the teacher-learner interaction (Moore's theory of transactional distance). More recently, Shin (2001) found that from learners' perspectives it is crucial to feel connected with the whole educational system to be considered as an active, respected part of the whole learning situation. She found that "an institution's transactional presence ("the perception of the presence of teachers, peer students and educational institutions") (p. iii) may be relatively more important than teachers' and peer students' transactional presence, especially for those students involved in out-of-classroom type of distance education" (p. iv.). This study supports that. Certainly, participants sought connection and acceptance within the course. Participants who were living within a university campus culture found comfort in campus-based cultures outside of the distance education experience when connects were not forthcoming from the online distance education cultures available to them. Those participants who were not living within a traditional campus-based learning environment did not have

that important sense of connection. This is a critical issue for distance educational institutions and programs that deliver courses to individuals in a global learning environment.

Finally, Holliday's host institution complex model is a beginning for discussion of interacting multiple cultures in education, but needs to be reconsidered for global online distance learning environments.

The Holliday model recognizes interacting and overlapping cultures as they relate to education, in particular the traditional classroom. Cultures perhaps more prevalent in distance education need to be also recognized for example, those mentioned in Saba's hierarchy of interacting subsystems in distance education (see page 47). Hardware, software, and telecommunication cultures interact with what Holliday labels as host institute and broader national cultures.

Additionally, the Holliday model needs expanded to include the complexity and variations within a culture. For example, this study pointed out the complexity within the concept of a student culture. Connection to a student culture was an important factor in whether or not participants felt engaged in the whole educational experience, even when it was not available within the classroom [online course] culture. But, it was clear that there was not just one

student culture although the traditional, campus-based student culture was the dominant image. Variations of student cultures might include, but not be limited to, general international student cultures, specific regional/national student cultures, adult learner cultures, and cohort-based cultures. Another example of variations of cultures is differing teaching-learning perspectives within Holliday's classroom [course], institution, and professional-academic cultures.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study emerged from observations within practice from brief mention in the professional best-practices literature that online distance education courses should be cultural sensitivity and from notice of tensions that international learners experienced in distance education. In turn, the findings in this study have implications for practice.

First, U.S. distance education institutions and programs need to acknowledge the presence of international learners. The compression of time and space due to technological advances (Usher, Bryant, & Johnston, 1997) has us living within an ever-shrinking global environment with broadening cross-cultural educational opportunities for individuals. Therefore, U.S. distance education institutions and programs need to foreground the issue of multicultural learning

perspectives if access and equity is to be a value. A primary discussion would need to be on whether the distance education program is focused on moving from “mono-cultural [to] cultural inclusivity” (McLoughlin, 2001) or “cultural sensitivity” (Chickering & Ehrmann, 1994; McLoughlin, 2001).

Training programs need to be developed for course designers and teachers. Awareness of the potentially stifling nature of embedded cultural biases, knowledge of different cultural expectations on teaching and learning, skills in designing and teaching in culturally inclusive ways, as well as training on facilitating learner-to-learner interactions within an online multicultural learning community and could be launched from the work of Henderson (1996); Wilson (2001); Robinson (1999); McLoughlin (2001, 1999a, 1999b); McLoughlin & Gower (2003) Collis (1999); Gunawardena et al. (2003); Collis and Remmers (1997); Chen, Mashhadi, Ang, and Harkrider (1999). The cultural identity model (Guy, Schell, Burnside, Thornton, & Scott, 1998; Guy, 1987; LaBrack, n.d.) was found useful for adult learners when considering multicultural education. Development of these training programs will be admittedly challenging and must include insights from international learners. For as Sleeter (1996) reminded us it can be quite a challenge for members of a dominant culture to grapple with

multiculturalism: “Fish do not see water, not because it does not exist, but because it surrounds them constantly” (p. 112).

Next, American distance education institutions and programs could solicit volunteers from their international learners base (especially those living off-campus, in their native cultures) to form advising teams. International learners involved in online distance education offer rich insights for improving online distance education offered globally. They could make recommendations for more culture inclusion or more cultural sensitivity in the design and teaching of online distance education courses. Merryfield (2003) used “cultural consultants” [“educators from other countries”] (¶7) to assist with her online global education course at a university in the U.S. and found them extremely engaging and helpful. In addition to providing invaluable information to teachers and designers, a project of this type might increase the participating international learners’ sense of engagement and transactional presence. Improved feelings of connection to the distance education program or university (increasing the sense of transactional presence) could be anticipated for the participants. Marin (1996), in calling attention to the “at risk” nature and the “stressful journey” of international learners in American graduate schools, suggested the institution, as well as

international learners would benefit “by allowing more and more voices to be heard” (p. 22).

Finally, the findings in this study provide only a glimpse into multicultural issues in distance education that are broad and deep. The growing plurality within our own country needs to be acknowledged within the design and delivery of online distance education programs (Sanchez & Gunawardena, 1998). Interestingly, the basis for Wilson’s (2001) work done in West Africa on cultural discontinuities originated from a 1992 study on African-American children by Americans Allen and Boykin. It is time to seriously consider implications of learners’ cultures and of dominant teaching cultures in American distance education.

IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH

This study is based in the literature, yet reveals the need to expand the recent emergence of culture as an issue in distance education. First, the whole issue of a global learning environment and ramifications needs to be considered if we are truly interested in diversity, equity and access. What does a global learning environment mean to the international learner, to the teacher, to the institution? Focused study on the concept of “global” learning environments would open the philosophical discussion and would help establish a shared vocabulary. What do

distance education institutions see as the relationship between global learning environments and globalization? Was Robinson (1999) right, “Is globalization in fact Westernisation” (p. 11)? Or is it a more complex dimension as Edwards and Usher (2000) suggested:

Globalisation, therefore, does not result in a global narrative, but points to the very impossibility of such a narrative through the production of the globe as a diaspora space. In other words, while space-time compression has tendencies towards uniformity in bringing the globe under increasingly integrated processes, it also provides the basis for a questioning of the guiding assumptions that have underpinned those very processes of globalisation, providing a basis for the recognition of and support for cultural difference. Rather than, therefore, globalisation resulting in the universalizing and homogenizing of modernity in bringing together diverse cultures, the modern is thrown into doubt and question. (p. 22)

These are the types of discussions that Lauzon (2002) was hinting at when he challenged distance education with opening “the discussion of moral, ethical,

and other communication issues that do not lend themselves to neat and tidy technical solutions” if we are truly interested in diversity, equity and access.

Next, who are these independent international online distance education learners who seek participation in American online distance education? This study points out the dilemma of invisibility for those individual international learners who seek online distance education programs and who are otherwise drawn to American-based online programs. What cultural perspectives do they represent? Basic demographic information would be helpful for distance education policy makers; but more importantly, a longitudinal study of current international learners who are participating within online distance education would be a key project. Are their needs being met?

Third, ethnographic studies of the layers of cultures intersecting in online distance education could build on this preliminary study. Holliday’s host culture complex offers a launching pad for further study by recognition of multiple layering of cultures. As noted above, the depth of diversity within patterns of culture could be expanded.

Finally, the theory of transactional distance (Moore, 1973; 1983), a bedrock concept in distance education (Saba, 2003) would be enriched by the inclusion of cultural distance. Transactional distance focuses on the learner’s

psychological comfort within a course. Emphasis is placed on structure (course design) and teacher-learner interaction. The findings in this study reinforce the teaching-learning tensions that online international learners experience. Participants noted, and appreciated, high structure within the online American courses in which they participated they liked the new experience of getting a syllabus, a course schedule, opportunities for testing, and feedback on tests and papers. However, they experienced tension because of lack of culturally induced expectations for teacher-centered interaction. The current reading of transactional distance (Moore & Kearsley, 1996; 2005) does not take into consideration cultural preferences and expectations. Additionally, within the theory of transactional distance learner autonomy is seen as the moderating factor. Learner autonomy is a culturally loaded concept (Flannery, 1994) that would benefit from further study on cultural ramifications within transactional distance. Cultural distance needs to be considered in the discussion of transactional distance to update the theory for postmodern, even postindustrial, learning environments opened globally. The inclusion of culture in the discussion would expand the theory from its psychological base to a broader sociological perspective.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

The tenets of humanism in a postmodern era, as well as andragogy demand that learners' diversities are recognized, but demand that relationships that impede full access and equity to learning are acknowledged. Approaching adult education values of equity and access from a contemporary humanism perspective suggests that Western education should reference what is outside and come to some agreement with the choices of those outside. Without this challenge the danger is in a narrow focus on exporting Western education philosophies and practices with little or no regard for the complex traditions and histories of adult learners in a technologically induced "opening" world. To repeat, this study was not a simple look at east-west interactions. The adult learner participants in this study revealed layers of interacting cultures – course, student, institutional, professional-academic, and national—that they experienced in online distance education.

Participants in this study were saying that they agree with the literature, that YES cultural inclusion must be a consideration within online distance education. They did this by loudly confirming the teaching-learning tension areas that had been identified within the literature. But more than that, they connected those course-level conflicts to broader, embedded values supporting the whole

system of education of which they were a part. The marginalization they experienced does not support any sense of equity or full access to learning. The implications for practice are strong. Training programs for those who design, teach, and manage American distance education programs need to be developed and implemented. Implications for further research revolve mostly around the notions of global learning environments and cultural distance as considerations within a fast-moving, global educational environment.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Interview Guide

1. To get started - Would you tell me the story about why you decided to take an online course at a US university? What were your expectations before the course? Were they met? Perhaps you would also say something about the your best experience in taking an online course at the US university? What was your worst experience?

2. I would like to learn about what you see as the impact of your cultural values on your experience in the online course. First, you might tell me what "culture" means to you and what national or regional culture with which you identify. You might then tell me how teaching and learning (as well as education, in general) is thought of in your native culture.

3. I am interested in learning from you what you think about the structure, design, and teaching of the online courses you took. In what ways was the course structure and design similar and different from the way a course might be typically structured and designed in your native culture?
 - a. Was there any concept that most of your "American" course mates seemed to understand, but seemed difficult for you to relate to?
 - i. Did you express your confusion about the concepts?
 - ii. If not, why not?
 - iii. If so, what was the reaction of others?
 - b. How would you describe your interactions during the course?
 - i. With whom did you interact?
 - ii. Were the interactions what you expected?
 - iii. Did any of your interactions surprise you?
 - iv. How?
 - c. Think of an image that best represents the teacher in the course - if you have taken more than one course you can just focus on one teacher OR you can create a composite of all of your online teachers. Your image can be an animal, a symbol, a color, a

character, or anything that you think of. Be as creative as you want!

- i. What is the image?
 - ii. What characteristics of [image] remind you of the teacher(s)?
 - iii. What behaviors of [image] did the teacher(s) exhibit?
 - iv. Was the teacher(s) more than one [image]? If so, what other [image]?
 - d. What about the way your learning was assessed?
 - i. Was it what you expected?
 - ii. In what ways was the assessment similar and different from the way your learning would typically be assessed in your native culture?
4. Think of an image that best represents you as an international student in your online course(s) (Your image can be an animal, a symbol, a color, a character, or anything that you think of.) Tell me about that image
5. How would you react to the following hypothetical statement that might have been made by an American distance educator - "culture isn't an important consideration in teaching and learning"? Should American distance education programs attempt to relate to learners from other cultures? How?
 - a. I just wanted to repeat the question here: How would you react to the following hypothetical statement that might have been made by an American distance educator - "culture isn't an important consideration in teaching and learning"? Should American distance education programs attempt to relate to learners from other cultures? How?
 - i. What specific suggestions would you suggest to improve the online course you took for international students?

6. I admit that I am asking my questions from my "western" orientation so I want to make sure that I have not missed hearing something important from you. Click into this forum to post any question or questions that I should have asked you (please answer your question because I know it will be an important one!).

What specific suggestions would you suggest to improve the online course you took for international students?

APPENDIX B: Access to Interview Site

Hi ** -

Again, thank you for volunteering to help with my study on cultural discontinuities in online education.

I hope you had a chance to review my letter of introduction which gives an overview of the project.

Let me give you a little summary of how all of this will work -

You know that we are doing something somewhat new, that is, interviewing online. I really want to do what I can to make this as informal and comfortable as I can. You are encouraged to ask me for clarification or to ask me questions at any time, okay?

I estimate that the maximum of time you will spend on the whole process (our exchanges so far, plus your time answering the online interview questions) and on any follow-up exchange (I want to make sure I am understanding what you're "saying", so I might have some follow-up questions to you), will take a total of 2 hours of your time (but probably closer to 1 total hour) - Remember, you control the amount of time you are willing to spend on the process. This is about learning from you.

We will be using Blackboard as our secure interview site. Blackboard is a course management system similar to Angel and to WebCT. The Blackboard site that we will be using is at Carroll Community College in Westminster, Maryland. The reason: I work there as the director of distance learning programs, and I am also their Blackboard administrator. No one else has access to "our" Blackboard interview site.

To log in go to <http://carrollcc.blackboard.com/>

Your Username is ****

Your Password is ****

At the Welcome, ** page click on  [research-kshattuck22: Cultures meeting cultures#22](#) to enter the Blackboard interview site.

Please review the implied informed consent form. You can find some tips for using Blackboard by clicking on the "Help" button. Learn a bit about me by clicking on the "contact" button. You will find the interview questions by clicking on the "Interview Questions". You can respond to the interview questions all at once or spread it out over time. I hope that you might be able to respond to these questions in a week.

I really look forward to learning about your experiences!

Please let me know if you have any problems.

Kay

APPENDIX C: Sample of the Interview Site

The image shows two screenshots of a Blackboard LMS interface. The top screenshot displays a user's dashboard for 'Kay' with a blue header for 'CARROLL UNIVERSITY' and 'My Courses'. A 'Tools' sidebar on the left lists options like Announcements, Calendar, and Tasks. The main content area is titled 'Welcome, Kay' and contains two panels: 'My Announcements' and 'My Courses'. The 'My Announcements' panel shows a message: 'No system announcements have been posted today. Cultures meeting cultures #09 (Sample)' with a list item 'Hello!'. The 'My Courses' panel shows 'Courses in which you are enrolled: Cultures meeting cultures #09 (Sample)' with an 'Announcements' section containing 'Hello!'.

The bottom screenshot shows a detailed view of an announcement. The breadcrumb trail is 'COURSES > CULTURES MEETING CULTURES #09 (SAMPLE) > ANNOUNCEMENTS'. The announcement is dated 'November 14, 2004 - November 21, 2004' and is titled 'Sat, Aug 28, 2004 -- Hello!'. It is posted by 'Kay Shattuck'. The text of the announcement reads: 'Welcome to our interview site! I have posted some questions for your consideration. Before you begin please make sure you click on the "Consent form" button to review and accept the implied informed consent. You might then want to click on the "Help" button for a brief explanation of how the Blackboard discussion board works - that is where the "interviewing" will take place. When you are ready to get to the questions just click on the button on the left marked "Interview questions". I would be most appreciative if you would be able to reflect on and then respond to my initial questions within one week. I will alert you via regular email if I post a reply back to you. (I might want to check with you to make sure I am understanding what you are "saying.") Again, thanks for helping to learn how we can improve international online education! Kay' Below the text is a 'Course Link' pointing to 'Consent form / Implied informed consent form'. At the bottom center, there is a 'Powered by Blackboard' logo.

Kay Shattuck
Email ksh106@psu.edu
Work Phone 410-306-0419
Office Location Home 717-749-5851
 Cell 717-377-3593

Notes

Perhaps you would like to know a little about me.

I work full-time as director of distance learning programs at Carroll Community College, a wonderful community college in Westminster, Maryland (USA). I am also the Blackboard administrator at Carroll and very active with MarylandOnline, a consortium of colleges in the state of Maryland that "shares" resources.

I am also on the teaching team with Penn State's World Campus. I usually work with the Introduction to Distance Learning course.

This research project is the final step in my earning a doctorate of education (adult education emphasis) at Penn State.

Getting started with the Interview questions

You will see six interview questions when you click on the "Interview questions" button . To provide your answer:

1. click on the underlined question topic (you will be clicking into the "forum")
2. click on "Add thread" on the next screen
3. type in your answer in the text box
4. click "submit"

For two questions - 1) the structure, design, teaching question and 2) the hypothetical question - I have posted a few related questions.

1. click on the underlined question heading (you will be clicking into the "forum")
2. click on the related question heading to see the question
3. click on reply to post your answer
4. click "submit"

Just email me if you have any questions or problems with the discussion board.

Kay

Contacting me

You can email me from within this Blackboard site by clicking on my email address listed in the "Contact" button. I will respond to you via the email address that you provided me. *Kay*

Blackboard Learning System™ (Release 61) - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Address http://carrollc.blackboard.com/webapps/portal/frameset.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=3994_1 Go Links Norton AntiVirus

CARROLL
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

My Carroll Courses

Announcements
Consent form
Help
Contact information
Interview questions

Course Map

COURSES > CULTURES MEETING CULTURES #06 (SAMPLE) > DISCUSSION BOARD

Getting started

To get started - Would you tell me the story about why you decided to take an online course at a US university? What were your expectations before the course? Were they met? Perhaps you would also say something about the your best experience in taking an online course at the US university? What was your worst experience? Please click on "Getting started" to be taken to a screen where you can provide your answer by clicking on "Add thread". No Messages

Culture and educational values

I would like to learn about what you see as the impact of your cultural values on your experience in the online course. First, you might tell me what "culture" means to you and what national or regional culture with which you identify. You might then tell me how teaching and learning (as well as education, in general) is thought of in your native culture. Please click on "Culture and educational values" to be taken to a screen where you can provide your answer by clicking on "Add thread". No Messages

Structure, design, and teaching of the course

I am interested in learning from you what you think about the structure, design, and teaching of the online courses you took. In what ways was the online course structure and taught similar and/or different from the ways a course might be typically designed and taught in your native culture? Please click into this forum to find a few related questions. Number of Messages: 5
[All 16w]

You are an international learner

Powered by Blackboard

Start | Internet | Chapter 3 rewrite | LiWen Linda | Blackboard Lear... | Blackboard L... | 10:51 AM

Blackboard Learning System TM (Release 6) - Microsoft Internet Explorer

File Edit View Favorites Tools Help

Address http://carrollc.blackboard.com/webapps/porta1/frameet.jsp?tab=courses&url=/bin/common/course.pl?course_id=3994_1

CARROLL
COLLEGE

Home Help Logout

My Carroll Courses

Announcements
 Consent form
 Help
 Contact information
 Interview questions
 Course Map

I am interested in learning from you what you think about the structure, design, and teaching of the online courses your took. In what ways was the online course structure and taught similar and/or different from the ways a course might be typically designed and taught in your native culture? Please click into this forum to find a few related questions. **Number of Messages: 5** [All New]

You as an international learner
 Think of an image that best represents you as an international student in your online course(s) (Your image can an animal, a symbol, a color, a character, or anything that you think of.) Be as creative as you want! Tell me about that image. Please click on "reply" to post your response. **No Messages**

Hypothetical question
 How would you react to the following *hypothetical* statement that might have been made by an American distance educator - "culture isn't an important consideration in teaching and learning"? Should American distance education programs attempt to relate to learners from other cultures? How? Please click into the forum to response to this question. **Number of Messages: 2** [All New]

What question did I miss?
 I admit that I am asking my questions from my "western" orientation so I want to make sure that I have not missed hearing something important from you. Click into this forum to post any question or questions that I should have asked you (please answer your question because I know it will be an important one!). **No Messages**

Powered by Blackboard

Start chapter 3 rewrite... Li-Men Linda ... Blackboard Lear... Blackboard L... 10:52 AM

V I T A - K A Y S H A T T U C K

EDUCATION

- D.Ed., The Pennsylvania State University, 2005
- M.S., Psychology, Shippensburg University PA, 1985
- B.S., Sociology, Hood College, Frederick MD, 1981

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Carroll Community College, Westminster MD	1993 - Present
▪ Director of Distance Learning Programs	
▪ Blackboard Administrator	
▪ Director of adult education program	
Maryland Online (Statewide Consortium)	
▪ Quality Matters (FIPSE Grant) team	
▪ Distance Learning Initiatives Group	
World Campus, Penn State University	2000 - Present
▪ Adjunct instructor & teaching assistant	
Penn State Mont Alto, Adjunct instructor	1993
Turning Point, Hagerstown MD	1985 – 1992
▪ Executive Director of psychiatric rehab agency	
Mental Health Association, Chambersburg PA	1982 – 1985
▪ Executive Director of community program	

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Contributor to Moore & Kearsley *Distance Education: A Systems View* (2005).
- Presentation, *Working towards “presence” in online learning*. Maryland Community College Academic Leadership Conference, Ocean City, MD June 2, 2004.
- Co-author, *The challenge of conducting learning across cultures via distance education mean: An HRD dilemma*, presented at the Fifth International Conference on HRD Research and Practice Across Europe, Limerick, Ireland, May 2004
- Literature review for FIPSE funded Quality Matters project matrix: a replicable pathway for inter-institutional quality assurance and course improvements in online learning (2003)
- Chair Research & Dissemination for Quality Matters project (2003 ongoing)
- Shattuck, K. (2002). Speaking Personally. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 16(4), 259-263.
- Presentation: *Distance education as open learning: Issues of disability and cultural sensitivity*. AAACE Conference, St. Louis, November 23, 2002.