



Chapter VI

Theorizing and Realizing the Globalized Classroom

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Abstract

This chapter examines what criteria, conditions, or characteristics actually constitute a globalized classroom. A graduate course on online education taught in Japan is presented as a case in point. Online mentoring and educational technologies spanning six countries are described. Explanatory frameworks include globalization, constructivism as a cross-cultural pedagogy, cultural attitudes toward the adoption of online technologies, transformative learning, and empowerment. Voluntary feedback from the graduate students, mostly translated from Japanese, provides evidence such as: (a) that mainstream Western constructivism has some universality to be readily accepted by Japanese students, (b) that unfamiliar online information and communication technologies (ICT) are also welcomed, (c) that a positive form of globalization can occur in such a class, and d) that their learning was transformative and empowering. The theoretical framework accounts for the changes which students reported in their attitudes and practices. Thus the class provides a model for realizing the globalized classroom.

Introduction

This chapter addresses such questions as: What actually constitutes a globalized classroom? Is it some ideal future goal, a potential state that is achievable today, or has it already been realized? What criteria or conditions, including educational technologies, would facilitate or characterize a globalized classroom? What breadth or diversity of cultural perspectives among the participants would qualify as global? What quality of learning experiences by students would result from or correspond to a globalized classroom? Since globalization can be positive or negative, when students and educators are from different cultures, what kind of pedagogical considerations can assure a positive form of globalization as the outcome of a course?

Lest the globalized classroom be reduced to a mere slogan or label, the factors involved need to be clarified with greater precision. This chapter aims to contribute to a theoretical framework of explanatory concepts augmenting existing literature, and grounded in a case of teaching online education to graduate students in Japan. Issues focused upon will include cross-cultural pedagogy, particularly testing the universality of the constructivist paradigm across cultures. Explanatory concepts proposed for their suitability to the globalized classroom and corresponding student experiences will include globalization, transformative learning, and empowerment. By the above criteria, the intensive course in online education, particularly the voluntary feedback from the graduate students, mostly translated from Japanese, will bear on the extent to which a globalized classroom has already been realized.

Case of the Tsukuba Course on Online Education

In Japan's Science City of Tsukuba just north of Tokyo from February 16-20, 2004, the author taught an intensive course at the national University of Tsukuba entitled Online Education in Theory, Practice, and Applying the Internet to English Education. The graduate students were majoring in English as Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogy. Three of the eight learners were already English schoolteachers and were at the Graduate School of Education for further studies.

With considerable preparations at a distance, the physical and virtual learning environments were designed. Complex planning involved securing a networked computer classroom that had not been used before for such courses, ensuring that the necessary hardware and software would be available, including having technical support staff install java runtime software necessary for the Internet voice technologies.

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