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## Title

Let's knock down some classroom walls and build a web-based learning, interactive multicultural environment among our online students

## Abstract

We are living in a culturally diverse world. Schools are becoming global in scope because of technology. Our world has many cultures and many styles of communication. Education is not just the preparation for life, it is life itself. The paper focus on Virtual Learning and effective outcomes from using technology as a tool in education to help break down all multicultural boundaries between online students coming from divers background. It is essential that schools recognize, respect, and build upon the cultural characteristics and experiences students bring to school. When cultural gaps exist between teachers and students, teachers can misinterpret students' intents, abilities, and aptitudes. In addition, teachers may interact with students in ways that are counter to the students' home and community standards. The result will lower teacher expectations and inequitable educational services, also students will continue to be at risk for academic success.

## Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness and correct unrecognized biases within online learning environment and assist course instructors to incorporate multicultural perspectives, content, and teaching strategies into their courses to increase students' learning outcomes. Multiculturalism or diversity means different and variety. It is used to describe a wide variety of people and circumstance. Also diversity defined differences based on, but not limited to race, ethnicity, region, gender, language, socio-economic status, age and disability. My mission in this paper is to raise the bar and close the existing achievement gaps experienced by students from different culture within an online learning environment, and how they will interact to influence their behavior and learning. In other words I will try to answer some of the common questions that are related to the same issue, such as; what are the main differences between usual traditional forms of interaction in on ground classes and new virtual forms in online classes? Where are the main advantages of online classes, and where lies potential danger of the virtual learning? Which principles are crucial for building an online educational organization? Does the online education represent our future?

## Methodology

In an online learning environment, the traditional roles of both; the teacher and the student, have been changed, important changes will occur in the area of the control and responsibility for the learning process; the teacher will change from a transmitter to the teacher as a coordinator and facilitator of the student activities in the browsing, analyzing and processing of delivered information, on the other hand the student will change from a passive receiver who very often memorizing not completely understanding content to be as highly competent social actor who is able co-operate and orientate himself/herself effectively in the delivered information.

Let's talk about CD ROM courses, how effective are they in the learning process? The production of CD ROM courses has not reached an adequate effect and success. Some of the problems occurred was the isolation of students in these courses, limited self activity, loneliness in self-study, absence of feedback and live contact with other students, needs of experience exchanging, possibility of co-operation, informal discussions etc., all these factors show necessity of mutual interaction. We need an

interaction not only between PCs and individuals or between individuals and technology but also and firstly among individuals themselves. Human mutual interaction forms an important aspect of human being. Each online student can directly communicate via internet. Virtual interaction is very flexible and co-operative. A further positive of online education is that it facilitates a process of multiculturalism. We can contact each other more quickly than before and often without an explanation of cultural differences in interpersonal relation. Multicultural learning environment should be transformed to virtual learning to eliminate the problem of interpersonal relations. The present-day situation shows that this problem is the core one.

Computers have been used for learning purposes for a long time, but when using the computer for teaching purposes as in online courses, it is important to create the online education system in such a way to be adaptive with the student capability and overall performance, not just showing the web pages, links, quizzes, and other teaching material as if we are browsing a book, without any response and adaptability to the student performance and capability.

According to the statistics of diversity in USA population (from the national multicultural institute), many changes happened nationwide demographically, for example 18.7% of the total U.S. population speaks a language other than English at home, and over 50% of that population speaks Spanish. Also by the year 2050, the White, non-Hispanic population will comprise only 50% of the population. Hispanic/Latinos will make up 25% of the U.S. population, followed by African Americans with 14.5%, Asian Americans 8%, and all other races at 5%. Another research shows the top 15 countries in internet usage in year 2000.

Rank	Country	Internet Users in Millions
1	U.S.	132.3
2	Germany	22.9
3	Japan	21.9
4	United Kingdom	17.0
5	France	12.6
6	Canada	11.6
7	Italy	10.6
8	Australia	8.0
9	Netherlands	5.4
10	Brazil	5.2
11	Russia	5.0
12	Spain	4.4
13	China	3.8
14	Sweden	3.7
15	South Korea	3.2
	Top 15 Countries	267.5
	Europe	102
	Worldwide	327
Source: <a href="http://www.c-i-a.com/199809iu.htm">www.c-i-a.com/199809iu.htm</a> <a href="http://www.interculturalrelations.com/v1i4Fall1998/f98hart.htm">http://www.interculturalrelations.com/v1i4Fall1998/f98hart.htm</a>		

So, it is obvious that people feel a lot comfortable using this technology, so why not benefit from this opportunity in the education system. Online learning will give students the opportunity to access and interact with each other even if they were at a great distance, both geographic and cultural. A diverse online class brings a wealth of experiences and ideas to students and teachers, thus sparking the innovation and creativity needed to succeed in education delivery process.

Over the last few years as I was teaching online courses, I compared the usage of communication tools that the diverse students were using to communicate with each other; I found 95.4% of my divers students prefer to use the email tool for communication whether they are enrolled in the online or the on ground class. As a result why not widen the use of this technology and offer the online education for all of

our students; it is the most powerful tool in learning process among all students especially the ones coming from different cultural background.

Our biggest challenge is convincing folks in the face- to- face world that online learning is an excellent method of instruction...How?

Online Education...

- Could be a solution for overcrowded schools.
- It is a tremendous opportunity for bringing school communities together.
- Seemed to be the perfect solution to leveling the playing field for many students, also serve and support their learning process. These students could be:
  - Students in high-need areas who did not have the same resources as others in the class, or came from different cultural background.
  - Adult learners who can not attend traditional classes because of work schedules or child care issues
  - Students coming from different cultural background
  - Home-schooled students
  - At risk students
  - Homebound or hospitalized students
  - Students in ruler districts.
- Tell us that other people, with their differences, can also be right.
- Encourage students across the world to become active, compassionate and lifelong learners
- In a multicultural setting traditional class there could be students who usually speak (write) more prolifically, forcefully, and with greater confidence, whereas students of different cultural backgrounds tend to speak less, more differently, and with greater caution, where in an online class with the same multicultural setting all students will perform the same.
- One of the advantages in teaching online course, online has to do with individual participation in group discussion. In the online classroom there is virtually an unlimited amount of classroom time, most of which is asynchronous so students do not have to compete for "airtime" like they would during a 55-minutes traditional class.
- Distance courses are convenient, efficient, and useful. Some students would not have been able to earn a degree if traveling were required. They used time they otherwise would have spent driving to complete course work instead. In an online course students will be on their own time work through course material in their own ways, at their own pace, on their own schedule, they will be allowed to gain contrast, alternate sources, explore concepts in new ways, in a location amenable to their learning; at home in soft light, at job locations while working, while driving, while exercising, at night in bed, good learning takes place; learners are not expected to do all of their learning in the classroom. In theses online setting away of classrooms, students will learn in setting of their own choice not limited to geographic dispersion of learners due to the ties of the lecture hall, while students who are tied to campuses where lectures or specialized laboratory equipment is located, they are expected to learn beyond the lecture hall or laboratory.
- Online classes will afford flexibility to students who find it difficult to commit to the rigid schedule of a long-term, face-to-face class.
- Within online learning environment students will get to know each others personally, they may have something in common. E-mail or call each other outside of class time, and outside of class-related interactions, helped participants feel connected and allowed them to work through their programs together.
- If students do not agree with comments a professor gives on an assignment, they will not be afraid to challenge the professor--as long as the student has cited sources to back up his or her ideas. Remember, however, that the faculty member is an expert in the subject matter and sees a range of student work on each assignment; he or she uses a set of standard criteria, and gives each grade based on the quality of the assignment.
- When using the discussion board, one participant pointed out the importance of students being sure of their facts. Because the discussion is in writing, other

students have more opportunity to challenge what is said, so students should think carefully before posting a message.

- Sometimes students are required to complete group projects. E-mailing one another on group projects can be a good process and scheduling time to work together in a chat room to accomplish their goal before deadlines can approach quickly.
- Students will always be encouraged to do as much networking with other as possible, support and help one another with course concepts and tasks, not to be afraid to ask questions.
- For some participants, a lack of face-to-face interaction was the biggest drawback of an online program. However, many participants said there are ways to connect with others, and have even made close friends through their programs. Multicultural students will participate in chat rooms, message boards, e-mailing, and calling one another, which helped them feel connected to class members.

The tools offer a great methodological resources in its learning, and students will feel the international boundaries are falling down as seeing each other as a web characters grow similar faces, wear same uniforms, and they will develop interactive learning platform and environment where all their main focus will be learning, solving problems, and sharing knowledge. Technology tools developed to support the education process will focus on high expectations and cooperative learning, which will effectively improve student achievement and closing the achievement gap created because of cultural differences between students and between students and teachers.

There are many exciting ways to enhance teaching & learning, we should explore them, to help us integrate technology successfully and achieve our educational goals. Briefly; well-managed diverse classroom create a competitive advantage within the whole class, this will lead to a very important question, and how can an online instructor support and encourage students in a diverse online environment.

- The instructor should emphasize the positive whenever possible and provide resources to do better if needed. For example, if a student has developed a good argument, the instructor could take the time to give references for follow up.
- Avoid negative remarks—students remember them and play them back in their own minds along with all of the self-doubts they already have which may cause tension, isolation, and social distance—if not some kind of over reaction.
- Aware your students about ethnic, racial, and cultural issues.
- On the first online class meeting, Create a discussion for diversity, where students and faculty had a chance to hear different perspectives, for example:
  - "One thing you have to know about me to understand who I am is..." students will introduce themselves to each other.
  - Instructor and students will write down two things that make the online class a welcoming and comfortable place in terms of being who you are at the school and two things that make the online class unwelcoming and uncomfortable. Students and faculty then shared their perspectives.
- Engage your online students in a one-on-one project, to work together especially if they are from different culture, they will still work together and the diversity gap between them will not exist.

An important issue we can use as target to increase the outcome of a diverse online environment is faculty training and development on diversity issues.

- Instructors must develop the awareness, knowledge, and understanding of their own culture and the beliefs, values, and assumptions that frame the educational practice of individuals and institutions.
- Understanding the cultural characteristics, perspectives, and strengths of students from diverse groups will allow instructors to engage in asset thinking instead of deficit thinking when planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction.
- Instructors must develop the knowledge and skill to modify instruction so that all students have equitable opportunities to learn and succeed in an online environment.

- Instructors should focus on improving teaching actions by building teacher capacity to implement a range of teaching strategies to meet the needs of online learners.
- Being a vital part in a group discussion or dialogue with students, will continually increase perspective talking, knowledge, and understanding ideas, information, and different ways of learning.
- Improve cross-cultural verbal communication and avoid misunderstanding, by making an effort to reduce or avoid the use of jargon, idioms, ambiguous or cute humor, and acronyms.
- It is desirable to design more fun and interesting procedure in the learning environment, though combing games and tests could be a good idea so students will not see an enormous sea of letters, and this idea will improve student's learning outcomes.

## Result

New technologies make the education delivered to our online students easier, and academic organizations realize their effectiveness in education depends on employing workers who can relate to diverse cultures and students, online instructors should become aware of the differences among students, and being willing to accept these differences as a positive factor within an online class, and it all starts with you- the instructor, who should be able to build constructive and beneficial relationships by learning how to analyze situations, select and use productive communication strategies with students from all different cultures, using strategic management of diversity can drive innovation, create competitive advantage and increase students' achievement. As an online teacher I believe that providing professional assistance related to the cultural differences and coordinating the bridge to and from the student is the key of success of any online environment. The online learning system brought to us many students from different cultures, and as professionals we will take advantage of that to break all boundaries of cultural differences and bring up a highly interactive learning environment, this fact dependent on the teacher personnel's skill, effort, and willingness to know about other cultural differences.

## Conclusion

Our PCs are not only instruments for our personal utilization, but they are also means of mutual interconnection, communication and various types of interaction, so why not use them as an educational tool world wide. As we can see in the virtual world we have more possibilities to meet each other online and to form new kinds of mutual relations. The teaching process of online classes will always need some dynamic improvement; one of the important features needed to be added to the computerized system is the capability of self-improvements. Any human teacher, improves his/her performance, and learns from the students responses; so we need to apply the same philosophy to the online learning. The idea of self-improvement can be guided, either by achieving higher standard, skilled students (given a certain amount of time to the teaching process), or by reducing the time used to achieve a certain limit of student's standards. I strongly believe that the Online Learning will help students from diverse groups to succeed in receiving a high quality and quantity of learning.

## Recommendations

- *Make the Magic Disappear* by *Jeff Penfold and J. Kelly Flanagan*  
*Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602*
- *Blended Learning: Research Perspectives*, *Anthony G. Picciano - Hunter College and the Graduate Center at the City University of New York*
- *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks - Volume 10:1 - February 2006\**
- *Growing by Degrees: Online Education in the United States, 2005*
- <http://www.sloan-c.org>
- *A Frame Work for E-Learning*, by *Badrul H. Khan*

- Online Learning: Personal Reflections on the Transformation of Education.  
Edited by *Greg Kearsely*.