

*Fostering Global
Competence Through
Cross-National
Asynchronous Online
Discussions*



**COLLEGE
OF EDUCATION**

Nannette Evans Commander,
Peggy A. Gallagher, Yali
Zhao
*Georgia State University,
Atlanta, GA 30303, USA*

Yongheng You
*Sichuan Normal University,
Chengdu, Sichuan, 610066
P.R. CHINA*

*eLearning Forum Asia
2013*

Purpose of Study

- Explore how asynchronous online discussions of classroom case studies can promote cross-cultural understanding of education for Chinese and American graduate students

Theoretical Framework

- **Sociocultural constructivism** that views social interactions at the center of learning and cognitive development (Driscoll, 1997, Vygotsky, 1986, & Lave and Wenger, 1998)

- **Critical pedagogy** (Freire, 1970) that argues the importance of the learners' ability to think critically about their education situation and experience
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- **Cross-cultural experiential learning** that values the salient cultural reference points of each student within the learning community (Kolb, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995; Merryfield, 2003)

Context of Study

- Graduate Class in Educational Psychology taught asynchronously online
- Focus on connecting learning theories to instructional practice
- Required course for teacher education

Context of Study

- 4 case studies illustrating classroom scenarios (2 American, 2 Chinese):
 - *The Marble Jar*
 - *Learning the Ropes*
 - *Minmin's Smile: Working with Students in Poverty*
 - *English Class at a Chinese Primary School*
- Issues addressed:
- English language learners, classroom management, students in poverty, motivation

Participants

- American graduate students (N=25); 4 males, 21 females (68% had taken an online course before)
- Chinese graduate students (N=9), six participating online on a voluntary basis not for credit from China and three participating on line while in America as exchange students, 2 males, 7 females (none had taken an online course before)

Materials

- Case study is Minmin's Smile (Chinese classroom scenario)
 - student who lives alone with illiterate grandmother
 - student is struggling financially, socially, emotionally, and academically
 - teacher elicits help from peers and grandmother
 - many issues prevalent in both the Chinese and America educational systems, including poverty, classroom management, parental involvement, self-esteem and academic success

Procedure

- Students analyzed cases from a theoretical perspective; evaluated teaching strategies and interventions
- Students justified their position from readings, research and personal experiences
- Students answered open-ended questions about their experience with online discussions

Research Questions

- What evidence exists that American and Chinese students participating in online discussions construct new knowledge regarding different cultures?
- What do American and Chinese students perceive as the most important things they learned from the online discussions?
- In what ways did the online discussions promote students' understanding of teaching and learning in different cultures?

Data Analysis

- Transcripts analyzed by the Interaction Analysis Model (IAM)
 - Posits five phases that indicate the degree of knowledge construction
- Answers to open-ended questions analyzed by content analysis and constant comparative method

Results

- 37% Phase I: exploring agreement
- 15% Phase II: discovering or exploring dissonance
- **48% New Knowledge Construction**
 - 23% Phase III: negotiation of meaning/knowledge co-construction
 - 19% Phase IV: testing and modification of proposed synthesis of co-construction
 - 6% Phase V: agreement and application of newly constructed meaning

Results

- Strong recurring themes
 - Common and different issues for American and Chinese educators
 - Crucial that teachers reach out to struggling students to provide academic and emotional support
 - Teachers in different cultural contexts can learn from each other to help students to achieve
 - Online discussions with students from other countries encouraged reflection on educational practice

Common Critical Issues

- *“While Minmin's story seems challenging to any teacher, there are many students in American classrooms today who struggle with similar uncontrolled home lives that emotionally, socially and academically affect their performance in school.”*



Different Issues

- *"It seemed like the Chinese teachers focused on prosocial behavior much more than the American teachers. Obviously, we all want our students to behave constructively, but it seemed that the main focus for Chinese educators in our discussions was to get kids to act respectfully toward each other, as we saw in Minmin's smile... Only after we build those skills and behaviors can we hope to have the classroom control upon which content knowledge, concentration and comfort are predicated."*

Crucial That Teachers Reach Out To Students

- *“As educators we do need to make a difference in our students' lives. We aren't there to punish the students constantly, but instead there to teach them the concepts needed to move forward in their educations and lives. While punishment may work for some students, I've noticed that encouragement seems to help me. This may only be the case with my students, but so far they respond better to the positive reinforcement in my class. It's so important to know and understand our students.”*

Teachers Can Learn From Each Other

- *"I also thought it was interesting corresponding with Chinese graduate students. They seemed very much like American graduate students. We all were answering questions for the assignments the same and working toward the same goals."*



Reflection On Practice

- *"Any time that technology gives us an opportunity to connect on a common issue or mission, there is a lot that can be gleaned. We are all teachers, trying to convey information to students, take care of their emotional needs, and keep in mind their physical needs as well. I have a feeling we're all pretty stressed out from time to time. For me, the discussions with students from China enhanced my knowledge of the more intimate aspects of education there. They say that you never know what happens after a teacher's door closes, and we can read about broad trends in international education, but actually hearing teachers ' voices is so rare that getting to know our counterparts across the world in this way was very helpful."*

Conclusions

- Online discussions on case studies with American and Chinese graduate students
 - promoted cross-cultural knowledge and understanding of education
 - provided an exciting forum for communication about learning theory and the culture behind instructional practices

Conclusions

- This study
 - adds to the knowledge base about international collaborative online courses
 - serves as a guide for those who wish to create international online courses

Contact Information

Nannette Commander: ncommander@gsu.edu

Peggy Gallagher: pgallagher@gsu.edu

Yali Zhao: yzhao@gsu.edu

Yongheng You: youyh2005@yahoo.com.cn