



Increasing Cultural Awareness Of Future Teachers Through Virtual International Experiences



HONG KONG
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Georgia State University (GSU)

- One of Southeast's major public research institutions (in Atlanta)
- Among top 100 public universities for doctoral degrees awarded
- More than 250 degree programs with 100 fields of study offered at the bachelor's, master's, specialist and doctoral levels
- Approximately 35,000 students

Hong Kong Baptist University (HKBU)

- With more than 50 years of experience in providing broad-based and creativity-inspiring education
- One of the leaders in “Whole Person Education” in Hong Kong
- Offer undergraduate, teaching and research postgraduate programs
- Approximately 42,000 full-time and part-time students

Increasing Cultural Awareness of Future Teachers

GSU & HKBU: strive to develop students with global perspectives

- Particularly important for future teachers
- Need to develop authentic experiences where future teachers interact with students from different cultures
- Presentation offers model to prepare future teachers for diverse classrooms

Why Cross-Cultural Online Discussions?

Technology

- incorporates international learning experience into curricula
- substantially affordable cost and convenience
 - Not all can study abroad due to cost and time to graduation (Freidheim, 2012)

Why Cross-Cultural Asynchronous Online Discussions/Case studies?

- Allows communication without limitations of time and space
- Promotes cross-cultural awareness, critical thinking skills, task engagement
- Fosters experiential learning
- Creates genuine learning experiences
- Encourages reflection on educational experience and instructional practice

Research Purpose

- Explore how asynchronous discussions on classroom case studies promote cross-cultural understanding of education for American and Hong Kong undergraduate students

Research Questions

1. How do American and Hong Kong students perceive online discussions about educational case studies?
2. How did participation in the online discussions and cross-cultural learning experience inform and prepare American and Hong Kong future teachers?

Theoretical Framework

- Sociocultural constructivism: views social interactions at the center of learning and cognitive development (Driscoll, 1997, Vygotsky, 1986, & Lave and Wenger, 1998)
- Critical pedagogy: argues the importance of the learners' ability to think critically about their education situation and experience (Freire, 1970)
- Cross-cultural experiential learning: values the salient cultural reference points of each student within the learning community (Kolb, 1984; Ladson-Billings, 1994; 1995; Merryfield, 2003)

Participants

- 60 students enrolled in an undergraduate Educational Psychology class at their home institution during fall, 2013
- American students (N=30): 6 males, 24 females
- Hong Kong students (N=35), 3 males, 32 females

Data Sources

- Four case studies (2 describing American classroom scenarios and 2 describing Hong Kong classroom scenarios) related to learning theories being discussed in class
 - *The Marble Jar (behaviorism)*
 - *Learning the Ropes (social cognitive)*
 - *Studying French (information processing)*
 - *The Unmotivated Student (motivation)*
- (adapted from Ormrod and McGuire, 2007)

Procedure

- Students in eight groups (4-5 Americans and 4-5 Chinese)
- Initial posting critical analysis of case from theoretical perspective
- Minimum 3 follow-up postings responding to others' case study analysis
- Evaluated strategies and interventions
- Justified position from readings, research, and personal experiences
- Reflected upon their learning

Data Analysis

- Content analysis and constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to determine reoccurring themes in online discussion postings

Results

Nature of Interaction Between Students

- Many questions, strong agreement, politeness
- GSU: shorter, more general posts
- HKBU: longer, more detailed posts

Results

Content of Interaction Between Students

Response to Research Question 1:

- Positive perception of online discussions

Response to Research Question 2:

- Competition versus collaboration
- Teacher/parent collaboration
- Communication versus punishment
- Focus on teacher development

Theme 1: Positive Perceptions of Online Discussions

- American and Hong Kong students expressed positive perceptions of online discussions and stated they learned a great deal from the experience

Representative Quotes

“I have learned a lot about how different and similar our cultures can be in certain aspects of education, and I plan to include many ideas and aspects of thinking that I learned from here in my own teaching someday. Thanks again, and good luck to all of you in your future endeavors as educators.”
(American student)

“Good to hear that you enjoyed the discussion. It is wonderful for people from two places thousands of miles apart to work on the same project, it is now all possible thanks to the internet and collaboration across the globe.” (Hong Kong student)

Theme 2: Competition versus Collaboration

- American students discussed the value of competition
- Hong Kong students discussed importance of collaborating in the classroom

Representative Quotes

“In regards to the peer pressure, I am all for competition fueling knowledge. I mean look what the arm's race did for science in the 1950s/60s globally. It is awesome and highly motivating to have competition for some, however, it may also stunt the development of children who are not as competitive.” (American student)

“Encouragement and helping by peers sometimes can be even more effective than those from teachers, and it can also strengthen the cohesion and spirit of the class.... also, students in the same group need to cooperate to reach the same goal, sense of participation, contribution and recognition from others and it may increase the willingness for them to follow the rules of the marble jar ‘games.’” (Hong Kong student)

Theme 3: Teacher/parent collaboration

- Both American and Hong Kong students discussed the importance of family and school working together to facilitate learning

Representative Quotes

- *“I believe disciplinary actions start in the home. Mr Fenwick can’t do it all himself. Teaching involves the parent, teacher, and student.”*
(American student)
- *“I must say disciplinary and behavioral teaching are essential at home, and that parents play an important role in doing this kind of education to their kids. What parents teach their children will definitely make deep impression and long-term effects on them.”* (Hong Kong student)

Theme 4: Punishment vs. Communication

- American students believed that teachers should communicate with students to deal with behavioural issues instead of using punishment
- Hong Kong students viewed punishment as a useful tool

Representative Quotes

“I really like how you are actually communicating with the student. So many teachers are quick to throw out a punishment rather than just communicate with the student, and to some extent, the parents as well.” (American student)

“As a traditional Chinese educator, I will most probably use the method of punishment to suppress the bad behaviors of the students because the traditional Chinese culture does not put efforts to reinforce students’ behaviors positively.” (Hong Kong student)

Theme 5: Focus on Teacher Development

- Students from both cultures strongly emphasized their desire to become better educators

Representative Quotes

"It certainly leaves us with a lot of questions, and it forces us, as future educators, to realize that our jobs require more than just facilitation of information if we are to be successful teachers. We have to be willing and able help students be successful learners in every aspect of the word. In other words we have to be willing to do our part even when the student is not willing to do his/her part." (American student)

"A good teacher should also pay attention to students' emotions and mental development instead of just put all the focus on their academic results." (Hong Kong student)

Conclusions

Online discussions on case studies with American and Hong Kong students

- promote cross-cultural knowledge and understanding of education for future teachers
- provide an exciting forum for meaningful and constructive communication about learning theory and the culture behind instructional practices
- provide constructive reciprocal learning of commonly concerned educational issues

Significance

This study

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

Strategies for Creating International Online Courses

Find motivated and collaborative faculty

- Willing to spend extra time and efforts to provide international learning
- Open-minded, global-minded
- Passionate about creating virtual classroom
- Strong cooperative working relationships (need contact here and abroad, coordinate schedules)

Strategies, cont.

Realize both opportunities and challenges

- Allows for pedagogical cross-fertilization
- Compares student-centered West with teacher-oriented East
- Enhances communication and understanding
- Forces systematic rethinking of course content
- Virtual classrooms not as prevalent in other countries
- Time difference, language barrier, access to resources

Strategies, cont.

Understand impact of culture on approach to learning

- Hong Kong students very respectful of teacher and appreciative of educational opportunity
- Hong Kong students consider discussion forum a formal platform



Strategies, cont.

Foster interaction through

- Clear directions (specific dates, times, explanation of how to analyze case, minimum 3 follow-up, control over dialogue)
- Case studies from both countries
- Prompt feedback on participation

Assessments (qualitative & quantitative)

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