Chapter 5

Building a Global E–Community:
Intercultural Courses on Human Rights Education

Sandra Reitz
Amnesty International & Goethe University Frankfurt, Germany

ABSTRACT

Traditional E-Learning programs mostly focus on disseminating knowledge. Motivation and the transfer to behavior in everyday situations are often neglected. Human Rights Education specifically encompasses attitudes and behavior, but the challenge is to bring this into a virtual setting. The Intercultural Courses on Human Rights Education were conducted with 80 learners from five different countries: USA, the Dominican Republic, Morocco, Germany, and Mongolia. The chapter first describes the practical background of these courses as well as theoretical considerations regarding computer-mediated communication and social constructivist learning approaches. The main focus lies on giving practical examples from the course, which include forum discussions, working with pseudonyms, internet research, and building a human rights conformant society in a simulation. A pre- and post-test enabled a thorough evaluation for all three learning areas: knowledge, attitudes and skills. The results of this evaluation, several lessons learned and a future learning scenario will be shared.

INTRODUCTION

After the "hype" of E-Learning in the past few years, a distinct disenchantment can be observed. Extremely high cancellation rates (Tyler-Smith, 2006) and a loss of motivation due to a lack of exchange with other learners contribute to this disenchantment. On the one hand, E-Learning – just like distance learning in general - requires a high motivation and a high competence for self-learning. The feeling of being "lost in hyperspace" makes it more difficult for the learners to keep an overview of the extent of the program, and previous knowledge of the learner is hardly taken into account. On the other hand, E-Learning environments can be more individualized than classroom trainings, and the combination of different media and learning paths

enable the consideration of different learning styles and preferences.

Still, the majority of E-Learning programs in the past have stuck to a more traditional approach, focusing on transferring knowledge and "page-turning". Motivation and the transfer to behavior in everyday situations have often been neglected. The setting has mostly been an isolated learner going through textual wasteland of material, and sometimes completing quizzes afterwards to ensure that a knowledge transfer has taken place.

This chapter wishes to show an alternative to this traditional approach. In 2007, Intercultural Courses on Human Rights Education were conducted with learning groups from all over the globe. Learners were not isolated, but members of an e-community exchanging ideas, questions and opinions while at the same time working in small virtual project teams. Even though there were also drop-outs in this course, the building of a virtual community and the importance of exchange as opposed to an isolated learning as well as some responsibility for the success of the project teams increased the motivation of the learners. The courses specifically focused not only on knowledge, but also on the formation and reflection of attitudes and on the acquisition of skills. Working on attitudes and skills was the real challenge for these courses, as hardly any E-Learning programs have tried to do that so far.

Whereas the used technology does not include the latest state of the art, it is the setting of an intercultural course and the inclusion of attitudes and behavior which makes the approach future-oriented. The focus lies clearly on didactic approaches for the world of tomorrow.

BACKGROUND

The Intercultural Courses on Human Rights Education were conducted as a part of a dissertation (Reitz, 2009) at the UNESCO-Chair for Human Rights Education at the University of Magdeburg, and with the support of Amnesty International Germany.

About 80 learners between 16 and 25 years from five different countries participated in the course. Exchange was fostered between all groups of students who came from Michigan State University (USA), and schools in Göttingen (Germany), Marrakesh (Morocco), Salcedo (Dominican Republic) and Ulanbaator (Mongolia). The learners were in various local settings and with variable access to the internet, which of course was a challenge. The learner groups were acquired through their educators – most of these educators had participated in a previously conducted multipliers' course on Human Rights Education and E-Learning. The virtual learning environment was realized with the open-source platform "Moodle" (Moodle, 2008).

The initial situation for the sub-groups was very heterogeneous, especially in form of access to the virtual learning environment, whether the course for them was part of a school setting, and in terms of their level of English. The learners from Germany and the USA were the groups with the easiest access (from home or from school) to the virtual learning environment, while also being the ones most embedded in a school or university setting. The majority of the learners from Morocco, the Dominican Republic and Mongolia were voluntary participants in the project and usually had to go to an internet cafe to access the virtual learning environment, which of course led to a difference in the time and effort they spent on the project.

Before going into the details of the course, some theoretical clarifications and considerations are necessary that will be laid out in the next three sub-chapters.

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/building-global-community/40728

Related Content

ICT Integration Efforts in Higher Education in Developing Economies: The Case of Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia

Dawit Tibebu, Tridib Bandyopadhyayand Solomon Negash (2009). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 34-58).*

www.irma-international.org/article/ict-integration-efforts-higher-education/3984

Information and Communication Technology in China: Connecting 200 Million Children for Better Education

Xiaobin Li (2009). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 34-43).*

www.irma-international.org/article/information-communication-technology-china/37518

Web-Based Course Development Tools

Hui-Ling Wu (2009). *Encyclopedia of Distance Learning, Second Edition (pp. 2324-2330).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/web-based-course-development-tools/12070

PowerPoint Presentations Increase Achievement and Student Attitudes Towards Technology

Michael Fedissonand Silvia Braidic (2007). *International Journal of Information and Communication Technology Education (pp. 64-75).*

www.irma-international.org/article/powerpoint-presentations-increase-achievement-student/2330

Usability Evaluation of Online Learning Programs

Bernard Blandin (2008). *Online and Distance Learning: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 475-481).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/usability-evaluation-online-learning-programs/27406