Online Tutoring e-Book

Editor Carol Higgison

Chapter 6
Culture and Ethics: Facilitating Online Learning

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Preface

Through the OTiS e-Workshop[1] we aimed to build a learning community of online practitioners (academics, faculty, lecturers, instructors, staff developers, facilitators and trainers) from education and business who could learn from each other. The e-workshop attracted over one hundred participants from seventeen countries worldwide, including sixty-nine authors, facilitators, rapporteurs and organisers.

The cultural diversity these participants brought to the e-workshop greatly enriched our experiences and, I hope, our practice. We encountered first-hand some of the challenges and opportunities presented by the international dimension of an online learning community. The participants addressed issues of language, culture and ethics through discussion and case studies, negotiating and clarifying meaning to build a greater understanding and knowledge of experiences and skills, informed by a range of perspectives.

The group, which came together to consider and discuss issues of Culture and Ethics, was one of the most dynamic and productive of the e-workshop. They identified and documented our experiences of effective practices that are presented in this chapter. Our success in achieving it is due to the drive and commitment of the participants.

Four participants from the e-workshop, Michel Labour, Charles Juwah, Nancy White and Sarah Tolley authored this chapter giving freely of their time and effort. Two of them are based in the UK, one based in the USA and the fourth in France. Their efforts were entirely voluntary and the collaboration was achieved without them ever meeting.

My sincere thanks to all the participants and, in particular, the authors whose commitment extended long beyond the end of the e-workshop.

Carol Higgison
(editor)

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[1] The OTiS International e-Workshop on Developing Online Tutoring Skills was held between 8–12 May 2000. It was organised by Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh and The Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, UK.

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Michel Labour, Charles Juwah, Nancy White and Sarah Tolley

1. Introduction

One of the key attributes of online learning is the ability to reach people around the block and around the globe. This presents an unprecedented opportunity for tapping into the richness and diversity of learners, as well as a challenge to overcome some of the barriers we face working across and between languages and cultures. This potential is recognised in many of the case studies, for example:

> "The potential of the Internet for delivering cost-effective and more accessible professional training is widely accepted… We wanted to exploit this potential to reach as many urban managers as possible in the Asia-Pacific region. Our aim is to deliver current, innovative and best practice oriented training material in a cost-effective and accessible manner. Delivering this workshop style Continuous Professional Development (CPD) online was essential to create a viable model of mass CPD by providing an alternative to sending professionals to regional United Nations and similar sponsored workshops." (Webster)

Learning and tutoring are very complex phenomena, much like "culture and ethics" that cannot easily be reduced to simple factors. Given this, the aim of our reflections is to suggest ways in which fellow tutors could anticipate and enhance the possible impact of culture and ethics in online communication and, consequently, in online learning.

As Warschaeur (1998) points out, one of the major changes in distance learning and tutoring is the renewed interest in culture in regards to online learning. It seems that many teachers are unsure as to how best to use "culture" in the learning and tutoring process. This is linked, in part, to Warschaeur's observation that there is a move from learner interaction with the machine to interaction with a variety of other people via the machine (arising from current socio-cognitive approaches to computer-assisted learning).

Some of the key questions revolve around how culture is, or is not, experienced online:

- Is it easier to work across cultures free from visual cues, which tap into our prejudices?

- Is it harder without visual cues so that we miss sensitive cultural cues?

- Just how do we maximise the diversity and respect for cultures while tutoring online?

The contributions for the content are drawn mainly from e-workshop sources and contributions including case studies, online discussions and chats. References given without dates are references to case study conference contributions details for which are given in Appendix A. This group used the online discussion space to collaborate, merge and synthesise a range of contributions into a cohesive presentation. They have chosen not to (and it is almost impossible to) attribute individual contributions. A full list of participants in the online discussion is listed in Appendix A.

2. Culture and Ethics

2.1   What is culture?

In this context, the concept of culture is associated with a coherent system of identifying attitudes, values, and frames of activities linked to a given pattern of behaviour (Sapir 1921 and 1967). What defines a culture is not the presence or absence of a certain cultural trait, but rather the way in which it pursues its objectives in a given direction. One way of doing this is to provide a system of accepted rules and standards of behaviour, in other words a '*code of ethical values*'.

2.2   What are ethics?

Habermas (1990, pp 65, 85, 86–94, 158–159), in his treatise on moral consciousness and communicative action, defines discourse ethics as reasoned agreement (or valid norms) reached by individuals in a group or community through dialogue or communicative action. These norms, agreed by all participants in the group for the common interest of all, are motivated by the values of respect, truth, sincerity, fairness, equity of participation in the discussion and accountability. For the norms to be valid within a group, community or culture, they must be regulated through the protection of practice that enhances mutual understanding of the norms from other cultures.

> "The problem we perceived was that people often do not know how to engage in supportive communication. Our competitive culture [*UK*] teaches adversarial communication – ie domination and control. An unhelpful result is a tendency for people to dogmatise one another rather than help one another to learn. A positively damaging result is a tendency for people to fight for domination – which, in an online environment, can result in flaming or withdrawal …" (Zimmer and Alexander)

In online communities as in any other, the ethical issues of respect for one another (regardless of gender, race, religion, class etc) such as truth, sincerity, fairness, equity of participation in discussion, decision-making and accountability are paramount for the effective operation and survival of the group as an entity. Zimmer and Alexander, and Kennedy and Duffy, each offer a technique to support such an ethical online community.

2.3   How is culture expressed online?

The predominant online learning context considered during the OTiS e-Workshop was text based communication which appears to be a critical component of retaining one's cultural identity. However images are also important to cultural identity.

2.3.1 Text based communication

Online tutors may observe a great deal of cultural form from an 'international' student by the style and content of, for example, an email text. This form may be signalled by the:

- choice of words,
- formality of informality of writing,
- amount of self-disclosure,
- amount of willingness to take risks by sharing ideas or comments.

What is not always immediately accessible to the reader are the cultural meanings that the participant wishes to convey in the message via the choice of vocabulary, syntax or metaphor, etc.

There are some aspects that are invisible even in a face-to-face situation that can have implications for online facilitation, for example, religion and sexual orientation. As online tutors we should reflect on these questions:

- Do we assume when someone has an accent that they are 'foreign' or that they lack a grasp of our language?

- How does that change our perception of the words sent by a student?

- How does the experience change online?

Robert Lado (1986, p54) proposes a threefold analysis in identifying units of culturally patterned behaviour:

- First, there is the cultural *'form'* of behaviour, identified functionally by members of that culture (eg 'learning' happens when you can memorise what the teacher has said).

- Then, there are culturally determined levels of *'meaning'* attributed to a given form of behaviour. Meaning can have a primary level (eg 'learning' to pass an examination) accompanied by secondary levels of meaning (eg 'learning' to make the teacher happy, for social acceptability, etc).

- Finally, all meaningful behaviours are socially distributed in a particular way. Patterned *'distribution'* (or frequency) of this sort, involves a complex combination of factors like time cycles, space locations and relationships to other units, etc (eg 'learning' happens in a school building, with a teacher between 8.30 a.m. and 4.30 p.m., from Monday to Saturday morning, with the exception of Wednesdays).

The totality of this culturally patterned behaviour is underpinned by cultural literacy (Lado). Finkelstein examines this concept in his case study:

> "In the context of cultural studies, one very positive point about utilising electronic tutorials and the Web was the opportunity it gave students to be exposed to, reflect upon and comment on the growing influence of and changes wrought by computers and cyberspace culture on society today. Comparing cultural identities and institutions as fixed in their present physical and mental surroundings, with such identities as reconstituted in cyberspace, as we did, for example, with our first assignment comparing real and virtual museums, provoked strong and considered responses from students. It was a valuable way of introducing and discussing cultural theories utilising examples drawn from immediate contexts and virtual spaces." (Finkelstein)

The cultural frequency/distribution of what was said might not be obvious for the reader of the text, eg praising people's performance may be acceptable and common in the USA but is rarer in a country like France. These misunderstandings may be compounded by delays caused by asynchronous learning due to different time zones between participants.

2.3.2 Images

Images can produce a strong reaction in students and can convey, ideas, associations and emotions more quickly than text. Webster, for example, describes the use of a 'building metaphor' in a multi-cultural context:

> "The Virtual Policy Studio (VPS) was designed around a *building* metaphor. We customised WebBoard to create a virtual policy studio, which functions something like a virtual clubhouse for urban managers in the region. A training corridor provides access to a tutor's office, personal study rooms, a lounge, and a group exercise room. The personal study rooms have full conferencing and chat facilities and access to a Resource Room, which in any particular workshop contains structured course material." (Webster)

What are the implications of our choice and use of visual metaphors and images? What underlying assumptions and values influence our choice and what impact do these images have in other cultures?

For example: commonly used software makes extensive use of icons. Can we assume that these are universally recognised throughout the world? An example is the navigation bar of most Internet browsers that show a traditional concept of a 'European home' designed for the nuclear family. Is this recognised as a symbol for 'home'? How does this affect other cultures? Institutions need to make such icons multicultural, a difficult but essential task.

This is an issue online tutors will need to address as the use of multiple media, such as pictures, graphics, simulations, video and audio, becomes more common and widespread.

2.4   The value of diversity

Diversity is difference and there is richness in diversity, which is underpinned by variety.

Variety is present in the form of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, creed, status, knowledge, skills level and life experiences. Diversity enriches the learning environment and the quality of learning and enhances learners' intercultural experience.

In online learning, diversity in itself forms a rich and valuable learning resource, which both tutors and students can use:

- to help them better understand aspects of other participants' culture,

- to help them understand how these cultural differences can affect learning and interaction online.

How can tutors minimise misunderstandings and use cultural variations as springboards to enhance online learning?

Clearly, there is no one 'right' method. The online tutor needs to be flexible to the range of possibilities and make an appropriate selection from a variety of approaches depending on the context. This requires cultural literacy or knowledge about the world that enables us to effectively communicate, interact and socialise with others. The lack of accurate cultural information about our own or others' ethnic groups may result in us being misinformed about other cultures and cause cultural shock, hurt or conflict.

We attempt to address some of these questions, issues and concerns in the remainder of this chapter by providing guidelines to facilitate online tutoring which focus on self-awareness, and transparent and open facilitation.

3. Self-awareness and online presence

When considering cultural issues it is important for us to consider our own starting point. We need to raise our self-awareness by reflecting on how we assess ourselves and how we communicate with, and present ourselves to, others:

- by what we say,

- by how we say it (ie in a formal/informal way).

This in itself is a cultural exercise. For example, in presenting oneself to establish an identity and place online, we can describe visible signs of recognition: race, gender, social status, age, place of residence, and personal interests and tastes. What and how much information is exchanged can have a major impact on the online learning community.

Online communication can be very liberating and is able to provide opportunities and remove or reduce barriers. As Labour describes:

> "… [*it*] allows learners to practice the target language with native speakers living in their own country. This represents an important complementary facet to learning English in a country like France where English is not a dominant language. Online learning also allows contact between people from different social backgrounds and profiles who would not always dialogue in a face-to-face (educational) context. This type of learning tends to encourage learners to be autonomous and tolerant, if nothing else, in order to maintain contact with their email partners." (Labour)

However some problems can arise in transnational conferencing where issues of status and hierarchy can influence the community, as Tolley reports:

> "Various problems arise that are specific to transnational conferencing. The first is formality. Given the wide range of forms of address that are considered necessary in a lot of European countries it is important observe the formalities at the start of a conference like this. My solution is to invite participants to introduce themselves formally and then to negotiate a more informal mode of address. This approach was particularly successful with a Sicilian professor, who was delighted at being addressed by his first name, something that simply could not happen in his university." (Tolley)

Gwynne and Chester adopted an approach whereby their students, wholly online, interact via aliases to self-reflexively explore the issues of identity and community in a qualitatively different teaching/learning environment while addressing issues of gender and cultural equity.

> "Students were required to have no face-to-face contact with each other during the semester.

> "To further stimulate life online and encourage a sense of pseudonymity, all students selected an alias in the first week and they were only known to the others in their group by their aliases.

> "We hoped the use of pseudonyms would create a context of 'managed ambiguity' (Jaffe, Lee, Huang, and Oshagan, 1995), permitting relationship, while offering an opportunity to actively conceal or reveal elements of real life identity. This process that Walther (1996) describes as self-selection, allows traits such as race, gender, and age to be *"revealed through performance rather than appearance"*. (p 20)

> "We only knew the students by their aliases. We did not know their real names, their gender, their age or whether they were part time or full time students." (Gywnne and Chester)

What is of particular importance is linking information we have available to questions such as:

- How does this influence me as an online facilitator?

- What assumptions and biases am I likely to be prone to?

- Where does my intuition and experience serve me?

- Where am I stepping into unknown/known territory?

- How might my disclosure of any/all of this affect others in the group?

This can have important implications for online tutors. For example, many case studies describe introductory exercises designed to promote interaction and generate a sense of community amongst the learners. The majority of these exercises involve some form of self-introduction as part of the exercise, as these examples illustrate:

> "I start each class with a 'two truths and one lie' exercise to establish a culture of interaction and collaboration, (tell two 'truths' and one 'lie' about yourself and ask classmates to vote on which is the lie)." (Kulp)

> "In the first instance (usually week one), the main aim is to encourage participation and discussion. This is achieved by a variety of methods, including mimicking conversational introductions and dialogue, and making controversial statements on the topic, for students to respond to." (Street)

> "… have found that asking the students to provide a short introduction and a description of their job role usually reveals areas they have in common and breaks the ice. A private conference, open only to students, also helps them to establish a sense of community, albeit virtual." (Creanor)

> "We use chat to create a sense of immediacy and connection. The first chat comes at the end of the first week and is about getting to know each other, starting sometimes with things as simple as the weather (as our students come from many parts of the world and the US, and that is always kind of funny). We use a 'clock' protocol that we introduce previously with the telephone conference call to ensure everyone has a chance to 'speak' and have a sense of the group in the absence of physical presence. Theoretically all students had already introduced themselves in the asynchronous conference environment and filled in their profiles, so these introductions are more casual and play off of what they have learned about each other during the week. Then each person comments on their experiences of the first week. This 'round' is very affirming as folks are a little more open, less formal in chat and it is OK to say 'I feel this' or 'I feel that'. People talk about how this experience helps them feel reassured and more connected to the group." (White and Moussou)

These examples raise issues such as the acceptability of lying (Kulp), reproducing face-to-face scenarios (Street) and judging the borderline between 'controversial' and offensive (Street). Most communities become established because the participants have something in common. As online tutors we have to identify appropriate areas to begin this bonding process, eg participants presenting and discussing information about each other (Creanor and White and Moussou) or forming impressions through working together towards a common end (Gwynne and Chester).

A key benefit that is often claimed for online communities is that they help to reduce prejudice, preconceptions and misconceptions that can arise through normal face-to-face situations. We need to consider carefully how much of the face-to-face signals and cues we reproduce online and how much information we share, eg biographies, photographs, hobbies, interests, and how we replace the perceived gap in our knowledge of other group members.

> "Gender issues became apparent in the tutor conferences at an early stage, when it was assumed (by a male tutor) that the person providing technical help, who had a non gender specific name, was male. His defence that 'people should state their gender where it isn't obvious' led to the only outbreak of flaming within the tutor conference. Other researchers have also noted this assumption being made by male students." (Morrison)

3.1   Action Tips

Online tutors may wish to work with a group of peers to explore their cultural identity and assumptions (see Finkelstein, Gwynne and Chester, Labour), for example:

- How are they expressed offline?

- How are they expressed online?

- Where are there gaps in cultural 'competence' and opportunities for further learning?

The use of private or public discussion rooms (eg Webster, Creanor) or 'journal spaces' can be a useful tool for both student and tutor self-assessment and reflection. (Cowan, Ehmann, Hird, Mohamad, and White and Moussou offer a range of perspectives on the use of journals). For a contrasting perspective on private spaces see Clarke, while Murray suggests a negotiated agreement on what will be made public and what will kept private.

Also check out Canney Davidson and Ward's 'cultural value checklist' available at http://www.mcgraw-hill.co.uk/tpr/international_teams/it_interventions.html, taken from their book *Leading International Teams* (1999).

4. Language

Language is an important element of cultural identity. It enables us to communicate ideas, beliefs, values and feelings. The choice of language will have an impact on communication and consequently on learning.

The table in Figure 1 (appendix B) summarises the typology of online learning communities by some of the major spoken languages.

4.1 Which language to use?

Communication and learning are more effective where the participants are relatively competent and fluent in the language being used. On the other hand, the Internet offers the potential for international collaboration and the provision of courses, which attract participants from around the world who bring different languages and cultures. In such a case, it is argued, a common language is needed to allow participants to communicate, learn and collaborate together successfully (as in Higgison).

4.1.1 English as the common language

English, it is argued, is the language of commerce and the Internet. Many providers of internationally available online learning opportunities, such as the UK Open University (see Macdonald, Morrison, Salmon and Tolley), use English as the common language. This rationale was also the basis of using English in the multinational courses described in Higgison, Kennedy and Duffy, McFarlane, McKenzie, Scheuerman et al, Webster and White and Moussou.

A caveat: English was the language used during the OTiS e-Workshop, because the organisers are based in the UK. The call to participate in the e-workshop was issued only in English and the participants were self-selecting in that they chose to submit a case study and participate in the e-workshop. All the case studies cited above describe courses which are provided by institutions and organisations based in countries where English (whatever version) is the 'native' language.

We should also question the view that English is a common language amongst countries like the USA, the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Although the majority of the e-workshop participants spoke English as their first language there were many misunderstandings and different interpretations of the meanings of key terms such as 'tutor', 'assessment' and 'evaluation' as an excerpt from the online discussion about one of the case studies (Creanor) demonstrates.

> **"Date:** 5-May-00 18:00
> **Author:** Rick
> **Subject:** So much in common / Need for translation
> ... One other thing that struck me was that I wished I'd had a Scottish-Academic to American-Corporate dictionary available as I read your case. ICT? FE? I'm clueless. Tutor? Is that anything like an instructor? Perhaps Carol can set up a database or discussion thread somewhere that we can visit when we encounter unfamiliar jargon. By the way, this is an issue in my own classes, whose students come from around the world. …

>> **Date:** 7-May-00 22:06
>> **Author:** Anne
>> **Subject:** language/acronyms
>> I, too, struggled with some of the acronyms. I think this brings up an interesting issue surrounding OTL--it really forces us all to think about language and to be aware of word usage beyond our own cultures. In my very first international online experience [Internet] years ago, the researcher hosting a Delphi study model lost significant time

in his study because participants across 4 English-speaking countries were all using different terminology related to one profession. [The problem was resolved by establishment of common lexicon.] "Speaking" online in language that is understood across cultures is yet one more skill that both teachers and students need when they shift to OTL.

> **Date:** 8-May-00 14:08
> **Author:** michel
> **Subject:** database for acronyms
> Hi Anne - I completely agree with you about professional and cultural acronyms, and jargon. Sadly I am guilty of it as anyone else, I suppose it is a type of shorthand and sign of recognition of being part of a community.
> I do think a database is necessary, for example, distinctions like teacher (school/pupil context?), tutor (small group discussions?), instructor (this particularly reminds me of the army? and Skinner and his programmed lock-step learning), trainer (business context?) intercultural would not always get consensus even within the same national culture as it may cover sociolinguistic assumptions about power and control in the learning process.
> PS what is OTL ?
> Michel

> > **Date:** 8-May-00 14:49
> > **Author:** Gilly
> >
> > **Subject:** UK to US contexts
> > This conversation strikes a chord with me too- I'm currently working to "translate" the online tutor training (described in case study 32) to the US context- the UK OU has a sister university just beginning - and I'm taking some responsibility for the training and development of the Associate Faculty (working as online tutors) their first complaint was - process OK - but excuse me what are you SAYING!!! gILLY

> > **Date:** 9-May-00 01:50
> > **Author:** Anne
> > **Subject:** "otl" defined
> > OTL stands for online teaching & learning. I apologize for confusing this conference with another project in which OTL is part of the project lingo. --Anne

> **Date:** 8-May-00 16:14
> **Author:** Linda
> **Subject:** So much in common / Need for translation
> Hi Rick,
> Apologies for the acronyms - I'm afraid I have to plead guilty to that. Normally I do try to spell them out (ICT-information and communication technologies, FE = Further Education) but as space was limited I succumbed to temptation!

The participants in this discussion were from the USA, UK and France. Their suggestion of a shared database or lexicon of common terms has arisen in other contexts.

4.1.2 Accommodating language differences

In forcing learners to limit themselves to one language (eg English), some participants may feel at a disadvantage at being unable to express themselves fully. This language barrier may pose considerable challenges and a block to learning for some non-native speakers of English. Less fluent speakers of a language may take a longer time in

composing or drafting their messages or responses to discussions and activities. This becomes crucial in synchronous conferences in which immediacy is paramount.

Some argue that the asynchronous nature of many online learning opportunities compensates for this disadvantage by allowing time for reflection and to write contributions, but does not take into account other factors. For example, English language speakers from different countries/cultures, and people with different writing skill sets will have different levels of willingness to take risks. This may lead to a greater reticence to contribute (eg Kennedy and Duffy) or may lead to more formality than the learner might typically use (eg Tolley). Cameo 1 clearly demonstrates the feelings of an online learner who found it difficult fully participating in a learning situation as a result of language barrier.

Cameo 1

Language Barriers LO19386

Maldonado
Fri, 2 Oct 1998 11:32:16 -0700

http://www.learning-org.com/98.10/0008.html - Learning organisation dialog on Learning Organisations – consulted 23 July 2000)
Replying to LO19376 - Diego … wrote:

I declare myself a Lurker, for not having the easiness of write my mail in English Language. English is not my mother tongue and I speak it seldom. Thus it is so difficult for me write my thoughts in this language. I think that many people are in my particular situation, for such reason, I need one suggest about How I find some effective technological help that allow me to dialogue in the cyberspace with so distinguished p*articipants.*

Some case studies describe online courses developed and delivered in a language other than English (for example Blom, Doufexopoulou, Eger and Vacek, Haragus, Lustigova and Zelenda, Mikulecka and Poulova, Mohamad, Nurmela, Spoustova, and Tammelin). However, participants on these courses tend to be restricted to the country of origin.

4.1.3 Native and non-native speakers

A major issue regarding language usage is where the learning community consists of both native and non-native speakers. A key problem is finding the right level of communication with which all learners are comfortable. The use of jargon or colloquialisms may be a source of misunderstanding and confusion for some non-native speakers. Therefore, it is very important for tutors to use 'plain language' and have excellent "communication skills (clear, brief, entertaining)" (Kulp). Online tutors need to show patience in supporting these learners.

One way of reducing this type of anxiety and apprehension is to encourage learners to comment on the use of the chosen language and discuss which other language(s) they would have been the most comfortable with (for example see Janes).

The issue of language usage could be quite emotive for some learners and may raise for example such questions as:

- How participants feel about communicating online. If they feel the medium corresponds to their idea of furthering intercultural understanding. For example, there may be difficulties in participating because the language of discourse is not always elegant or well thought out as described in Cameo 2.

Cameo 2

Language Barriers LO19390

Replying to LO19386

http://www.learning-org.com/98.09/0328.html - Learning organisation dialog on Learning Organisations – consulted 23 July 2000)

Several of you have expressed low confidence in writing to such an august group. That problem is not limited to difference in native language. I watched for months fearful of speaking out because my language is shop not academia. Reading the smooth sentence structure than many use is also intimidating. The idea of communicating with written words and no action is very intimidating as well. Besides I can't type so most ideas are lost before they hit the screen. My language has always been do it. Now I work with ideas and must use mostly words. Strange feeling. You have great insights, ideas and questions. Keep it up.

Gene

Eugene …

Cameo 3 shows how other learners empathise and can support their peers in learning.

Cameo 3

Language Barriers LO19389

W.M. …
Sat, 3 Oct 1998 02:45:05 +0200
replying to Language Barriers LO19376

Buenos Dias Diego!(I probably wrote it wrong)

http://www.learning-org.com/98.10/0011.html- Learning organisation dialog on Learning Organisations – consulted 23 July 2000)

As a Dutchman raised in two different cultures I understand your problem. I remember that writing my first postings to this list took me houres!! I was worried about they way I expressed myself and felt often foolish. So I changed sentences again and again before I daired to hit the "send now" button. But my wish to express and share my thoughts, idea's comments and questions was always bigger than my fear to make a fool out of myself. I have never regret it. In the almost three years I am member of this list I have NEVER had any complains about my writing skills nor the quality of my contributions. (Of course I don't know how many were stopped by our dear moderator Rick...... :-)). If something wasn't clear, people asked me for clearafication. It helped me sort out my own mind but theirs as well. THEY also re-concidered their use of language (remember the 'faith' and 'trust' thread.) I even dare to state that I improved my english along the road. (Did I boys and girls??) So their is teaching and learning on both ends; not only on the level of contents, but also at the processlevel, the relational level and the observing level. What more can we wish? I for me hope that you (and others) will contribute with whatever is on your learning mind! Or, as my Indonesian Grandmother used to say: "Barchih barbeh, bu barchichi bu barkabeh" (translated: If one sheep starts to walk, the others will follow.......):-)
Have a great day!

Winfried …

- Stereotyping, be it open or hidden, can be particularly destructive. For example, carelessly saying to a learner whose native language is not English that his/her language is 'very bad and not up to scratch' will be very de-motivating.

4.1.4 Supporting multiple languages

In certain online learning situations it may be appropriate to use, or even promote, the use of two or more languages – to help enhance meaning and the understanding of knowledge for the learners. Daele, Janes, Labour and Noakes report examples where courses have been designed as multi-lingual or have adapted to meet a lack of language skills (Sitharam and Shimizu).

> "The course materials are in English but tutorial support and online discussions can be in English or Spanish. If a student registers for this course via UBC [*Canada*] then all work, reading and discussions are done in English. If the student registers via ITESM [*Mexico*] then Masters' students have the option to discuss online and with their Spanish speaking instructors in Spanish. … Many of the UBC registered students come to the course with English as a second language but are aware that the work is conducted in English. However any group work can be conducted in any language agreed to by the group. Submitted works must be in English. Several of our UBC instructors have been taking intensive Spanish language instruction." (Janes)

> "…the assumption that students were sufficiently fluent in English to undertake the course, which was mostly designed in English, proved not to be correct. Later attempts were made to integrate some specific terms in both languages with the help of a colleague and students, who were also instrumental in such a development… web education oriented towards Japanese students opens another area of bilingual education media development." (Sitharam and Shimizu)

A conflict can arise where such a need is clearly demonstrated but not met, as for example in Higgison. This case study reported on how the online participants were led to question the assumption of an 'English language only' approach when they found a need to create a glossary of specialised terms in their own language which did not previously exist. The creation of a glossary in the learners' own language was to enable them make sense of and to meaningfully engage in learning. This example clearly highlights how online learning can be used to encourage respect for language-cultural diversity. Higgison describes a course delivered to participants in eleven Central European countries. Legal restrictions imposed by the University hosting the online discussions required that these had to be in English. Groups in some countries set up their own discussion facilities for own language discussions, but all the course materials and assessments were conducted in English (as in Janes).

In practical terms, one traditional feature of tutoring models from countries like Britain is the tendency to promote an 'English Only' approach (see Nuffield Report: The Next Generation 2000[2] at http://www.nuffield.org/language/news/nws_0023732.html) and in doing so resist multi-linguilism and language change (Ellis, 1994, p236).

On the one hand, this can be explained by a natural reflex to conserve the reassuringly familiar (Shorris, 2000, p36). On the other hand, researchers, like Phillipson (1992, pp145–168), show that this tendency is based on a self-interested (economic) strategy by claiming to promote international co-operation and peace in using a language like 'Standard English'. In a detailed study on the subject, Phillipson (1992, p285) exposes the

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[2] "(In the UK)... we teach a narrowing range of languages, at a time when we should be doing the opposite ... The government should arrange for a sustained campaign to promote positive attitudes towards languages, raise awareness of their potential and foster a culture where using more than one language is seen as an attainable goal for the majority." at
http://www.nuffield.org/language/news/nws_0023732.html (consulted 07.07.2000)

fallacies underlying the 'English Only' approach, including the myth that language diversity has been a major cause of conflict between people.

The dangers of down playing the respect for language and cultural diversity in favour of standardised languages is brought home by the work of linguists like Michael Krauss, specialist of dead and dying languages (Shorris, 2000, pp35–36). Looking at the present situation, Krauss estimates that as many as 3,000 languages, or half of the words on Earth, will die in the next century.

In the light of this, if the respect of cultural diversity is to be encouraged, the use of a widespread language like English should not serve to help kill off other languages and the cultures associated with them. Its use, as an intercultural [3] mode of communication, should rather be that of being flexible enough to accommodate other languages and inevitable language changes to the English language. This is no easy task. New strategies in online reading and writing may have to be developed.

4.2   Style of communication

Cross-cultural learning groups present a wonderful opportunity to benefit from diverse views and experiences, often far beyond what learners might find in their local, offline community. Online groups, like all learning communities[4], need 'ground rules' to guide people in how to interact with each other. Zimmer, Harris and Muirhead examine this topic in more detail in Theme 3 – 'Building an Online Community'.

4.2.1 Formal or informal communication?

'Ground rules' may address how participants wish to identify themselves, the community's mode of operation and style of communication (formal/informal), and frequency of participation. They can help reduce learner worries about offending each other by overstepping unknown boundaries.

The key here is to be explicit about things. One way of doing this is to allow participants to express their preferred social and cultural formalities in the opening introductions and presentations. Most online forums adopt an informal style of address in which participants including the tutor/facilitator are addressed by their first names. However, this may not be true in all contexts. There could be a cultural or social need for some to remain formal. For example many Southern Europeans feel reassured with a preamble to open discussions, and those in the South and East of Europe tend to be keen on their titles. Some may prefer a period of relationship building while others are accustomed to "getting right to work" (Tolley).

4.2.2 Status of the written text

Whatever the online conversation style participants prefer, some may have deeply held feelings concerning the written text. Osterloh (1986, pp78–79) points out that in many non-Anglo American cultures the written text is seen as something more than an

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[3] The term intercultural refers to "the symbolic exchange whereby individuals from two (or more) different cultural communities negotiate shared meanings in an interactive situation" (Ting-Toomey 1999 p16)

[4] Definition of a Learning Community: A Learning Community is a learning event with fixed time limits, that exists for a specific purpose and brings together a group of people as peers to meet personal learning needs through sharing resources and skills offered by those present. In such a community, tutors act as facilitators and co-learners". Source Pedler, M. (1981) Developing the Learning Community in Boydell, T. and Pedler, M. (eds) *Management Self-Development: Concepts and Practices*, UK: Gower.

individual presentation or personal opinion, which can be challenged. Perception of differences of opinion in writing may be seen as an attack on the person or the person's group. This can be explained by the fact that in some cultures, the written text is seen as a "fixed unit in which everything is important ... (and) worth reading" (*ibidum*). Such a reader will not have been encouraged to distinguish between important and unimportant information. The emphasis will be not so much on the content, but essentially on the style and status of the author of the text. The higher the status of the author, the more authoritative the text and the less likely that it may be challenged. This makes the task of producing written text based on personal opinion particularly challenging for some learners. These learners will tend to rely more on collective opinion or that based of someone of higher recognised status than their own. Given that this type of written skill may not exist to the same extent in the 'native' tongue of the learner (Osterloh, 1986, pp81–82) it is up to the tutor to show the learner:

- how to contradict someone politely,

- how to join conversation,

- how to draw attention to common points of view,

- how to come to a conclusion,

- how to generally depersonalise opinions and arguments (see action tips).

4.3   Action Tips

Developing an online (intercultural) writing style

- Short, simple sentences.

- Active modes of verbs and sentences (see http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/testing.html).

- Explicitly define vocabulary.

- Regular use of questions and tag questions to draw responses from learners.

Recognising the advantages of language change

There is consensus that we should communicate in a coherent and appropriate way. The question, however, is how to reconcile linguistic norms with the inevitable process of change and adaptation of the language. One criterion could be establishing how the online language is able to go beyond face-to-face and local communication needs.

Questioning language usage

The tutor may encourage learners to question problematic language norms with each other and with the tutor. Behind language-cultural norms and non-standard language there are often revealing cultural representations. For example, slang (and humour) "offers an index to changing perception based not on theories but on immediate experience" (McLuhan, 1964, p viii).

Tips for communicating with non-native speakers of English

- Use uncomplicated language and clear explanations.

- Write clearly and avoid slang and idioms.

- Summarise what each person has written to assure each that you have understood.

- Clarify and confirm that your explanation has helped the participant understand.

- Check for understanding, avoiding 'Yes/No' questions.

- Pause longer when waiting for responses; allow time for the other person to reply.

- Allow non-native speakers to finish their sentences by themselves (many cultures are extremely comfortable with silence).

- Remember that language fluency does not equal cultural fluency.

- Encourage co-mediation as a positive approach to take advantage of different mediators' styles.

Adapted from Myers and Filner (1999) *Mediation Across Cultures* available online at http://www.amedpub.com/worklife2k/divconflict.html.

See also Cowan, Kulp, Kennedy and Duffy, and Zimmer and Alexander for techniques to promote mutually supportive, non-confrontational learning communities.

Language-switching tolerance

The tutor can permit learners to refer occasionally to local languages when no other alternative is possible. It seems preferable for the learner to refer what he/she knows, albeit in a language other than English, rather than be systematically excluded due to the absence of appropriate competence by the reader. The text can later be translated. For example in Higgison, the participants of the 'English' version of the course later went on to translate the materials into their own languages and acted as tutors for local delivery of the course. Labour reports a strategy for intercultural communication in an email partnership project between native French speakers and English speakers. Participants are encouraged to use different languages, so a French speaker may write part of the email in French and part of it in English and vice versa; the primary focus is on the content and meaning not the language. Noakes expanded on language usage in his case study during the discussion:

> "… in Hong Kong our Putonghua classes use written Chinese in their online forums, in the ESL online forums we use English, in the Japanese classes, written Japanese ... etc. But with multi-lingual groups who are *not* on a language course like the students we teach, then they revert to English. But students here who share the same first language of Cantonese are used to using instant messengers such as ICQ with a mix of English and Chinese characters – happily code switching between the two." (Noakes-D)

Exemplar lesson plans on interculturality

Originally aimed at language learning, the following online lesson plans are examples of how to use cultural resources in an educational context. They could be useful in defusing intercultural misunderstandings. These resources were accessed on 21 Feb 2001.

- 'Teaching awareness of stereotyping' available online at http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Lessons/Kajiura-Stereotyping.html,

- 'Nationalities and their Stereotypes' available online at http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Lessons/Counihan-Stereotypes.html,

- 'Developing Awareness: An Intercultural Communication Lesson Plan' available online at http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Lessons/Kajiura-Intercultural.html,

- 'Country Presentations' available online at
  http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Lessons/Swain-Country.html,

- 'Crossing Cultural and Spatial Boundaries: A Cybercomposition Experience'
  http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/Articles/Gousseva-CyberComp.html,

- 'Reflections on interculturality' available online at
  http://www.siu.edu/~ekachai/intercultural.html,

- 'Reflections on intercultural resources' available online at
  http://www2.soc.hawaii.edu/css/dept/com/resources/intercultural/ICH.html,

- 'Online (intercultural) reading techniques'. This is linked to silence, space, and
  time for reflection. One technique is to ask the reader to read another's post in a
  variety of manners to see how many possible tones/intent the writer might have
  had. The post can be read as if :

    – you do not know the language,

    – you understand only half of the words,

    – it is the voice of a stern teacher or boss,

    – it is the voice of a colleague, etc.

5. Silences and Humour as online interaction issues

5.1   Silences

In online intercultural communication, silences can occur either in the texts themselves, where certain topics are avoided, or in the irregular contribution of messages in asynchronous discussions. Some research into email communication for learning purposes (Labour) has found that the lack of relatively 'immediate' response to students' emails is a major de-motivating factor. Depending on the culture, these silences can mean disapproval, approval, neutrality, an admission of guilt, or a sign of incompetence (Ting-Toomey, 1999, p216).

Edward Hall (1976) explains a cultural phenomenon like 'silence' by splitting human interaction into low-context (eg Germanic countries) and high-context (eg China, Japan, Vietnam) cultures.

In low-context situations the emphasis is on personal and explicit verbal messages for which the writer assumes responsibility for its clarity. Words serve as a form of social control, while silence tends to be used as a form of tacit consent or a sign of failure (eg guilt, incompetence).

In high-context cultures meaning is based on an indirect style emphasising the implicit meaning of words in a given social context (eg the high/low status of the writer). The onus is on the reader to decode meaning from the socio-linguistic context, and not for the writer to send an explicit message that can be understood by all and sundry. This ability to read between the lines includes the understanding of the various registers of silence. In this way silence is used as a means of social control.

In some Asian contexts silences can be a sign of respect for the expertise of the other, or of displeasure. While in other cultures, like that of France, silence can be a form of neutral communication to keep a respectful distance from strangers, unlike many "European Americans … (who) tend to reserve silence for their most intimate relationship" (Carroll, 1987 in Ting-Toomey, 1999, p111).

We must be careful not to fall into the danger of generalising description of different cultures which can result in what Ting-Toomey (1999, p163) calls, "mindless stereotypes", ie a closed-ended, exaggerated over-generalisation of a group of people based on little or no external validity. The case studies report on a range of differing experiences regarding the success or otherwise of participation of non-native English speakers in online discussions, eg Glasson, Gwynne and Chester, Kennedy and Duffy, and Sitharam and Shimizu.

Given that individuals are not clones of any one culture, there will always be a range of diversity in a group. For example, in online learning some students gradually become aware of a reduction of traditional cultural barriers (Gwynne and Chester). This seems to be linked to the relative anonymity (in terms of gender, race, intercultural) of the medium, resulting in behaviour that differs from traditional face-to-face classroom behaviour. Given this, online tutors cannot assume to fully understand phenomena like silence and humour. It would be wiser to check and ask. This can be done in the online group environment, or behind the scenes in individual emails, faxes, or telephone calls.

5.2   Action Tips (silence)

It is important to allow silences. Silence could mean the learner is:

- too busy,

- not present for the moment, eg holiday, illness, pressure of work,

- following along just fine,

- having difficulties,

- waiting to be called upon,

- uncomfortable responding to something, for example, with which the person disagrees,

- in a position where the person feels there is nothing appropriate to say,

- waiting for a difficult situation to 'cool down' before responding, (eg conflict, embarrassment),

- taking the time to carefully word what to say,

- unable to access the learning environment,

Asking learners to reply, or to give the reason for their silence, should be done regularly, but with tact and explaining why the subject is raised (quality control, checking all is well, etc). Learners are often not aware of the impact of their silence on other participants in the group or on the tutoring/learning process.

5.3   Humour

Humour is a very difficult area in online intercultural communication. Humour is both culturally specific and personal.

- Some expressions of humour can be appropriate in one culture and completely inappropriate in a different culture.

- Some individuals are less comfortable with humour than others.

- Some humour is language specific, especially humour that relies on plays on words (puns) or slang.

However, humour is also a way in which we can communicate our 'humanness' in a technologically mediated environment, helping bridge the distance and lack of physical communication cues. Play as a form of interaction can also provide a 'safe' place to experience online learning environment and tools if applied with care and sensitivity (White and Moussou).

The use of games or play should also be used with a great deal of awareness and context. Cultural attitudes about being 'serious' must be surfaced. That said, a right dose of fun can facilitate the learning process through improved interaction (Gwynne and Chester). To achieve this, humour and other recreational activities (if possible linked to the learning content) need to be first run through a filter, and perhaps also discussed afterwards with learners to make sure they have not got the wrong end of the stick.

5.4   Action Tips (humour)

The personal use of humour by a tutor must be made in the context of the tutor's self-awareness or 'filters'. Tutors can check their filters with the following tips:

- Does the humour rely on language/slang that may not be understood across the group (as in face-to-face situations)?

- If the humour is deprecating, is it self-deprecating and free of implications for others in the group (as in face-to-face situations)?

- Are you using visual cues or setting a context to make sure the readers are clear you are making a joke or using humour? You can use emoticons (text based smiley faces, eg 'Windweaver Guide to Emoticons' available online at http://www.windweaver.com/emoticon.htm) or words to clearly tag a message as an attempt at humour so no one would doubt the intent.

- Is the humour used in appropriate spaces/context? Do not make a joke in the middle of a serious dialogue. Save it for social spaces, or, rarely, as a tension breaker. That is a very delicate application and harder to do online than offline.

- Do you have a sense of the group's interest/capacity to use humour? Start small, sense the reception. If someone comes back with HEHEE or LOL (laughing out loud) you will know the comment was read in the spirit intended. If not, then you might need to check to see if anyone has understood the attempt at humour or has been offended by it. Ask, do not assume.

- Explore using culturally based humour as a learning experience carefully. This is a very delicate option. For example, when using role playing to show how to work with a difficult interchange online, people have less of a filter to discern that another is 'play acting'. Even with an explicit notice of role playing, participants seem to have a hard time keeping an assumed role from the 'real' role assigned to the experience of another person.

- Use humour with intent. If working on developing a sense of warmth in a group, and working on facilitating relationship building, a self-deprecating warning about one's humour is in line. If behaving more formally, use humour with a much lighter hand.

- Humour Gone Wrong: recognise and admit mistakes.

6. Tutor and Learner roles

> "Values underlying the production and transmission of knowledge are very culturally dependent. These can manifest themselves in teaching and learning systems and hence in the relationship between student and 'teacher'. When these values and relationships 'translate' to the online environment, they may become rapidly quite apparent." (Gilly Salmon during an OTiS online chat on Cultural and Ethical issues).

6.1   Brief pedagogy of online learning

Constructivism is the main pedagogy used in online learning. This approach is used in the form of discussions, constructivist activity and conferencing to enable the learner to build an understanding and the meaning of the issues and to construct new knowledge on the basis of information (O'Reilly and Morgan, 1999). This interactive mode of learning shown in Figure 2: 'Concept diagram of Interactive Learning' (appendix C), is underpinned by:

- the learner's active role and participation in the creation of knowledge – significance of experience (individual and social) in the knowledge creation process,

- the variation in the degree of validity and accurate representation,

- the recognition that construction of knowledge is influenced by biological factors, language and socio-cultural interactions.

In this mode of learning, the tutor's role is that of being a guide, motivator or facilitator, and in some cases, a 'co-learner' (Brooks and Brooks, 1993).

Salter provides a detailed definition of constructivism and, along with Clarke and Salmon, documents examples of constructivism in action.

6.2   Tutor-student relationship

For a majority of cultures, particularly non-English speaking cultures, tutoring is seen as teacher-led, formal activity, with academic achievement being highly valued socially. Therefore, a lot of emphasis is placed on the formal and scheduled acquisition of skills and on the assessment of learning. In these cultures, for example African and Asian, the tutor is well respected and the tutor-student relationship is formal. The tutor is formally addressed and very rarely do tutors get addressed by their first names, although this is changing. Kennedy and Duffy, Sitharam and Shimizu, and Gwynne and Chester report on the potential of online learning to change the tutor-student relationship.

This view of tutoring contrasts to the Western English-speaking tutoring system that lays great store in a learner-centred approach to encourage autonomous learning (self-regulation, self-mediation, self-awareness, etc). Emphasis is placed on skills development and a flexible approach is adopted for the assessment of learning. Tutor-student relationships tend to be informal.

Kennedy and Duffy report on the styles of interaction exhibited by students from a Western English speaking culture (UK) and an Asian non-English speaking culture (Hong-Kong).

From a modal perspective of online delivery, the shift is to learning communities with less emphasis on the tutor as 'sage on the stage' and more on the guiding and facilitative functions. Part of this is cultural, and part of it is how the medium is best being used.

Online communication lends itself to dialogue and negotiation as it allows both the learner and the tutor to test understanding, which might be evidenced offline in the form of body language or signs of attention. Online, the tutor does not know what a student does or does not understand unless he/she asks!

Cornelius and Higgison provide a more detailed consideration of these issues in Theme 2: 'The Tutor's Role and Effective Strategies for Online Tutoring'.

6.3   Diversity of learners

> "It is not our purpose to become each other; it is to recognise each other,
> to learn to see the other and honour him for what he is." (Hermann Hesse,
> German author and poet, and recipient of the 1946 Nobel Prize for
> literature.)

The Internet is a 'melting pot' in which people of different races, creed, gender status and abilities meet to share experience and skills with each other, and to learn from each other. It is one of the challenges of a learning community to establish how these differences and similarities can be used to help achieve the learning needs of the group. For example, Daele reported that online students had the same concerns and questions despite coming from various institutions and countries.

As Ting-Toomey (1999, p22) points out, most intercultural miscommunication is caused by "well-meaning" clashes, where each person behaves according to his/her own cultural norms, rather than by deliberate unpleasantness. To help prevent such miscommunication, participants of intercultural communities may have to be encouraged to better understand the implications of working with people from diverse backgrounds. This understanding involves recognising that there exist other human qualities outside the group to which a person belongs, and which can constitute part of the online identity of the person.

With the increased access to the Internet, people who traditionally have little voice in the decision making process of society (disabled people, women, children, little-taught-language populations) can be encouraged to participate more in online learning and decision making through online interaction. This can greatly be enhanced by having appropriate multicultural approaches and content online so to increase the appeal of web based resources. For example, online facilities that cater for the needs of the visually and hearing impaired can be found online at:

- 'Web Accessibility Initiative' at http://www.w3c.org/wai (last updated 7 Jan 2001).

- 'BrailleNet' at http://www.braillenet.jussieu.fr (in French, last updated Feb 2001).

- 'Welcome to 10 Downing Street' at http://www.number-10.gov.uk, which offers a text only version of the site, capable of being read by 'text to speech' software.

- 'Disability information systems in Higher Education' at http://www.disinhe.ac.uk/.

To ensure that diversity is appropriately catered for in online learning situations, it is of paramount importance that the learning environment and resources:

- are accessible to all including learners with disability (eg http://www.disabilityhistory.org/about.html),

- provide intercultural interaction and cross cultural communication,

- promote a transformational and inclusive learning – through content which allows for views, multi-perspectives, infusion of experience and active learning experience (Gorski, 1999).

Claudia L'Amoreaux summed up the benefits of a culturally enriched online learning as experienced by young learners as "they had gained uncanny wisdom about encountering obstacles: language and time zone barriers, expectations and disappointment, technolgical hurdles, conflict management and resolution" (http://www.creatinglearningcommunities.org/book/internet/lamoreaux1.htm).

To avoid diversity issues causing a block to learning in an online environment, online tutors/facilitators need to address a number of issues.

- Access

  In designing the curriculum, online tutors/facilitators should give due consideration in ensuring access to people who are disabled. For example, the learning environment may be provided with audio facilities, for the blind and the visually impaired. Avoid frames or provide a text only version of web sites.

- Use of colours

  Tutors should where possible avoid the use of red colour as people who are colour blind have difficulty reading writings in red ink.

- Spell check

  Tutors should ensure that spell check facilities are available for use by those who are dyslexic.

- Content

  Tutors/facilitators of learning should include in the content of the learning materials, appropriate items that reflect the diversity of the learning community.

- Be culturally aware and sensitive to issues of disability, gender, race, language, religion etc.

- Avoid stereotyping.

- Help the group set ground rules for interacting with members of the group.

- Avoid assumptions, eg attributing gender to a name say Hyacinth, Michel, Grace.

- Always endeavour to ask for clarification on any points made by a learner that she/he does not understand.

- Do not be judgemental or show bias on any personal beliefs by ignoring a learner.

- Avoid the use of humour that can cause offence to any group on the grounds of disability, gender, race, sexuality, religion etc.

- Sensitively support learners who are finding language a barrier to their learning, particularly non-native speakers of English (Myers and Filner, 1999 – www.amedpub.com/worklife2k/divconflict.html).

6.4   Action Tips

Transparent facilitation

Due to different cultural models of tutoring, it is advisable that tutors are explicit and transparent about their tutoring techniques (eg White and Moussou). However challenging it may be, learners and tutors may need help in being open, willing to take risks and not to always be in 'authority', in order that they fully participate in the online community. In

particular, for participants who express difficulty in communicating in the language of reference, the role of the tutor would be to encourage them by:

- making rules, norms, expectations, learning content and skills explicit and explaining the reason for doing something,

- checking that they have really understood what is expected of them,

- focusing on learners' strengths rather than weaknesses (asset-based approach),

- drawing on learners' prior knowledge and experiences,

- promoting multiple perspectives and representations of content and ways of doing things,

- identifying and suggesting ways of resolving online misunderstandings, eg confusion between cultures by putting the learner in the shoes of the other person (see Lado above),

- helping learners negotiate meaning, give corrective feedback and self-repair, and generally monitor their own work, for example by referencing and examining archived materials,

- reminding them that errors and mistakes are the natural products of the creative learning process, and that not all errors and mistakes are of the same importance,

- emphasising the completion of the task at hand, and stressing the active role that learners can play in the knowledge creation process (constructivist approach to learning),

- highlighting online interactive skills (eg greetings, gender relations, tactful criticisms, as well as 'input modification' strategies like repetitions, confirmations, reformulations, comprehension checks, recasts, confirmation checks and clarification requests etc),

- getting them to participate in formative assessment (to inform future learning) and to use summative assessment to measure significant change or learning achieved by learners and as a motivator to the learning process,

- exploring ways of having a little fun online, eg exchanging 'national' jokes and puns,

- suggesting where they could get appropriate help, including online organisations that welcome and guide international students.

By adopting the tips listed above tutors have the opportunity to really take advantage of the differences and richness arising form a diversity of cultures in facilitating online learning. The advantages of these valuable cultural differences might be missed if the 'sage on the stage' tutoring mode were adopted.

7 Using online sources ethically

7.1   Copyright and Intellectual Property Rights

One of the most important ethical issues which online learning raises, is that of 'fairness', ie giving due credit or acknowledgement to the work of others. A commonly held view is that the Internet is 'free' and the resources and materials it provides access to are also free. The Internet and its resources are not perceived to be subject to the same controls and regulations as would be the case in other publishing media, and hence the same rules of acknowledgement need not apply. Some individuals may be led to believe that it is 'fair game' to use others people's work without authorisation, clearance or acknowledgement. Such practices are not ethical.

There is generally considered to be a consensus against plagiarism. However, it is common practice in some cultures not to give credit to an author, whose work or statement is being quoted or used, if the work is regarded to have become part of the general pool of knowledge, arguing exemption through 'fair use'.

It is therefore, important to ensure those agreements about the use and quoting of other people's materials and respect for their intellectual property rights are made explicit at the onset of any online interaction. An example is the American Council on Education's Division of Public Government Affairs statement on 'Developing a Distance Education Policy for 21st Century Learning' (March 2000) available online at http://www.acenet.edu/washington/distance_ed/2000/03march/distance_ed.html.

The copyright agreement for materials generated by the OTiS e-Workshop is available online at http://otis.scotcit.ac.uk/onlinebook/copyright.htm. It was adapted from the copyright statement of the Scottish Electronic Staff development Library (SeSDL) available online at http://www.sesdl.scotcit.ac.uk/conditions.html.

7.2   Ethereal nature of online documents

Updating, altering, pirating and taking materials offline

The Internet is a rich repository of knowledge as well as a large source of teaching and learning materials. However, its dynamic state accounts for the ethereal nature of online documents and materials, when compared to the permanent status of paper-based resources. The Web presents the advantage of ease in updating and altering documents. Unfortunately, this flexibility makes it easy to 'pirate' (ie illegally copy) documents on the Web or remove them (ie take them offline).

These features could create an ethical dilemma for a student who in 'good faith' may have cited materials from a site in his/her work without realising that the material may have been pirated. Similarly, the impermanence of web based resources, eg web sites and documents being taken offline without notice of how to further gain access to such materials, makes it difficult for students to use them. If a student has quoted one such source in his/her work and it is no longer there when the tutor checks the site for accuracy and relevance, it may seem or be adjudged that the student has cheated or quoted a source incorrectly. Such a scenario may call to question the moral integrity of the student. Thus, it would seem ethical for online tutors to inform and forewarn students about such issues.

7.3   Plagiarism and online learning

In any learning situation, honesty and integrity are paramount particularly in regards to summative assessments. The issue of impersonation (and/or possibility of impersonation) at assessments has remained a major cause for concern and ethical dilemma for online learning. This issue has caused some to undervalue or dismiss the achievement and qualifications of learners from online courses, because of doubt about the integrity and security of online assessment. Although no one solution has been found to this dilemma, advances in technology such as 'iris', 'voice' and 'finger on the mouse' recognition are making it less possible for impersonators to cheat during assessment.

'Hot plating', or buying to specification, essays, theses or projects for submission as a student's own work for assessment purposes is another area of concern. Such practices should be discouraged and penalised. Online tutors can help a great deal in limiting such practices by informing learners appropriately about plagiarism, how to cite and acknowledge other people's work correctly and by putting in place anti-plagiarism strategies, examples are available online at:

- 'Plagiarism and the Web' at http://www.wiu.edu/users/mfbhl/wiu/plagiarism.htm,

- Lisa Janicke Hinchliffe online statement about copyright use at http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~janicke/lisa.htm.

Prevention is better than cure.

7.4   Action Tips

- Tutors should show learners how to acknowledge other people's work through disseminating best practice – for example, by ensuring that in citing online sources, there is an obligation to insert the exact date, month and year when the e-document was consulted, and if possible, when it was last updated.

- Tutors can give guidelines to students on how to identify web sites and discussions groups that are reliable and authoritative with regard to the subject discipline. This will help students be selective in their choice of references and prevent them quoting unreliable sources.

- Learners' awareness should be raised on the issues of copyright and intellectual property rights and the adverse consequences of damage to their reputation, and the economic and financial costs that may be involved if the provisions of the copyright regulations are breached.

- Tutors should use assessment methods that are 'fit for the purpose' and which are varied in format and method.

- Tutors should employ a combination of anti-plagiarism strategies to help deal with this problem.

8. Executive Summary

8.1   Introduction

In a global learning community our key question is "How do we maximise the diversity and respect for cultures while tutoring online?"

8.2   Culture and ethics

Culture is a complex concept defined by attitudes, values and patterns of behaviour.

Ethics are negotiated and agreed rules of behaviour for group interaction and communication.

Culture is expressed in the online environment through the form, structure and choice of language or images.

This global environment offers a rich diversity and variety of experiences and knowledge which is in itself a valuable learning resource for tutors and students.

8.3   Self-awareness and online presence

In order to work and learn successfully in a culturally diverse online community we must be aware of our own culture and how we present ourselves in the online environment through what we say and how we say it.

Potentially, we have much greater control over the information and image we present to the community. This is particularly important and can have a significant impact in the initial stages of establishing an online community.

8.4   Language

Much discussion focussed on the predominance, or at least the assumption of predominance of English as the 'language' of the Internet. It is important to recognise the need to accommodate different languages (an important facet of cultural identity) and the impact on learning where the study is not in the participant's native language.

Differences in the expected style of language and the level of formality can have a major impact in a multi-cultural community. Negotiating and agreeing ground rules about the community's mode of operation and style of communication were seen as an important step in respecting different cultural perspectives and establishing and effective online community.

8.5   Silences and humour

The areas of communication where the greatest diversity of cultural norms arise are in the use of humour and silence. These should be used with caution and explicitly flagged to participants.

8.6   Tutor and learner roles

Different cultures have very different values underlying the production and transmission of knowledge.

Constructivism is the predominant pedagogy used in online learning, involving the active participation of the learner in discussions and knowledge construction.

The expectations of the tutor-student relationship can vary from extremely formal master-student relationships to learner-centred approaches that encourage autonomous student learning.

The diversity of learners in the online community demands an inclusive approach that respects differences and promotes understanding.

8.7 Using online sources ethically

Clear standards must be agreed which respect copyright and intellectual property rights and which specify how these are to be used and acknowledged.

The transitory and ethereal nature of online resources presents challenges for both students and tutors.

Measures need to be put in place to discourage and detect plagiarism and maintain the quality and reputation of the achievement of learners on online courses.

8.8 Conclusion

Online learning offers a unique opportunity for people of different cultures to share knowledge, skills and experiences with each other, and to learn from each other. The uniqueness of this mode of learning is that it enhances collaborative and cooperative learning across distance, as well as across physical and cultural boundaries. If appropriately facilitated, online learning helps to promote interculturality – a situation in which participants of the learning community endeavour to respect and appreciate cultures that are different from their own. In addition, this cultural diversity provides a rich learning resource and environment, which in turn, contributes to the quality of learning.

Culture and ethics are dynamic and subject to change. So too, is online learning. To keep up with these changing phenomena and to continue to effectively facilitate intercultural online learning, it is imperative that online tutors/facilitators should adapt as appropriate. The area of culture and ethics is so diverse that this chapter has barely scratched the surface. However, it has attempted to introduce this important but often neglected aspect of interaction and education. In addition, the proposed 'Action Tips' may serve as an online tutor's/facilitator's 'survival guide to online culture and ethics'. Lastly, we hope the chapter is a start for tutors/facilitators who wish to explore further this vast area of human interaction with a view to fostering 'unity in diversity' in lifelong learning.

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Contributors to the discussion were John Clayton, Anne Hird, Charles Juwah (A/M), Michel Labour (A), Nick Noakes, Thallak Sitheram, Sarah Tolley (A), Gilly Salmon (M) and Nancy White (A).

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Appendix B: Cultural communication styles associated with learning cultures by major linguistic grouping

| **Low Context Communication** (eg Germanic countries) Individualistic values Person-oriented style Self-face concern Self-enhancement style Linear logic Direct style Speaker oriented style Verbal-based understanding												**High Context Communication** (eg Japan, China) Group-oriented values Status-oriented style Mutual-face concern Self-effacement style Spiral logic Indirect style Listener oriented style Context-based understanding		
	German speakers	**English speakers**	**French speakers**	**Italian speakers**	**Spanish speakers**	**Portuguese speakers**	**Russian speakers**	**Arabic speakers**	**Niger-Congo (eg Swahili, Zulu, Efik, Tiv,Yoruba Igbo,Hausa)**	**Hindu speakers**	**Asian languages (Indonesia Bahasa, Korea)**	**Chinese speakers**	**Japanese speakers**
Variations in standard of the language and forms of expression	German Austrian	British North American Australasian Southern African	Belgian Quebecois Mainland France	-	Spain South American	Portugal Brazil Macau Mozambique	-	North Africans Middle Eastern	-	-	Malaysian Bahasa Indonesian Bahasa Thai Korean Different alphabets	Mandarin Cantonese Many dialects Different alphabets	Different alphabets
Differences in the use of words and meanings	Some differences exist eg. in dialect	Some differences exist e.g. Assessment in British term is the equivalent for evaluation in the US, etc.	-	-	-	Some differences exist in Portugal and Brazilian dialects	-	-	Some differences exist in their alphabets and in dialects	-	Some differences exist in their alphabets, dialects and expressions	Some differences exist in their alphabets and expressions	-
Forms of address and salutation	Respect for convention	Relaxed, multi-mode	Initial respect for conventions but can loosen up afterwards	Relationship centric, value social interactions	Relationship centric, value social interactions	Relationship centric, value social interactions	Initial respect for convention	Respect for traditional greetings and conventions, value social interactions	Expect formal address, and especially appreciate it from "outsiders" who historically make little effort	Respect for traditional greetings	Respect for traditional greetings	High respect for traditional greetings	Respect for traditional greetings

	German speakers	English speakers	French speakers	Italian speakers	Spanish speakers	Portuguese speakers	Russian speakers	Arabic speakers	Abantu (e.g. Swahili, Zulu)	Hindu speakers	Asian languages (Indonesians, Bahasa, Koreans)	Chinese speakers	Japanese speakers
Teaching mode	Learner/ client centred,	Learner/client centred, made to measure ("personnalised")	Teacher centred, everyone gets the same treatment when individual is "ready" ("individualised")	Learner/ client centred,	Learner/ client centred,	Learner/client centred,	Learner /client centred,	Teacher led, respect for designated authority	Teacher led, respect for designated authority	Teacher led, respect for designated authority	Teacher led	Teacher centred (top-down)	Teacher led
Attitude to learning	Competitive, high reliance of memory, collaborative work	Result-oriented, questioning, more "pragmatic rational" than "linear logical", draws on personal experience, collaborative work	Competitive, high reliance of memory, groupwork	Competitive, high reliance of memory, groupwork	Competitive, high reliance of memory, groupwork	Competitive, high reliance of memory, groupwork	Competitive, high reliance of memory, groupwork	Traditionally based on recitation, reliance on memory	Traditionally based on story telling and "choral" work		Reliance on memory, groupwork/ collaborative learning	Competitive, high reliance of memory, groupwork	End result important but not centre of preoccupation, stress on method in resolving problems & presenting work, heavy reliance on memory.

Note:

All online learning cultures have the following expectations and needs:

• to share knowledge, experience and expertise;

• to participate in a collaborative and co-operative learning community;

• of belonging to a community of learners

• to fulfil personal or professional development needs

• to contribute to the construction of knowledge and meaning

• provide a forum for 'socialisation'

Source: Adapted from Hall's categorisation (1976) (in Ting-Toomey 1999:101)
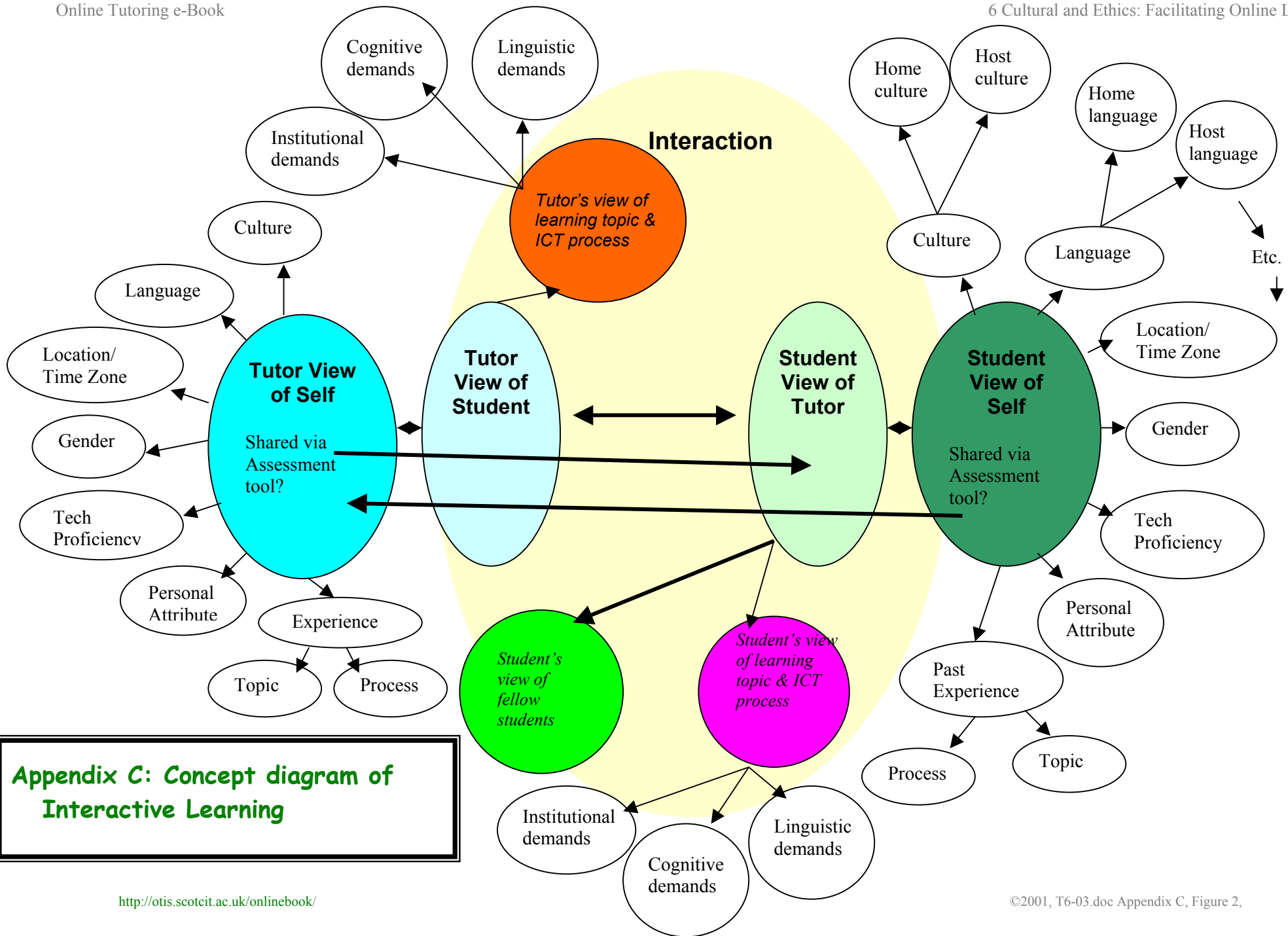
Appendix C: Concept diagram of Interactive Learning