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“Divertual” Learning in Education Leadership: Implications of Teaching Cultural Diversity Online vs. Face-to-Face

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Wisdom on the page correlates with wisdom in the writer about as frequently as a high batting average correlates with a high IQ: they just seem to have very little to do with one another. Witty and charming people can produce prose of sneering sententiousness, and fretful neurotics can, to their readers, seem as though they must be delightful to live with. Personal drabness, through some obscure neural kink, can deliver verbal blooms. . . . Speech is somatic, a bodily function, and it is accompanied by physical inflections—tone of voice, winks, smiles, raised eyebrows, hand gestures—that are not reproducible in writing. Spoken language is repetitive, fragmentary, contradictory, limited in vocabulary, loaded down with space holders (“like,” “um,” “you know”)—all the things writing teachers tell students not to do. And yet people can generally make themselves understood right away. As a medium, writing is a million times weaker than speech. It’s a hieroglyph competing with a symphony.

—Menand, Bad comma; Lynne Truss’s
strange grammar

INTRODUCTION

MENAND (2004), IN THE QUOTATION ABOVE, CAPTURES one of the dilemmas of online courses offered by colleges and universities. Writing, when competing with speech, he claims, is a “hieroglyph competing with a symphony.” If restricted only to writing (a medium that is “a million times weaker than speech,” in his words) students are seriously limited both in being understood and in understanding others. Being enrolled in an online course restricts students to Menand’s “hieroglyphics.” Interactions among students, their teacher, and their peers are carried out only through words typed on the computer monitor.

What are the consequences of this teaching-learning situation when graduate students in a Department

of Educational Leadership are enrolled in a course on cultural diversity? Might the words on the computer screen be completely unrelated to the humanity, personality, style, interpersonal behaviors, and dispositions of the student writing them, as Menand suggests? Or, might the detachment provide a security in which the most honest and unadulterated discourse can be shared between teacher and students, as some proponents hope? In this chapter we explore responses to this dilemma. We attempt to capture this situation in our label: “divertual learning,” a neologism coupling “diversity” with the “virtual” reality of the learning situation.

The two questions included in the call for proposals for the UCEA 2004 annual meeting, *The Changing Face of Educational Leadership: UCEA at the Crossroads*, were “*What is/should be the role of educational leadership in addressing issues of equity and social justice?*” and “*How do we define ‘effective’ leadership preparation programs in light of the rapidly changing demographics of the United States?*” This chapter falls into the nexus of these two questions that were drivers of the most recent conference of academics in education leadership. These questions also capture a place in space and time for us. We are in the midst of research into the transition of some components of our educational leadership preparation program to an online mode of delivery. Simultaneously, we are probing into whether or not a course focusing on cultural diversity and social justice can legitimately and effectively be delivered in an online environment.

Specifically, in this chapter we attempt to discuss the efficacy of delivering online a graduate course in issues of diversity (what we call “divertual” learning) versus teaching that course in a traditional face-to-face graduate classroom. Many colleges and departments of educational leadership face parallel issues: first, a need to strengthen the social justice mission as increasingly diverse constituents are being served by

the graduates of these programs and second, the influx of distance education into graduate schools of education by university administrators seeking financial gain in a competitive marketplace.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this chapter is to raise questions and perhaps begin to shed light on delivering online a course in cultural diversity to future school administrators as opposed to delivering the course within a traditional face-to-face classroom setting. Questions are naturally raised by a shift from face-to-face traditional instruction, in general, to an online delivery system. The shift to an online environment for a cultural diversity course, in particular, may raise an even more important question: how can education for social justice be effective when divertual arrangements impede authentic and holistic human interaction in shared physical time and space? How can educational objectives that require graduate students to wrestle with dimensions of human difference and their own identities be accomplished within a milieu that masks most of those human differences?

Addressed in four sections of this chapter are selected dynamics that need attention when comparing the two learning venues. In the first section, we discuss the challenge of teaching cultural diversity and social justice *at all*, let alone comparing the two settings in which “they” are “taught.” Next, in the second section, we explore several benefits and drawbacks of each instructional setting; and, thirdly, we raise the question of interpersonal dynamics: How does student-student interaction and teacher-student interaction differ in face-to-face classrooms from those same human interactions in an online situation? And how do these differences inform the teaching of issues of cultural diversity? Importantly, how do students relate with one another and the instructor in ways that can effectively dismantle individual and institutional sexism and racism?

Finally, in the fourth section, we attempt to examine both learning environments as to their potential to foster personal transformation, an important goal of change when learning surrounds issues of cultural diversity, such as race, gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, sexual orientation and physical and mental abilities and disabilities.

We admit that this chapter is only a work in progress. We are only at the beginning of a long process of examining these important academic, social, economic, and ethical issues about online educa-

tion, particularly as they impact future school administrators.

“TEACHING” ISSUES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Can We Teach Cultural Diversity?

In the mid-1990s our Department of Educational Leadership designed two courses addressing issues of cultural diversity for aspiring school administrators. One course, entitled, *Issues of Diversity in Schools*, was designed to consider race, gender, social class, ethnicity, religion, special needs, and sexual orientation as dimensions of society that influence school culture, which can privilege or marginalize both students and educators. A second course, *Leadership in Diverse Communities*, was designed to move students forward from the basic course into applying new understandings about cultural diversity to school organizations. We were not alone in filling this void that we called “cultural diversity.” The decade saw numerous educational administration preparation programs redoubling their energies toward issues of race, gender, social class and children who had been historically underserved (Murphy, 1999).

Can one actually teach leadership in diverse communities? Can one teach acceptance, tolerance, social justice and antiracist attitudes? Our stance is that no, we cannot teach this as subject matter, but we can create a learning situation that allows graduate students to experience new awareness, learn about cultural difference, and reflect on their own cultural identities, transform their thinking and dispositions, develop cultural proficiency (Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell, 2003), and perhaps reconstruct their values and beliefs to become advocates for the success of children and families in diverse cultures. In short, we cannot “teach cultural diversity” but students can “learn cultural diversity.”

We recognized that these issues were routinely addressed in our existing educational administration courses that address curriculum, law, personnel, supervision, and leadership. The departmental consensus, however, was that we needed to bring cultural diversity from the background to the foreground. An increasing multicultural society was clearly playing a growing role in the academic success of children, the instructional role of teachers, and the communities with whom administrators interact. No longer wanting to leave these issues to chance in other courses and because they were growing in importance to school leadership, we devoted ourselves to these two

3-semester hour courses. Within about a year, however, two changes outside the department were catalysts for cutting back on the progress we had made.

First, changes in Ohio licensure requirements and second, our move from an academic calendar structured into quarters to a calendar of semesters forced us to make difficult decisions toward streamlining the required credit hours. We needed to eliminate some courses. One of the diversity courses was discontinued. As a result, we no longer offer two courses but combined the two into one course. This course which continues to be offered today is entitled *Leadership in Diverse Communities*. And, since 2001, the course has been offered both online and in face-to-face traditional classrooms.

The Face-to-Face and Online Courses in Cultural Diversity

In the face-to-face course, students engage in multiple activities: they assess their own attitudes and values; maintain weekly written journals; interact face-to-face with those who might not share their beliefs, values, and cultural backgrounds; deliberate on marginalized social groups; consider issues of equity and social justice; identify racism and sexism and other marginalizing forces in schools, curriculum, policies and practices; question the role of schools in the context of wider societal cultures; discuss the possible roots of the majority-minority gaps in student achievement; and, locate themselves as agents of change and advocates of social justice (ISLLC, 1996). In the face-to-face course instructors use dialogue, simulations, small group deliberations and problem solving, case studies, journaling, self reflection and self assessment, invited guests who share diverse experiences and beliefs with enrolled students, and various media (videos, films, novels, and websites). Students demonstrate growth through journaling, group dialogue, personal reflections, presentations (group and individual), a scholarly paper and written exams. Required books have included those by Delpit (1995), Gollnick and Chinn (2004), Gruwell and The Freedom Writers (1999), Jelloun (1999), Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell (2003), McIntyre (1997), and Payne (2003), as well as other readings.

"Online education" needs to be contextualized and defined for each specific situation. In our situation, online education consists of three masters' level courses¹ and five postmasters level courses for Ohio principal licensure. Each online course, including the *Leadership in Diverse Communities* course, is uni-

formly structured into ten modules and enrollment is limited to 18 students in each course. The course is delivered asynchronously, although required timelines for completed assignments are included. Students are assigned to small groups; they respond to readings by writing to probes of the instructor. Students respond to the writings of peers in their group, using threaded discussions. Students do not interact with the instructor or their colleagues in any planned face-to-face meetings. This course is delivered by both full-time and adjunct faculty. Those teaching online have had no special training in this delivery medium.

To further illuminate the context, our university is a Catholic and Marianist school whose central mission is "community." This value should be evidenced in all that we do, particularly in teaching and learning, the center of our efforts. The goal of the course is not merely the effective management of issues of diversity. Studying cultural differences is only one of several steps toward the wider cause of social justice. Building a community committed to social justice requires vigilance so that we can reflect on and reject any of our behaviors that perpetuate inequity (hooks, 2003). Diversity merely outlines the dimensions of difference, but our behaviors, attitudes, and dispositions are our responses to diversity (Simmer-Brown, 2003). Whether or not the *facts* of diversity can be learned similarly in traditional and face-to-face environments is less our concern than is the question of whether or not our *responses* to diversity can be experienced and perhaps transformed in these two settings.

GENERAL BENEFITS AND DRAWBACKS OF FACE-TO-FACE AND ONLINE SETTINGS AS EDUCATIONALLY EFFECTIVE AND POWERFUL

Origins of Online Learning

Some authors report that little research into the benefits of online coursework has been conducted (Speck, 2000) and, of the research that has been completed, most is flawed by weak theoretical foundations (Merisotis and Phipps, 1999). While strong evidence is not yet firmly established, Moore and Anderson (2003) have recently edited a *Handbook of Distance Education* that includes online learning situations within a wider spectrum of distance learning options.

Not all distance education is labeled "online." In his introduction to that volume, Michael Moore characterizes distance education as the educational experience in which the teacher and students are in different locations. Not all of these arrangements are "online."

He admonishes those who *start* with the technology when they study any form of distance education. Technology and distance education are not synonymous. It is the technology, the computers, and the internet, that are new and not empirically supported. According to Moore, researchers have confused the technology with the education and many have discounted what actually is a rich body of knowledge and established understanding about distance education (2003).

Only recently has distance education entered the mainstream of acceptable educational venues (Moore, 2003) after having been an option as far back as the establishment of the U.S. postal service. Two dynamics: globalization and expanded communications technology generated this exponential growth in the last few years. The explosion of online courses in higher education seems to have been driven not by evidence of its advantages to teaching and learning but because of its financial benefits to universities and other sponsoring organizations. No groundswell of faculty seeking to teach online courses has driven this avalanche. Generally, it has been driven by top-down decisions of university administrators (Speck, 2000). That online learning continues to proliferate absent much research into its impact demonstrates continued disinterest in its pedagogical warrants and blind acceptance of its presumed profitability. Given this context, however, we are not absolved of responsibility to ask questions about these courses and to assess their current and potential impact.

Instructors

Moving from traditional face-to-face classroom settings to online settings changes the role of the instructor. But, the extent of the changes depends on the instructor, the content, and the goals of the course. According to McLoughlin and Oliver (1999), within the traditional setting, the teacher's role is "manager, expert, disciplinarian, controller, dispenser of information, goal setter, timekeeper," while in the online environment, the teacher's role changes into a supportive role as "coparticipant, scaffolder, colearner, moderator, facilitator, coach, monitor, adviser." These distinctions may be dichotomous and extreme. Each circumstance has unique contextual variables. These distinctions make stereotypical assumptions about instructors in traditional classrooms that are not always valid. Many face-to-face instructors conduct learner-centered classrooms; they coach their students and moderate lots of collaborative participation of students. Simplistic reductions that stereotype

all online courses and all face-to-face courses hinder what might be more productive dialogue. However, they are sometimes difficult to avoid.

Educational leadership is an applied field, a professional realm of study. Application of what preservice principals learn to their professional roles in schools is the goal of what we do in the classroom. School, according to bell hooks (2003) must always be made a definite part of the "real world" (p. 41). Educational administration is a profession largely engaged in face-to-face human interaction, communication, negotiation, deliberation, and conflict resolution.

From which venue, face-to-face or online, are students better prepared to transfer their learning to their professional lives as school administrators? An important concern, this has been voiced by many. Indeed, in his 1999 book on preparation programs for educational administrators (co-edited with Forsythe), Murphy, in the concluding essay, questions why the knowledge base in educational administration has been unrelated to the real-world practice in schools. Would online learning exacerbate or lessen that putative disconnect? Conflicting points of view have been expressed about the connection between courses and the world outside the "classroom."

Transfer of Learning to Practice

Students can very easily be oblivious to any links between a classroom and the rest of their lives. Students in educational administration programs may perceive that learning statistics or finance or law is not immediately connected to "what they will do tomorrow" in their K-12 classrooms. However, it is fair to say that the face-to-face classroom is never set totally apart from the external world in terms of cultural diversity. In these classes, graduate students are constantly interacting with others in shared physical time and space. Some of their peers and instructors come from similar cultural heritages and some come from different backgrounds. Thrown together, they discuss the problems of schools.

However, graduate students, who are teachers and administrators, can routinely disconnect their university experiences from their professional work. If successfully decoupled, the potential transfer of learning from any college courses to the practice of teaching and administration is minimized.

Given the likelihood of this alienation in traditional classrooms, does an online learning isolate students even more from "real world" contexts and peers who are struggling with them? Does it reinforce the false as-

sumption that what students do in class is not relevant to their lives outside graduate school? Are the online learning communities in which students share ideas in writing to their classmates sufficient to strengthen transfer to professional practice? Learning needs to be holistic, integrated, and relevant rather than narrow and isolated if it is to make a substantive difference in students' lives (Nussbaum, 1997; Palmer, 1998).

Some might even claim that transfer to practice is enhanced online; they would reject the isolationism of online learning. They promote online learning as *liberated* from traditional classroom constraints. Online learning can connect the students to rich and multiple sources of information, expert opinion, virtual realities, web-based expertise, and, according to Dabbagh and Bannon-Ritland (2005), linking students to a universe of multiple realities. Here, the authors assume a particular category of online learning that consists of multimedia, options from which enrolled students select to meet their needs, and a variety of socially constructed learning communities. They might say that relevance to the "real world" is perhaps more immediate when one is linked to a streaming video of a building principal in action. However, in terms of personal connection and interaction in a course on cultural diversity, this is not the same experience as visiting that principal's school or conversing with her in a graduate seminar.

Moreover, those instructors in traditional classrooms who exclusively lecture may subject their students to linear, time-bound, narrow subject matter sources, and rigid teacher control, according to Chambers (cited in Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland, 2005, p. 4), and in so doing, reinforce the disconnection between learning and practice.

INTERPERSONAL DYNAMICS: FACE-TO-FACE VS. ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Given what we have claimed about this course in educational leadership, both "divertual learning" and "classroom-situated learning" necessarily involves very different types of interpersonal behaviors and relationships. These warrant some discussion. What are the dynamics of interpersonal relationships in divertual and face-to-face situations? Is it fair to ask: To what extent is one or the other superior in a course addressing cultural diversity? Or, are they equally effective?

Major Emphasis of Face-to-Face and Online Courses: Content or People

University learning settings are focused on academic content knowledge. However, in a leadership

preparation program, the focus must be on the people as well as the subject matter. And, even more importantly, in a cultural diversity course the emphasis on the people must be even stronger.

Much of the research into online education has been conducted in the context of distance education, and the emphasis is on *distance*. These studies have investigated the dynamics of teaching and learning that span oceans and continents. Whether or not the value of online education can be similarly argued when students are within the same city, county, or region, for example, as most of our students are, is a separate question. Students who are thousands of miles away from their instructors and peers are almost always in different cultures. These groups of students are unlikely to encounter their instructor or fellow students in shared physical space. These cultural diversities are manifest primarily in writing, requiring expressive language skills of students. "Technology-mediated interaction" seems to be an accurate term for online learning, one used by Vrasidas and Zembylas (2003) to capture the essence on online communication.

On the other hand, students who are in relatively close proximity to one another and to their instructor might easily engage in at least some face-to-face interaction. Not all of their interactions need to be "technology-mediated," of course. And, some online programs include at least some face-to-face encounters between students and instructors (Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland, 2005). Distance learning markets, however, encompass increasingly large geographic areas, reducing the possibility of these personal face-to-face encounters.

Examining face-to-face learning and comparing it to the interpersonal dynamics of online learning was the focus of a British researcher, Nigel Blake (2000). He turns the argument about face-to-face instruction and online instruction upside down. The burden of proof, he hints, is on face-to-face. Cutting off all human contact *benefits* learning, he claims, lending the experience a dimension of scientific disinterestedness. In what might have been a condescending tone (if he were face-to-face and not writing text), he describes the almost "primitive" need for physical proximity that humans crave to satisfy. However, he argues that teaching is better considered synonymous with *study*, an activity that is traditionally more solitary. Blake attempts to make parallel the notions of "teaching/learning" and "study":

Instead of the text actually teaching, the student has to actively study the text, just as she might also study

primary sources . . . behind the text is a writer who is plausibly described as 'teaching at a distance.' . . . The solitude of the student is as compatible with teaching as with study. (p. 185)

Intellectual discourse values disinterestedness, according to Blake (2000); academic "decorum" is strengthened by "bracketing off" the personal, such as facial expressions, body language, and voice intonations. These are intrusions on both sides of the teaching-learning duo, according to Blake, intrusions that must be "tamed" (p. 188). It is the academic voice to which the interaction should be directed, not the raced or gendered voice. To quote Blake further:

And much of what is screened out or clouded in online education is precisely the kind of personal characteristic that can interfere irrationally in human interaction, and in education can distort, disrupt and at the extreme pervert the interaction of tutor [teacher] and student. And students are no less vulnerable to the same possible irrationalities, either taking against a tutor [teacher] as a kind of person they just 'don't get on with' or 'falling for them' as seductively attractive—and treating them with unjustified skepticism or perhaps undue deference. (p. 190)

On the other hand, perhaps Blake protests too much about the disadvantages of personal human contact. The personal dimension might be totally irrelevant in Carstens and Worsfold's (2000) conceptualization of online courses, insofar as the focus is solely on *content*. They suggest that online courses focus only on "knowledge" objectives (as opposed to, say, performance, dispositions, or transformation).

From three separate authors come three examples of similar language used to convey the meaning of online education, i.e., its primary focus on subject matter content. For instance, Berge (2000) writes:

When it comes to learning, there are essentially two kinds of interaction. One occurs when a student individually interacts with content. The other is more social: a student interacts with others about the content. (p. 25)

In either case, according to Berge, the focus is the *subject matter content*, not the students themselves. A second example comes from Simonson (2000) when he writes that

learning outcomes are the observable, measurable behaviors that are a consequence of online instruction.

When learning activities are designed it is important that some expectations for students be identified to guide the selection of appropriate technologies. (p. 31)

Similar "subject matter-focused" language comes from Canada (2000), when he writes in "product" language about both environments. The difference in Canada's characterization is that he disparages *both* learning settings. If his argument holds up, *neither* the traditional face-to-face classroom *nor* the online environment is suitable to achieve personal transformation, our goal in the *Leadership in Diverse Communities* course. We aim for cultural proficiency, personal transformation, in our students (Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell, 2003). Canada depicts both environments as oriented toward some *product*, rather than oriented toward personal transformation.

An online course resembles a traditional course in many ways. In both environments, for example, a teacher guides students through a body of knowledge and skills. Students, in turn, show the teacher—and themselves—how much they have learned by producing something, perhaps a paper or a test. Finally, the teacher evaluates the product, often suggesting ways the student can improve. (p. 35)

Divertual Interpersonal Relationships

Weiss (2000) claims that the online environment might not only be "antiseptic" but also might lead to potentially unethical behaviors and responses. She suggests that

the removal of the human element creates an environment that is not conducive to maintaining ethical behavior among students. If the student does not see the pain of a hurtful remark, then it must not exist. (p. 48)

With the absence of the "human element," how do students sense the impact of a hurtful remark? How do they grow in their interpersonal relationships? How do they experience growing forgiveness for hurting and being hurt? Discussions of race, gender, religion, and social class situate people in vulnerable positions; faculty members who facilitate these discussions establish their classrooms as safe havens for such discussions. When communicating face-to-face, meaning depends on whether words are said in respect, anger, frustration, humor, or love (Weiss, 2000). Such cues are unavailable online.

In an online environment, how can students look another human being in the eye, a human being who

is different than they are? How do they experience personal transformation? How well do they get to merely know one another, the foundation of productive human relationships? Aspiring school administrators *face a role in which human interaction is crucial to their effectiveness. Can human beings relate to one another in personally transforming ways when they experience one another as only moving words on a screen?*

There may not be one answer to that query. Personal relationships develop in online communication quite frequently. And, the question itself, to some, might be moot. Entrepreneurs have latched on to the profit potential for linking individuals with one another online. From contacting old high school classmates to dating services, sharing hobbies and social concerns, political and social bloggers, the personal connections online have proliferated (Correll, 2002; Imel, 2003).

Evidence for meaningful interpersonal relationships in online courses, however, is inconclusive, at best. For example, one student that Canada (2000) quotes made these remarks:

The only adverse part of this course is that you don't know me and I don't know you. Voices only. When teaching any class, I think the passion and professor's actions communicate a lot about what he or she is attempting to teach. With an online class you miss that. (p. 39)

The feeling of Canada's student is the opposite of a student of one of the authors of this chapter. The student visited her recently, lauding the success of her online course—she loved it! Her first comment was, "I got to know the other students so well!" In this course, the students would ultimately meet face-to-face at a concluding session of presentations. She was eagerly anticipating that session. "I can't wait to meet them!" Notwithstanding that the sequence of the two feelings seemed to be reversed (i.e., one usually meets others *before* they get to know them), her remarks showed passion about others she knew only through technology mediated communication, in the absence of interaction with them in shared physical time and space.

An online message from a student in a masters program was written at the end of a two-year online program in response to a probe to reflect on the experience. Her words capture the mixed blessings of this teaching-learning medium insofar as divirtual learning is concerned, here recapitulated by Vrasidas and Zembylas (2003):

In my opinion, technology influences our cross-cultural online interaction by making us simply reflect on each other's opinions posted in words, and not based on biases, stereotypes, misconceived perceptions, or misinterpretations due to someone's skin color, physical appearance, gestures, or facial expression. . . . Part of the problem of this medium is that it forces our relationships to remain on a very "textual" level by relying on just the typewritten characters that make up our words, sentences, and meaning. This is not exactly a negative aspect. . . . Perhaps another way technology has influenced our cross-cultural online interaction is that it "muffled" some of the insensitivity that we sometimes experience in face-to-face environments. Since most of us are now living on or are originally from the islands where people share a lot and are very close with each other, this technology has at least assisted us and facilitated our "islander" longing to communicate, socialize, and make lasting relationships. (p. 271–272)

The price we pay for "muffling" the insensitivity may be actual learning that is lost. Personal transformation, for some individuals, involves the uncomfortability of facing racism and stereotypes that perhaps one has not previously been aware of or acknowledged.

Cyber relationships, however, grow from very different purposes than do online graduate courses. To what extent are personal relationships important for success in graduate courses? Are gains in knowledge sufficient? For the course we are discussing in this chapter, personal relationships are indispensable as learning grounds for students aspiring to cultural proficiency.

Learners Bring Cultural Differences

Teachers have been continually encouraged to attempt to tailor their teaching to the styles and cultures of the learners in their classrooms (Brown, 2003; Ingram, Conley, McDonald, Parker, and Rivers, 2003). The cultural backgrounds and related learning preferences of students enrolled in online courses are worthy of discussion, perhaps even more relevant to an online course in cultural diversity. For instance, individualism tends to be more valued in Western cultures and collectivism, an emphasis on the group, tends to be valued in Nonwestern cultures (Matsumoto, 1996). And, it is also the case that some individuals in both cultures behave differently when they are interacting with family members in intimate relationships (mostly in a collective spirit) than they do with others outside their families (mostly individualistically), according to a synthesis of research by Gunawardena,

Wilson, and Nolla (2003). The isolation in an online learning setting might reinforce individualism and privilege those from Western cultures; the independent learning setting might be inconsistent with those from cultures that place a higher value on relationships and the collective.

Unfortunately, the picture is not that clear. One might argue just the opposite. Individualistic cultures, such as ours in the United States, tend to have more groups to which people can align themselves, but individuals do tend to abandon groups that are too demanding and "their relationships within their groups are marked by a high level of independence or detachment. In collectivist cultures, depending on the effective functioning of the group, a member's commitment to an ingroup is greater" (Gunawardena, Wilson, and Nolla, 2003, p. 755). This seems to imply that it is possible that members of individualistic cultures maintain more detachment from online learning groups than do those from collective cultures. In either case, success as an independent learner bodes well for students in an online learning setting (Dillon and Greene, 2003).

Online learning creates potential challenges for those from what Hall (1998) refers to as "high-context cultures," cultures in which indirect nonverbal contextual cues are important to successful personal interaction and communication. (Low-context cultures depend on the explicit verbal message and less on the contextual cues.) Online text-based education can privilege those from low-context cultures, such as the United States, while those from some Hispanic, Native American, and Japanese cultures might be disadvantaged (Gunawardena, Wilson, and Nolla, 2003). When those from high-context and low-context cultures communicate, those predisposed to the former might participate less and learn less.

Similarly, silence is perceived very differently in different cultures. Some Asian cultures consider silence as powerful and useful; it is nurtured along with a posture of reserve and formality. On the other hand, the United States and other Western cultures are more apt to value assertion and aggressive verbal behavior (Ishii and Bruneau, as cited in Gunawardena, Wilson, and Nolla, 2003). In an online learning situation, silence renders a student invisible. In face-to-face learning settings, silence and reserve might not be barriers to the extent they are in online courses. The instructor is much more able to navigate the teaching-learning dynamics to maximize the participation of all learners in both nonverbal as well as verbal ways. A nod, a gesture, a questioning look can signal understanding.

Students for whom English is not their first language may also experience more flexibility in communicating face-to-face than they do online. As people engage in the give and take of speaking and listening, clarification of meaning can be immediate and effective. Perhaps communication is easier and more effective with less struggle for new users of English when it is carried out face-to-face than it is online.

Calculating the quality of students' work online and the quality of instructors' feedback online differs from the face-to-face classroom (Dillon and Greene, 2003). Online educators are encouraged to provide timely feedback to students who submit their assignments, just as face-to-face educators are. In the online environment, that immediacy is calculated differently and so is the quality. The cultural dynamics, however, come in to play in both venues. For example, absent personal human contact, a lengthy response by an online instructor can be perceived negatively, depending on the predispositions of the student (Dillon and Greene, 2003). It may well be that, because instructors and students do not become acquainted in a rapport building phase and get to know one another more holistically as persons as they do in face-to-face classes, an intervening step is needed whereby online instructors learn how their students respond to feedback. Students, too, may need to learn to be independent learners, if they are not personally or culturally predisposed to learn that way. This shift could eventually produce unintended consequences if all students' learning dispositions and behaviors become more standardized in all environments.

Cultural dispositions are brought to all learning environments; learning styles and preferences play a role in students' capacity to maximize learning. The restrictions of a divirtual setting may render it unsuitable for some learning goals. But, on the horizon are other more dramatic shifts that may diminish the impact of this mismatch. The goals of the courses themselves may be modified to fit an online environment. Revolutionizing the way educators consider learning styles and learning preferences might be an outcome in the explosion of distance education, moving away from learning styles to emphasizing metacognition (Dillon and Greene, 2003). Students need to learn how to learn in a variety of settings, regardless of any traits they display. Because the technology favors students who learn independently and in isolation, more and more educators will likely train students to learn independently, over and above whatever cultural values they bring to the "classroom."

ONLINE VS. TRADITIONAL: HOW CAN WE PROMOTE PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION THAT STRENGTHENS THE VALUES OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE?

Personal transformation implies change from within. Rather than solely emphasizing cognitive goals, the goals for learners are dispositional. Students are taught to examine their own values, beliefs, and attitudes about their professional role in the wider world. They are confronted with the need to change or expand the repertoire of their personal behaviors and attitudes. Educational processes are intended to be holistic, encompassing the entire person, mind, body, and spirit. Grounded in ISLLC standards, we are obligated to define our work this deeply: preparing students to manage schools in ways that guarantee that students are treated fairly, ethically, and with understanding of the larger cultural context (ISLLC, 1996). Teaching that encourages personal transformation is teaching holistically. Building awareness and new understandings about culturally diverse communities and the attitudes and behaviors of those who lead them is our goal in the *Leadership in Diverse Communities* course. Our goal is personal transformation. That we must teach holistically is required not only by ISLLC, but also by our local institutional mission, the Marianist characteristics that are our legacy.

If it is offered online, teaching a course on cultural diversity, i.e., divirtual learning, must be carried out through this framework with no less purposefulness than in delivering the class face-to-face. Online it cannot be the same course as it is face-to-face. Colleagues in K–12 education join us in this commitment. Concerns are no different in their K–12 schools than they are for us in departments of educational leadership. For example, the Executive Director of AASA, Paul Houston, expressed concern that time spent sitting before a computer screen rather than interacting with those unlike oneself may limit children's social education. In his own words, he expressed the fact that

as children are growing up in an increasingly diverse world, they need to have exposure to people different than themselves. I'm not saying it can't happen outside the public system, but it happens easily in the public system in many cases (Cox, 2004).

What stance must we take in our own graduate classrooms that might parallel a similar concern?

We must ponder the real possibility that the online classroom may be appropriate for "knowledge transfer" but "not to personal transformation and the de-

velopment of human values," according to Carstens and Worsfold (2000). And it is personal transformation that should be at the heart of a course focused on social justice and equity. For example, cultural proficiency theory (Lindsey, Robins, and Terrell, 2003, a book sometimes used in this course we are studying) maintains that some educators move along a 6-point continuum as they develop cultural proficiency, the

point at which educators and the school environment optimally facilitate effective cross-cultural interaction. . . . [Culturally proficient] educators recognize that culture involves far more than ethnic or racial differences. They demonstrate an understanding of the cacophony of diverse cultures each person experiences in the school setting . . . a conscious awareness of the culture of their communities, districts, or schools. (p. 30–31)

Lindsey et al. began to chart the course of one's personal development toward cultural proficiency as a journey through "contact" with others unlike oneself, through "disintegration" of long held personal values and attitudes, on through more steps toward the goal of cultural proficiency. Authentic transformation of values, attitudes, and beliefs within students almost always requires personal discomfort. In other words, this graduate course is not solely focused on knowledge gained. The course aims at personal transformation. Other theories, such as Janet Helms' (1992) theory of white racial identity, pose similar developmental schema that include the disintegration of one's previously held beliefs, values, and behaviors and their subsequent rebuilding.

In both theories, these are not just *any* beliefs and values. These are beliefs and values about one's identity, about how one ascribes value to other human beings, about one's sense of power and self-worth, about one's family heritage, about one's appearance in an appearance-obsessed culture, about one's religious beliefs, social class, and economic status, about one's physical abilities and disabilities, about one's sexuality, and about one's often unrecognized but lifelong fears of those unlike oneself.

Delineating these many beliefs and values brings to mind the notion that *education* is about finding one's place in the world, according to Parker Palmer (1998) about empowerment, transcendence, healing and wholeness. In the educational leadership milieu, this means that *education* is about our students' finding their place in the world of schools where they assume much responsibility for children and teachers and

accountability to the community. Their own personal identities, their personal beliefs and value for strong relationships with others influence the heart of their leadership style and its eventual effectiveness.

Personal transformation carries them toward their place in the world. And we must admit that the globalization discourse, the discourse that dominates online learning, creates a reality about the world that substantially reduces cultural pluralism. The communication technology, in fact, constructs one networked culture. Not unexpectedly, some doubt that a "mediated technology communication" environment can encourage true human interaction that is transformational (Mason, 2003). Thus, online learning may not be suitable for a course in cultural diversity which aspires to such transformation.

Some proponents of online learning ground its effectiveness in the very social processes that doubters might claim are missing. For example, Dabbagh and Bannan-Ritland (2005) characterize asynchronous learning networks as potentially strong social groups

where groups of learners or professionals with a common goal congregate to share information and resources, ask questions, solve problems, and achieve goals, and in doing so, collectively build new knowledge and evolve the practices of their community. These distributed forms of interaction are made possible by telecommunications technologies, which . . . are fundamentally responsible for increasing the interconnectedness and scope of interactions and activities and providing a global perspective on a particular area of study. (p. 10)

This perspective strongly suggests that personal transformation might be logically consistent with an online learning environment. In whatever ways they construct the learning environment, however, it is absent the physicality of actual culturally diverse human beings sitting together in shared physical space with their flesh and blood counterparts who embody the human encounters potential school leaders will soon have, if they hope to successfully manage future schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Our conclusions at this point in time surround five ideas. First, globalization has changed how we think about education. Second, the competition that has generated the proliferation of online learning may outweigh attention paid to the learning values, if not closely monitored. Third, there is real difficulty in

concluding that online and face-to-face can support exactly the same goals; this is even truer for a cultural diversity course. Fourth, we admit that there are limitations of each venue; but, finally, the cultural dimensions that activate all learning situations are even more consequential for online teaching.

Globalization: A Way of Thinking About Oneself and Others

"Globalization" has begun to structure the discourse on distance education, including online venues and, we believe, divertual learning. At first glance, "globalization" would not seem a relevant construct to the interpersonal relationships in an online course in an educational leadership program in Ohio. However, we concluded that this construct does inform our questions about divertual learning because it addresses a dimension fundamental to theories of all distance learning—how one thinks about oneself in relation to the rest of the world. At first glance, the term "globalization" is automatically connected to discussions of competitive markets, global trade, and international relations. We believe that the dramatic influence of globalization over the past couple of decades does play a role in how individuals consider online education. In essence, people have begun to think about themselves and their "distance" from others in new ways. The notion of "I" and "others" has begun to change. These new ways of thinking have begun to influence educational delivery systems, even when the system is within the borders of one country or state.

In arriving at this conclusion, we considered at least three ways of thinking about globalization—three perspectives that are quite different from one another. Evans (1997), a prolific researcher in the field of distance education, defines "globalization" as the notion that "most people, if not all, are connected more or less contemporaneously with distant events, sometimes whether they like it or not" (p. 18). His meaning, here, implies an embodied connectedness. Staying with definitions, we considered Mason's (2003) definition. To her, the construct is simpler: in educational circles the term is used synonymously with borderless education, virtual education, and online education. Vrasidas and Zembylas (2003) conceptualize "globalization" in less neutral ways than do Evans and Mason, structuring the phenomenon through a lens of power, a second perspective. They state:

Although there is no agreement among scholars on what globalization means, there are some identifiable

characteristics that focus mainly on its impact. Such characteristics include the dominance of a world capitalist economic system, the increased use and reliance on new information and communications technology, the strengthening of transnational corporations and organizations, the erosion of local cultures, values, and traditions, and the emergence of what some call a “global culture” (Giddens, 1990) within a “network society” (Castells, 1996, p. 272).

In this quotation we’re most interested in Vrasidas and Zembylas’s allusion to cross-cultural reliance on “new information and communications technology” and the “network society,” the latter to which they cite Castells (1996). All of these authors integrate two areas of progress: communications technology and the forces that have promoted increased globalization. In the history of distance learning these are inseparable phenomena (e.g., see Moore, 2003).

We considered yet a third perspective, that of Dabagh and Bannan-Ritland (2005) who, in fact, based their perspective on Evans’ ideas as expressed in a 1995 article. These authors add another dimension to the meaning of globalization—the ways in which people think. Ultimately, this construct brought the issue back to the forefront of divertual learning. They state:

Globalization can be described as a psychological phenomenon that can be applied to many contexts to imply that most people are connected simultaneously with distant events, directly or indirectly, intentionally or unintentionally, which promotes a perception or an awareness of the globe as a single environment. (Evans, 1995, p. 8)

In this context, globalization becomes psychological, a way of thinking about oneself in relation to the world. More importantly, this way of thinking promotes the world as a single environment, a single culture. Combined with Vrasidas and Zembylas’s claim, this discourse privileges a single culture paradigm at the expense of local cultures. Because of the dominance of the United States on the internet and in technology, globalization may well be interpreted as Americanization (Evans and Nation, 2003).

The phenomenon of globalization, then, when accepted as a psychological construct, as a way of thinking about oneself in relationship to the world, has implications for divertual learning. This course we teach is heavily laced with issues of identity, both personal and professional. Identities constructed through race, ethnicity, gender, religion, geography, sexual orientation, social class—are all issues of sociocultural importance to

those who aspire to be school leaders. Constructing one’s identity as a learner, a scholar, a teacher, or a school administrator within a globalization discourse may be carried out in ways that reinforce certain power structures and diminish others. In cultivating cultural proficiency within our classrooms (or online) we are simultaneously teaching in a world where the very notion of culture itself has been dramatically altered.

The Bottom Line

A second conclusion is related to finances. Comparing face-to-face education and online education cannot be considered without considering market share, and ultimate revenue for the university and resulting viability of our program in educational administration. Online education promises to bring in more students and potentially more revenue for universities. Our online course, *Leadership in Diverse Communities*, may sustain or increase the university’s revenues if we can attract students to our program with the online option who may have otherwise gone elsewhere. Regardless of the responses to the four questions we have considered about divertual learning in this chapter, market forces may dominate any decisions about the relative appropriateness of online vs. face-to-face learning environments.

Appropriate and Inappropriate Online Course Goals

Third, we have concluded that online and face-to-face educational settings are sufficiently different. Establishing the same goals for students in the same course in both settings is problematic. Some may argue that no courses in educational leadership should be delivered online. Others may make finer distinctions, pointing out meaningful differences between courses such as law or finance or research (where, they say, knowledge trumps personal transformation as a course goal) and a cultural diversity course (where enlightened human interaction and personal transformation are course goals). The former courses, to these decision makers, might be more easily relegated to an online environment with the same goals and objectives as those in the face-to-face venue. If a course in cultural diversity is to be put online, however, the nature of the desired outcomes would necessarily have to differ due to the absence of human interaction in shared physical time and space.

Cultural Dispositions of Students and Instructors

Fourth, we concluded that the cultural dispositions that students and instructors bring to their learning

experiences matter. Students' sense of self, their communication styles and preferences, and their dispositions as learners play a role in their success. In the traditional face-to-face classroom, the instructor's role has a longer history and is better understood. The flexibility of the face-to-face instructor maximizes his/her potential to adapt to changing learner's needs. Instruction online is not well understood and is less familiar to those responsible for students' academic and personal growth. Less flexibility in the online environment can minimize instructors' ability to adapt to learners' needs. Technology mediated communication, in itself, supports certain learning preferences and limits others. Those assigned to deliver online courses need to reflect on their own instructional preferences and be given time to prepare for this new way of interacting with their students. They need to acknowledge the cultural preferences that both they and their students bring to the learning situation.

Next Steps

We have merely scratched the surface of our ideas in this chapter. The conversations will continue and much more knowledge, understanding, research, and organizational collaboration must go into new learning technologies before they can be effectively implemented. Accomplishing the mission of our educational leadership department must always be held up as the criterion for whether or not we are effectively carrying out the legacy of our academic ancestors in a contemporary world of schools, rather than whether or not we are incorporating the newest technology.

We began this chapter arguing that there were two reasons that compelled us to examine these four questions. First, our students in educational administration will face increasing diversity among the students and families they will serve in the future, making it imperative that we include cultural diversity in our preparation programs. That future school leaders be culturally proficient and embody the dispositions and behaviors that serve diverse families equitably is one way to regain excellence in all schools, especially those schools that we have historically served less well. Second, graduate students who want to study educational administration have multiple options from which to choose; we want to remain viable within that market by considering when online learning might be appropriately considered and when it might not be.

Of these two issues, both must be addressed, but the obligation for meeting the needs of all children

and families is most important. This comes first; designing the best ways to prepare culturally proficient school leaders must be our first obligation. Whether those strategies are best delivered face-to-face or online is secondary and should be decided based on the results of those established criteria.

NOTE

1. We will develop all ten masters level courses for online delivery over the next couple of years; currently only three courses in the masters program are delivered online.

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