

Title: Portals and Multicultural Competencies

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Abstract

Statement of Objectives

This exploratory research seeks to investigate the dialogue of in-service and pre-service teachers in a web based environment. The environment is an Intra/Intercultural and Cross Cultural Teaching Portal. This study will observe how dialogue can generate responses that are based on personal and social identity through computer-mediated communication technology, interactive multimedia multi-sensory vignettes, and threaded discussion forums in a web-based environment. This proposed study addresses the gap in the literature on teacher development for reflection and processes on character education using multimedia and discussion forums in a web-based computer mediated communication environment. Additionally, this research will primarily provide empirical data on how educators talk about social constructs such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation using computer-mediated communication for insight regarding intergroup/intragroup relations. It also seeks to explore the social identity of pre-service and in-service teachers in the following ways: (a) provide data showing how specific racial/ethnic groups' of educators mediate social constructs such as race, class, gender, and sexuality using computer-mediated communication through asynchronous discussion forums and multimedia interactive animated vignettes. To date, no studies have empirically examined dialogue of educators with a principal focus on social constructs such as race, class, and gender.

Computer Mediated Communication, in this study, refers to text that is sent and controlled by the sender using technological tools (keyboards, e-mail browsers, and

asynchronous/synchronous environments.

Proposed Methodology

This quantitative design used for this study is ex post facto and cluster analysis. An ex post facto co-relational study involves the collection of two or more sets of data. In this case, the data is the racial groups (independent variables), gender, and age (dependent variables) to determine the relationship between race, gender, and age.

The researcher's data collection methods were designed for qualitative and quantitative analysis. The responses, from the vignettes, will be submitted to cluster analysis using a statistical package that identifies and classifies themes and patterns. The themes and patterns will be recognized from the text that is submitted from watching the animated the vignette. Cat Pac uses the clumping technique to identify words for clustering. An example of cluster analysis is presented,

Cluster analysis is an exploratory data analysis tool for solving classification problems. Its object is to sort cases (people, things, events, etc) into groups, or clusters, so that the degree of association is strong between members of the same cluster and weak between members of different clusters. Each cluster thus describes, in terms of the data collected, the class to which its members belong; and this description may be abstracted through use from the particular to the general class or type. Cluster analysis is thus a tool of discovery. It may reveal associations and structure in data that, though not previously evident, nevertheless are sensible and useful once found. The results of cluster analysis may contribute to the definition of a formal classification scheme, such as taxonomy for related animals, insects, or plants; or suggest statistical models. The models describe populations; or indicate rules for assigning new cases to classes for identification and diagnostic purposes; or provide measures of definition, size and change in what previously were only broad concepts; or find exemplars to represent classes. (http://www.clustan.com/what_is_cluster_analysis.html)

The data from the responses and forums will be thematically coded and analyzed for patterns using CatPac. CatPac, a statistical application, will generate the clusters that are based on key words, which are taken from the forums and the vignette responses of the different racial, age and gendered groups. To facilitate this process, the researcher will

construct a matrix using Cat-Pac (category package) to provide computer assisted text analysis to look for themes and patterns within and across groups. CatPac is a neural network software that is modeled on the structure of biological nervous systems (Woelfel, Stoyanoff, & Danielsen, 1993). CatPac software enables “computers to read and understand text in any language that can be represented in ASCII characters” (Woelfel, 1998). This previously mentioned feature will make this statistical package an appropriate method to cluster and analyze text.

The purpose for using cluster analysis in this research is to look for conceptual themes, generate several hypotheses through data exploration and development of attribution classifications of the participants. The first analysis will include clustering similar and dissimilar responses within and between the racial group discussion forums. For example, which of the educators thought the vignettes was positive, which one thought the vignette was negative? Positive and negative responses will be determined by observation and reading the responses based on descriptive keywords identified by Cat Pac and the researcher. The key word list will be refined by the researcher once they are clustered by Cat Pac. The keyword list will be used to label the data from the responses and discussion forums. To compile the data set for analysis we will begin with labels based on did the educator respond positively or negatively to the vignette. Although, the exact themes and patterns cannot be determined at this time, general labels will be provided. Themes may include attitudes towards the vignette, children, and teacher’s social identity (racial, gender, age, etc.).

The ethnographic unit of analysis is observed as a reaction by the educators to the animated vignettes. The qualitative methodology is based on a procedure for analyzing

systematic observation developed by psychological anthropologists Beatrice and John Whiting (Whiting & Edwards, 1988; Whiting & Whiting, 1975; Seymour, 1999).

The qualitative ethnographic observations of the discussion forums and the vignette responses will analyze the dialogue. The first question, Does social identity influence how educators' talk about multicultural competences? This question will be answered by observing the dialogue in the racial group forums. This study seeks to determine if African American educators' dialogue will differ from Asian Americans' dialogue on social constructs such as race, gender, and age.

Coding

I will describe two different methods of analysis. The first describes the ethnographic method that will be employed, the second sections describes the quantitative designed used for this study. The data will be group into responses that are negative and positive. For each of the two groups of data, the researcher will develop a scale of one to five, where five represents a positive response to the vignette, one represents a negative reaction and three a neutral reaction. The coding scheme will include the clusters developed by CatPac based on key words taken from the data sources (forums and text box).

This research is interested in how the behaviors of teachers might be interpreted by other educators who may have a different cultural perspective. In this case, the researcher will focus only data that describe value judgments attributed to reactions to the vignettes. Data will include the participants own reactions to the vignettes as well as the participants observations of the reactions of others to the vignettes.

Educational Significance

The Intra/Inter Cultural, Cross-Cultural Teaching Portal will provide insight into how teachers talk about their experiences in diverse classrooms. This study can provide

baseline data about how teachers dialogue in an Internet/Web-based environment regarding volatile issues such as gender, race, class, etc. Future studies can include experimental design research where a comparison can be made between the Internet dialogues and physically attended, face-to-face discussions on intergroup dialogue issues related to intra/intercultural, multicultural, and cross-cultural classroom dynamics. Further longitudinal studies can include teacher dialogue forums on how they interact with each other and how teachers' psychological capital and cultural consciousness give meaning to their classroom behaviors over several years. In this study, the researcher could conduct pre- and post-classroom observations to investigate whether or not the educators who received workshops and courses compared to the ones that engage in reflective dialogues handle situations more equitably. Finally, information from this study can provide teachers with knowledge that would help facilitate reflections and increase positive interactions in their intra/inter cultural, cross-cultural/multicultural classroom practices. When educators and others engage in ongoing textual representations of their psychological capital related to their cultural consciousness, they begin to generate questions that occur in their classrooms and apply the concepts of social justice and multicultural education.

The benefits of this research are numerous. In our current age of technology, human computer interaction, and on-line courses and degree programs, this research will explore the possibilities of developing specific curricula that deals with issues on multicultural, social justice, and anti-oppressive education in a web-supported (on-line) environment. It may also allow for a more in-depth discussion of such volatile issues as race, class, gender, and disabilities, since the participants are not engaged in face-to-face interaction. It also allows for immediate responses to classroom issues because the teacher can quickly get on-line to engage in a threaded discussion and vignette without having to wait for next week's class.

Previous research has documented that more people were able to express themselves without having the sneers, rejection, and embarrassment that sometimes occurs when in a face-to-face classroom environment, while engaged in computer-mediated-communication (Hammond, 2000; Hawkes, 2000). Research in this area also targets populations who would normally not be able to engage in such dialogue due to limited access to colleges and universities.

Online and Internet studies on social identity (SI) will become a very important issue in education (Jones, 1999). Other studies found that using the Internet for teaching were useful because the Internet provides non-threatening environments for integrating language and culture (Siekman, 1998). The change in landscape is here, moving from voices being seen and not heard, as would occur in a classroom, where education courses are taught in university classroom environments to online environments (Kress, 1998; Paton & Neilson, 1999). As Jones (1999) states:

Either our attempts to both study the Internet and understand it as a medium of communication can broaden our options for understanding the fluid or social nature of mediated communication, or it can narrow our options by focusing on the essentially digital, binary, nature of being on-line: connected versus not connected, on-line-versus-off-line (p. 25).

I suggest that social identity attitudes of teachers, like most people in American society, have been profoundly influenced by the social construction of racism, racial beliefs, and racial attitudes in the United States. Like most individuals growing up in America, teachers are not exempt from racial and ethnic biased attitudes. In fact, many teachers appear to be most vulnerable to using stereotypical perceptions of student characteristics for which they hold different expectations (Cochran-Smith, 1995; Sleeter, 2001).

This interface allows teachers to collaborate, think, pair, and share stories, situations in a worldly manner so they can engage in dialogue using multi-sensory, multimodal and

multimedia for reflective learning. It will also engage parents and students to include a voice that is heard from the community. Additionally, the ICCTP allows for capacity building of multiple voices for character education in the following way: build capacity for multicultural competencies for teachers, parent, and students to share their stories by reflective writing and dialogue.

Conclusion

From this research, I hope to develop a better understanding of educator's social identity attitudes about multicultural competencies in teaching and learning. This study will also provide a baseline for issues related to studies that investigate meaning making of teacher beliefs and attitudes in computer-mediated-communication environments and perhaps assist educators in reflecting and dialoguing on unrecognized biases. The controlled forums will allow teachers to structure their inquiries where they may feel comfortable. It will enable them to dialogue in virtual communities so they can engage in discussions based on stimuli and interactivity.

Employing interactivity and caucus groups in computer-mediated-communication provides an appropriate opportunity for developing and testing theories of intergroup processes, social identity, and insight into questions about social identity, psychological capital, and cultural consciousness and the nature of the users (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988). Through examination of dialogue, the researcher can provide a valuable contribution to the field based on practitioners' conversations.

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