Different strokes: Asian journalists' online learning strategies

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Abstract

Various obstacles usually deter journalists from taking long-term training and education, such as the huge costs involved, the separation from family and work. To overcome these obstacles and encourage graduate education among Asian journalists, a distance-learning master's degree program in journalism was conceived and launched in the Philippines in 2003. The program uses blended learning methods, ie: the combined use of synchronous, asynchronous, and face-to-face methods; English is the medium of instruction. On its eighth year, the program has graduated 61 students from 14 Asian countries.

Observing the growth of the program, and the vigorous learning interactions and the social networks that grow during the classes and are sustained afterwards, we ask how learning - in particular critical thinking, the goal of higher education - occurs and is fostered in the program. The study's framework is the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrisson, Anderson and Archer, 2000) which proposes that for online learning to achieve its goals, online learners must develop into a community of inquiry wherein social interaction is marked by a structured discussion that results in higher learning. In an online learning environment the community of inquiry is formed as a result of the social interactions arising from social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence. Using this model, we examined the strategies, i.e., the indicators of the three presences, used by students and teachers to build a community of inquiry.

Given the regional nature of the program, we also gathered data to examine diversity in the classes so that the findings may be appreciated in light of cultural differences or similarities.

A survey was conducted to obtain data on the social, cognitive and teaching presences in the program, and to determine cultural variability among students and faculty members. The presences were operationally defined on the basis of a set of indicators derived from related studies (eg: Rourke et al, 2001) and anecdotal data from students and teachers.

The cultural diversity variables examined were first, identity variables: country of origin and gender, and second, variables pertaining to the school system. In addition, data about the respondents' online learning skills and access was gathered through the following variables: prior experience in online learning or teaching, source of access, use/non-use of broadband services.

Findings suggest that the respondents tended to use the strategies of social presence, cognitive

presence and teaching presence that were appropriate to their respective classroom roles and that these strategies tended to reflect dominant cultural traits in Asia.

Introduction

Asia is a continent of 49 countries representing a multitude of cultures. Various efforts are forged to bring these countries and cultures together to foster peace and share visions. Education that provides a cross-cultural experience is one approach and is of particular importance in journalism, the profession that mediates realities for vast audiences. As the news has valuable implications in the management of cultural differences, it is important for journalists to have an informed and intelligent understanding of other cultures.

A training and education program that leverages on cultural diversity is at the core of the work of a university-based journalism training center in Manila, Philippines, the Konrad Adenauer Asian Center for Journalism at the Ateneo de Manila University (referred to below using its acronym, ACFJ). Named after its two major stakeholders – the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a German political foundation, and the Ateneo, a private, Catholic, Jesuit university in the Philippines, the ACFJ envisions to become a regional training hub for Asian journalists. In light of this it builds on the capabilities and potentials of online distance learning to overcome the obstacles that usually deter journalists from taking long-term training and education, such as the huge costs involved, the separation from the family and work, and resource constraints on the part of the training institution.

Thus ACFJ developed blended learning methods, or the combined use of synchronous, asynchronous, and face-to-face methods, to conduct its courses. In 2001, it offered its first online courses , namely, Investigative Journalism, Media Law and Reporting on Conflict and Peace. In 2003 it opened a two-year program leading to the Master of Arts (M. A.) in Journalism. The first enrollees were seven journalists and one public information expert from the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. Four years hence, the program has graduated 45 students, 90 percent of them working journalists, from Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Sri Lanka. At present it has students from these countries as well as from Vietnam, Pakistan and Nepal. Like the student body, the faculty is of diverse origins, coming from or are based in countries in Asia, Australia, Europe and North America.

Building a Community of Learners among Asian Journalists

Objectives

Observing the growth of the program, and the vigorous learning interactions and the social networks that grow during the classes and are sustained afterwards, a key question we ask is whether learning - in particular critical thinking which is the goal of higher education - occurs and is fostered in the program. The Community of Inquiry Model proposed by Garrisson, Anderson and Archer (2000) provides a useful way of engaging this question. The model proposes that for online learning to achieve its goals, the participants must develop into a community of inquiry wherein social interaction is marked by a structured discussion that results in higher learning. In an online learning environment the community of inquiry is formed as a result of the social interactions arising from social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence. Using this model, we conducted an exploratory study to determine the strategies, i.e., the indicators of the three presences, used by the students and teachers to build a community of inquiry.

Given the regional nature of the program, we also gathered data to examine diversity in the classes so that the findings may be appreciated in light of cultural differences or similarities. However, due to the negligible number of cases of some nationality groups, we deferred an analysis of the relationship between the cultural variability indicators and the variables comprising the Community of Inquiry Model.

Challenges of Catering to Contemporary Students

Online learning, the use of computer technology for an educational activity (Harasim, et al., 1997), is characterized by the quasi-permanent geographic separation of teacher and learners, the oversight and influence of an educational organization, the use of technical media to deliver course materials and facilitate two-way communication, and the physical absence of a learning group (Keegan, 1996). Online learning presents educational institutions the opportunity to extend its reach to underserved learners and, conversely, provides students access to education that may

have previously been beyond their grasp (Ciges, 2001; Harasim, et al.., 1997; Keegan, 1996; Smith & Ayers, 2006).

Online learning grew and continues to grow in response to changes in workforce and therefore learner characteristics. Gone are the days of lifetime jobs and intensive corporate training. To retain competitiveness, workers are expected to remain flexible and highly-trained. In response to this need, educational institutions have established online learning programs that cater to non-conventional learners: geographically dispersed; mobile; over 25 years old; with work experience; constrained by location, time, and professional or personal obligations; largely self- or privately-funded (Harasim, et al., 1997; Powell, et al., 1999). This differs markedly from the typical college student who is fresh out of high school, under 24 years old, and has little to no work experience nor outside obligations.

Convening a potentially diverse group of learners presents unique opportunities for showcasing a variety of expertise, ideas, language, values, arts, beliefs and traditions (Ciges, 2001; Smith & Ayers, 2006). In such a group cultural sensitivity is fostered as learners find themselves engaged in collaborative work and sharing knowledge and experience in a multicultural setting (Ciges, 2001; Wang, 2001).

Building this sense of community, though, is a challenge. Teachers and students may convene either for didactic or socialization purposes, or both, but . much of the learning throughout a program of study takes place on an individual basis (Keegan, 1996). Geographic separation, delays in feedback, the absence of non-verbal cues, intra-group differences and other factors can result in feelings of isolation which in turn have adverse effects on student motivation (Ciges, 2001; Harasim, et al., 1997; Powell, et al., 1999; Wang, 2001).

Framework of Analysis

For an online learning undertaking to succeed, it is essential for teachers and students to build an online learning community that fosters the exchange of ideas, information, and feelings (Ciges, 2001). Community develops when people care about one another and when they exercise non-critical acceptance, patience and tolerance of each other's independent beliefs (Wang, 2001). Lauzon (1999) in Smith & Ayers (2006) refers to the building of a community of practice, i.e. a

group of knowledgeable peers who share an inventory of relevant concepts, beliefs, theories, and values that enable them to solve problems within their sphere of influence as well as maintain social cohesion. Essential to building this community is dialogue: communication among individuals in which each participant affirms the other, even when conflict occurs (Wang, 2001).

Interaction in online learning takes place along three levels, namely: learner- instructor interaction, learner-content interaction, and learner-learner interaction (Moore, 1989). These three types of interaction are the components of a theoretical model called the "Community of Inquiry" developed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). According to the model, an effective online educational community is created as a result of three critical components, namely: cognitive presence, social presence and teaching presence. The model postulates that deep and meaningful learning results when there are sufficient levels of these three component "presences. Anderson (2004,) describes how these 'presences' combine to create an effective online learning environment, thus:

The first requirement is a "sufficient degree of cognitive presence, such that serious learning can take place in an environment that supports the development and growth of critical thinking skills" (Anderson, 2004, p. 274).

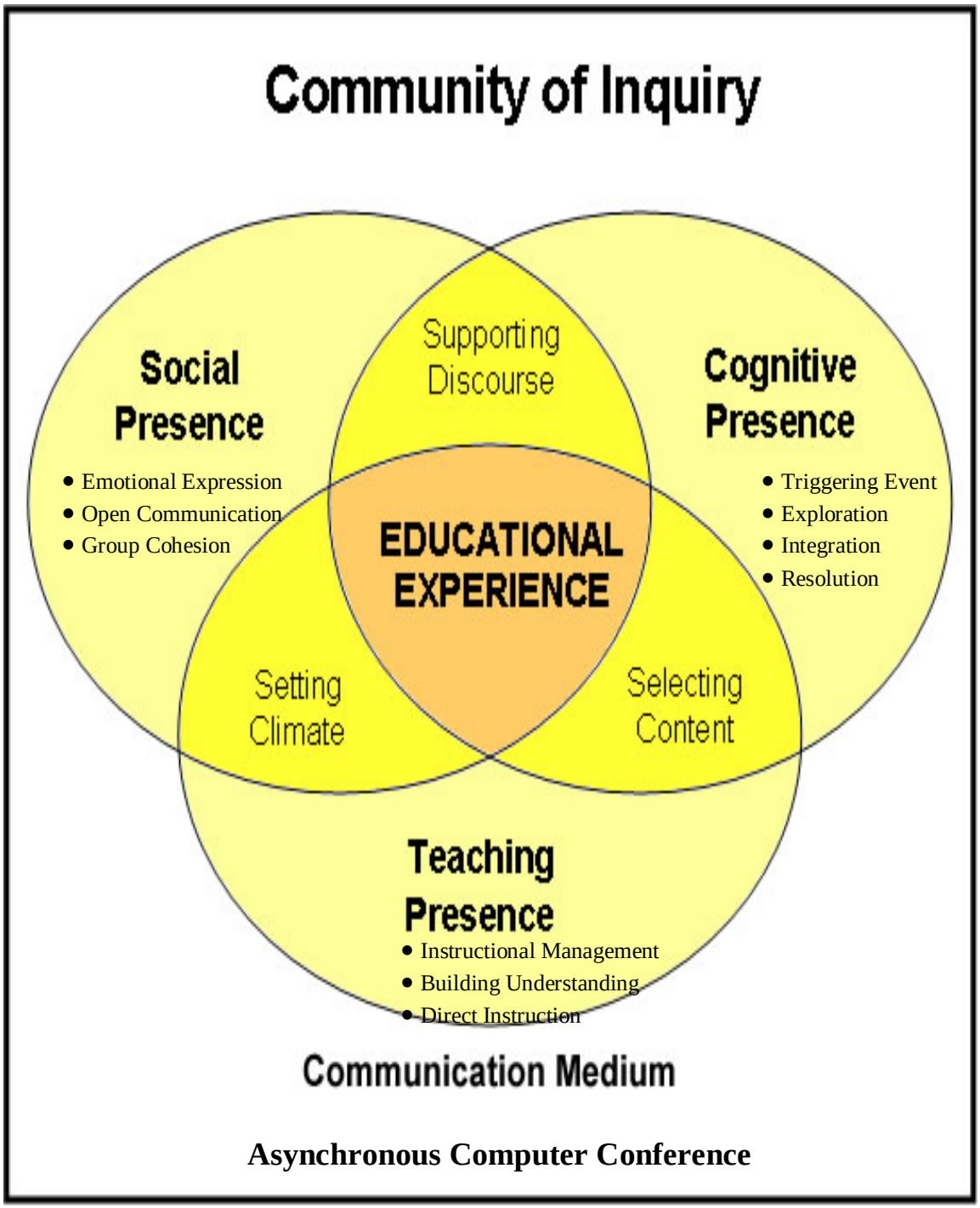
The second component, social presence, is defined by Anderson (ibid) to refer " to the establishment of a supportive environment such that students feel the necessary degree of comfort and safety to express their ideas in a collaborative context. The absence of social presence leads to an inability to express disagreements, share viewpoints, explore differences, and accept support and confirmation from peers and teacher. "

The third component, teaching presence, is a composite of the following roles: 1) the design and organization of the learning experience, 2) "devising and implementing learning activities to encourage discourse between and among students, between the teacher and the student, and between individual students and groups of students and content resources" (Anderson, 2000 as cited in Anderson, 2004, p. 274) , 3) contributing subject matter expertise through a variety of forms of direct instruction, and 4) in formal education: a "credentiating role that involves the assessment and certification of student learning" (Anderson, 2004, p. 275) . –

Students also perform teaching roles. Anderson (2004, p. 274) asserts that "the creation of teaching presence is not always the sole task of the formal teacher. In many contexts, especially when teaching at senior university level, teaching presence is delegated to or assumed by students as they contribute their own skills and knowledge to the developing learning community."

Figure 1 below illustrates the relationships of the three elements in an asynchronous learning environment and Table 1 shows the dimensions and indicators of social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence (Garrison & Anderson, 2003).

Figure 1. The Community of Inquiry Model in an Asynchronous Computer Conference



Source: Garrison, Anderson & Archer (2000)

Table 1. Indicators of Community of Inquiry

ELEMENTS	CATEGORIES	INDICATORS
Social Presence	Emotional Expression	Emoticons; Autobiographical narratives; Self-disclosure; Expression of emotions; Use of humor; Paralanguage
	Open Communication	Risk-free expression; Acknowledging others; Quoting from others' messages; Being encouraging
	Group Cohesion	Encouraging collaboration; Complimenting/expressing appreciation; Expressing agreement; Refers to group using inclusive pronouns; Helping and supporting
Cognitive Presence	Triggering Event	Sense of puzzlement; Recognizing the problem
	Exploration	Information exchange; Discussion of ambiguities; Moving between private and shared worlds
	Integration	Connecting ideas; Creating solutions
	Resolution	Applying new ideas; Critically assessing solutions
Teaching Presence	Instructional Management	Structuring content; Setting discussion topics; Designing methods; Establishing etiquette; Responding to technical concerns; Establishing discussion groups
	Building Understanding	Sharing personal meaning/values; Expressing agreement; Seeking consensus; Drawing in participants
	Direct Instruction	Focusing and pacing discussion; Presenting content/questions; Answering questions; Diagnosing misconceptions; Summarizing learning outcomes or issues

Source: Garrison & Anderson (2003)

The Community of Inquiry model has been examined in research work at the University of Alberta (http://www.atl.ualberta.ca/cmc) as well as in a study of the online learning courses offered by the ACFJ using qualitative and quantitative measures.

Using content analysis Borsoto (2004) sought to determine the presence of the indicators of a community of inquiry in three online journalism courses offered by ACFJ in 2003. The study used a content analysis instrument based on the categories in the Transcript Analysis Tool (TAT) developed by Fahy et al (2000). in which sentences were classified into the following five primary categories: questioning, statements, reflections, interpersonal coaching and scaffolding, and quotations and citations. These categories were then aligned with the Community of Inquiry model so that each sentence category pertains to a particular element in the model. Findings showed an "obvious interplay of the elements of social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence" in the courses examined. The frequency distribution of statements that indicated cognitive, teaching and social presence was almost uniform, indicating that the online learning environment exhibited equal amounts of the three presences.

In an exploratory study, Valdez (2005) equated social, cognitive, and teaching presences with indicators of online class participation, namely the frequency of hits, downloads, posts and presence in weekly chat sessions. It was sought to determine the relationship between the student's social and cognitive presences and the grades they obtained, and also the relationship between the teacher's social, cognitive and teaching presences and the scores they obtained from the students' evaluation of the course. Findings showed that the frequency of student presences tended to be related to their grades, and that the teacher's presences were related to their evaluation scores.

The Role of Diversity

As in many social processes, cultural variabilities impinge on the processes and outcomes of teaching and learning. Cultural variations may be understood using Hofstede's Cultural Variability Theory (1980) which proposes that country cultures vary along the four main

dimensions of individualism - collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity. The theory also argues that ethnic and religious groups, gender, generation, social class and social structure assert a strong influence on the value patterns within a particular culture (Ting-Toomey, 1999).

Cultural variations are manifested in many ways in the formal school system. In learning and teaching, the degree to which the following methods are employed may vary: deep vs. rote learning, studying hard vs. enjoying studying, intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation, whole class vs. individual learning (Leung, 2000), teacher vs. student-centeredness (Li, Fox & Almarza, 2007; Rennie & Mason, 2007; Wong, 2004), creative vs. concrete work (Wong, 2004) and exam-based vs. multi-dimensional
assessment (Leung, 2000; Morse, 2003). The four dimensions of cultural variability and social group membership may exert an influence on variations in educational practices.

Literature cites several teaching and learning styles or preferences that vary across cultures. As a whole, Asian cultures tend to stress listening over speaking and places less emphasis on class discussion (Li, Fox, & Almarza, 2007). Differences within the region have been observed however, with the East Asian culture tending to emphasize memorization as a vehicle for deepening understanding. Premium is placed on hard work as well as motivation through high-stakes public examinations and on the social nature of learning, with a preference to learning in groups rather than individually (Leung, 2000).

In comparing Asian and Australian learning styles, Rambuth (2001) noted that Asians were less critical of information, less inclined to seek clarification or to discover or explore concepts on their own. Australians, on the other hand, were expected to be more critical and less accepting of information, more aggressive about seeking assistance or clarification, and more likely to engage in independent learning and research.

In the same vein, cultural variations may shape the online learning practices that teachers and students use to create a community of inquiry.

Online journalism training for Asian journalists

The online learning program described in this chapter was a response to the increasing complexity of journalism practice in Asia. This is due, among others, to factors such as new forms of threats to press freedom, rapid changes in information and communication technology, competition, changing audience habits and complex social issues many of which, for instance, health, environmental and political problems, transcend national boundaries. All these add to the complexity of newsgathering and reporting today. Journalism training programs offered usually by national press institutes and media advocacy groups seek to help journalists retool and be at the forefront of developments. ACFJ counts itself among these organizations but is unique in light of its academic base, its regional scope, and use of online learning. The platform employed is WebCT, and the methods used are a blend of the asynchronous method through the discussion board, the synchronous method through chat sessions and conventional classroom methods.

Online learning met the requirements of the ACFJ vision of an ideal educational and training environment for Asian journalists in many ways. It presents practical as well as content-related advantages to adult learners (Ally, 2004; Anderson, 2004, Valdez, 2004). An obvious advantage is flexibility of access. In asynchronous online learning students can access materials at their convenience from their own locations, while in synchronous online learning, students may negotiate with teachers the schedule of the real time interaction, also from their chosen locations. As to learning content, online learning allows for 'situated learning' since learners can attend their courses without having to leave their own space, and can thus contextualize learning. Moreover, it offers journalists an opportunity to hone their skills in the use of wired and wireless resources of contemporary society and to the skills needed to use these in their jobs.

Second, online learning facilitates participation by students and faculty from neighboring countries hence making it possible to bring the Asian dimension into class discussions. Third, it is learner-centered: it demands active participation from students in the teaching and learning process – an important ingredient in adult learning. Fourth, it solves the dilemma posed by limited resources – the inverse reltationship between the broadness of ACFJ's coverage and ambition, on the one hand, and the limits of its resources, on the other. Fifth, it offers journalists an opportunity to hone their skills in the use of ICT for good journalism.

In the 11-course master's program, the three core courses are conducted using all three methods, i,e.: the class meets online in the discussion board and in the chat room as well as on-campus. The three core courses are Media Ethics, Media Law and Advanced Reporting and Writing. Electives are conducted entirely online and include specialized reporting such as Reporting about Conflict and Peace, Reporting about Elections, Covering Religions; advanced reporting skills such as Investigative Reporting and Multimedia Journalism: and management skills such as Newsroom Management and Leadership Styles. Each course takes eight weeks of instruction via the discussion board and the weekly chat sessions. Cognate courses chosen from allied fields such as the humanities and the natural sciences are taken by the students as conventional classroom courses during a six-week summer semester.

Online courses are known to suffer from attrition rates that are higher than the rates observed in conventional classes, namely: 20-50 percent and 10-20 percent respectively (Frankola, 2001). In the ACFJ master's program however, only two attritions have been observed since school year 2003-004. Moreover, the rate of degree completion has been very high with most students finishing within the prescribed period of two years although almost all of them retained full time employment as journalists while working towards the degree. Most of them enjoy a full fellowship granted annually by ACFJ to 15 working journalists with outstanding and career records.

Since June 2003 up to June 2007, 93 students from 13 Asian countries and one from Germany, have enrolled in the master's program. Most were professional journalists (80, or 86%); a majority were women (49, or 52 %), and Most of the students (79, or 83%) were from Southeast Asian countries, predominantly from the Philippines (55, or 59%), and the others from), Malaysia (11), Indonesia (7), Burma (2), Vietnam (2), and Thailand (1).

Filipinos also comprised the largest nationality group in the faculty (12 of 25, or 48%). The others originated from the USA (4), Canada (2), Australia (2), India (2), China (1), Germany (1) and Malaysia (1).

Method of Data-gathering

A survey was conducted to obtain data on the social, cognitive and teaching presences in the ACFJ online master's program, and to determine cultural variability among its students and faculty members. The presences were operationally defined on the basis of the indicators in Table 1, related studies (eg: Rourke et al., 2001) as well as anecdotal information from students and teachers. In the questionnaire the respondents were asked to indicate in a five-point scale - always, often, sometimes, rarely, never - wherein 'always' was rated 5 and 'never' 1, whether they used the strategies referring to the three presences whenever these were appropriate or applicable. Mean scores were taken for each strategy.

The cultural diversity variables examined were first, identity variables: country of origin and gender, and second, variables pertaining to the school system. In addition, data about the respondents' online learning skills and access was gathered through the following variables: prior experience in online learning or teaching, source of access, use/non-use of broadband services.

To determine validity, the questionnaire was pre-tested on six graduate students who had taken online courses and four teachers who have had experience teaching online.

Results

Cultural Diversity: Identity Variables

Respondents were sought from 77 students and 25 faculty members from 2003 up to the summer semester (April - May) 2007 (Table 2). The largest number of students (44, or 57%) and teachers (12, or 48%) came from the Philippines. When classified according to region, the largest number of students were from Southeast Asian countries, namely Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, Cambodia, and Philippines. Taken together they comprised 86 percent of the student body.

A majority of the students were female (43, or 56%) while most faculty members were were male (16, or 64%).

A majority of the students worked as journalists or editors for print, online, or broadcast media while the others worked for government, non-government organizations, law firms, and educational institutions.

The questionnaires were sent via email. Fifty-five students and 18 teachers returned the questionnaire, accounting for a response rate of 71 and 72 percent, respectively. Only one follow-up was made due to time constraints; most of the non-response came from emails which had bounced back. A majority of the respondents (56%) were students from the Philippines. Respondents from Southeast Asian countries comprised most of the student respondents (47, or 85 %), thus reflecting the geographical distribution of the student body.

Table 2. Distribution of students and respondents, by country of origin and gender.

Country of Origin	**All Students**	**Respondents**
Bangladesh	1	0
Burma	2	0
Cambodia	3	3
China	1	1
Germany	1	1
India	4	3
Indonesia	6	5
Malaysia	8	5
Nepal	1	1
Pakistan	1	1
Philippines	44	31
Sri Lanka	2	1
Thailand	1	1
Vietnam	2	2
Total	77	55
Gender		
Female	43	27
Male	34	28
Total	77	55

Cultural Diversity: Variations in School System

To obtain data on differences in practices in the formal school system, respondents were asked to state their agreement or disagreement to statements reflective of teacher-centered instruction, encouragement of deep learning, adherence to national standards, the use of individual or group learning techniques, respect for diversity and extra-curricular involvement.

Findings show that the students and faculty respondents came from schools which practiced teacher-centered techniques such as lectures and memorization, deep-learning approaches such as research, analysis and reasoning, and both group and individual learning.

Respondents also reported that their schools generally respected diversity both in terms of skill levels and points of view by encouraging the following: recitation, seeking help whenever needed, the sharing of ideas, opinions or points of views, sensitivity to other people's opinions and speaking out one's mind.

In terms of language proficiency, the survey showed that only 9 (or 16%) of the student respondents were not educated in English at some stage - either in the elementary, secondary or tertiary level - of their formal education. Most of them (42, or 81 %) had English as medium of instruction in the high school. It must be noted that English proficiency was important because English was used at ACFJ as it was the mandatory medium of instruction in the secondary and tertiary levels in the Philippines. Hence non-Filipino students were required to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) and obtain a score of at least 600.

Thus, the results show that despite their geographical dispersion, both student and faculty respondents tend to be used to a variety of teaching and learning styles, underwent formal education in environments where diversity of and respect for opinion were fostered, and shared experience in a common language – English. Such varied experiences and an open-minded attitude are important foundations for building an online learning community (Ciges, 2001; Garrison & Anderson, 2003).

Online Learning Skills, Access and Experience

Obviously a requisite of online learning is engagement with the technology. Most faculty and student respondents used broadband Internet services (2 or 11%; and 6 or 10%, respectively) and almost all accessed the courses from at least three places: either from their offices, homes, or Internet cafés, indicating a high level of engagement with the technology in their daily lives. However, with a few exceptions, the courses were the teachers' and students' first experience of online learning. Only 2 of the 18 teacher respondents (11%) had previously taught online while only 8 of the 55 students (14.5%) had prior experience in online learning.

Strategies of Community Building

The Community of Inquiry is formed from social interactions that arise from social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence. Various methods are employed to assert these presences.

Social Presence

Social presence, according to the model, is indicated by emotional expression, open communication and group cohesion. Results show that the respondents used all the indicators of social presence in a positive way towards the building of a community of inquiry as indicated by the prevalence of mean scores of 3 and lesser (Table 3). Moreover, there is a tendency for the teachers and the students to use the same strategies.

The data shows that among the categories of strategies of social presence, both the teachers and students used the strategies of emotional expression the least used. as indicated by the mean scores The respondents tended to use these strategies infrequently (sometimes).

Among the 12 indicators of open communication, both the students and teachers reported that they used the following most often: welcoming students or classmates on the first week of classes, opening a message with a greeting such as "Hello!", and visiting the course at least once a day. The least used strategy was the use of strong words to express displeasure (mean score of 3.6 for students and 4.0 for teachers). The use of ironic remarks was also infrequent (mean of 3.0 for students and 3.5 for teachers).

One teacher respondent has remarked that information, even when individuals disagreed, the class found amicable ways of settling differences. One teacher recalled an incident in which a usually jovial student was unhappy with feedback that he had received for an essay. The student came to a chat with a bone to pick. It took five to six hours of chatting during which the teacher, the student and several other colleagues processed the incident. In the end, they turned the whole situation into a humorous memory as well as a greater sense of achievement and camaraderie.

To reinforce group cohesion, the most often used strategy among teachers was that of giving compliments to good work (mean: 1.3) while among students, it was the strategy of expressing agreement with like-minded persons (mean: 1.6).

The findings point to a tendency among the students and teachers to maximize harmony and minimize conflict as a strategy in asserting social presence to form a community of inquiry. This tendency has been observed as an Asian trait and is consistent with cultures characterized by collectivism rather than individualism. Cultures which manifest collectivism emphasize relationships among people (Ting-Toomey, 1999; Jandt, 2007). Interdependent activities are stressed while individual aims may be suppressed to make way for the group's welfare. In a ranking of 50 countries along the dimension of collectivism-individualism, Hofstede ranked many Asian countries below European countries. For instance, Malaysia ranked 36, the Philippines 31 and Indonesia and Pakistan, 47/48. The US, Australia and U.K. ranked among the top three (Hofstede, 2001).

Table 3. Students and teachers' use of strategies of social presence, by mean scores.*

Categories and Indicators		
Emotional Expression	Students N: 55	Teachers N: 18
Use of emoticons	3.4	4.0
Sharing personal experiences	n.a.**	3.0
Sharing personal information	3.1	4.2
Use of humor	3.0	3.1
Use of paralanguage	3.0	3.2
Open Communication		
Making reference to classmates / teacher	2.2	3.0
Beginning message with a greeting	1.5	1.2
Ending message with a salutation	2.2	2.3
Welcoming classmates / students on first week of classes	1.5	1
Calling classmates / students by their nicknames	2.1	2.0
Using strong words to express displeasure	3.6	4.0
Using ironic remarks instead of insults	3.0	3.5
Visiting the course site at least once a day	1.3	1.5
Posting at least 2 messages for each topic	2.0	2.0
Exchanging emails with classmates outside class	2.4	n.a.
Sending SMS or calling classmates outside class	3.0	n.a.
Chatting with classmates outside class	3.1	n.a.
Communicating with students outside class	n.a.	2.1
Group Cohesion		
Expressing agreement with like-minded persons	1.6	2.0
Complimenting outstanding posts / works	2.8	1.3
Preferring to work with a partner/group; encouraging group work	2.3	3.0
Offering help	2.0	2.0
Giving encouragement and support	2.4	1.5

*Scores ranged from 1 to 5, with the following references: 1 – always; 2 – often; 3 – sometimes; 4 – rarely, and 5 – never.

**n.a. stands for 'not applicable' and is used here to refer to statements which were not in the questionnaire for either the student or the teacher respondent.

Cognitive Presence

The strategies for cognitive presence fall under the following categories: triggering event, exploration and integration. Data shows the prevalence of mean scores of 2 and below, indicating that most of the strategies were used frequently by the students and teachers (Table 4) . The teachers most often used strategies were: asking questions to steer discussion, connecting ideas and offering synthesis (mean scores of 1.4, 1.5 and 1.5 respectively). Among the students, the most prevalent strategy was that of asking clarifying questions (mean: 1.6). The techniques referring to triggering discussions and integrating ideas tended to be used more by the teachers than the students.

Based on anecdotal information, teachers tend to make the observation that discussions were generally robust and enthusiastic. Students were eager to contribute to the discussion. One teacher noted that some of the students searched for and quoted articles that he had written years earlier but which were not part of the reading list and therefore were additional inputs to the discussions.

Table 4. Students' and teachers' use of strategies of cognitive presence, by mean scores.

Categories and Indicators		
Triggering Event	Students N: 18	Teachers N: 55
Ask questions to steer discussion	2.3	1.4
Exploration		
Ask clarifying questions	1.6	n.a.*
Offer information	2.0	n.a.
Comment on posts of my classmates.	2.2	n.a.
IOffer my own opinions.	2.0	n.a.
Integration		
Try to connect ideas	2.0	1.5
Offer synthesis of discussions.	3.0	1.5
Offer own analysis	2.1	2.1
Offer solutions	n.a.	2.1

*n.a. stands for 'not applicable' and is used here to refer to statements which were not in the questionnaire for either the student or the teacher respondent.

Teaching Presence

Teaching presence was indicated by strategies that aimed at building understanding, instructional management, and direct instruction. Judging from the prevalence of mean scores of 2.0 and below (Table 5) , the teachers frequently used all the strategies appropriate to their role. The least used strategy was that of sharing personal questions (mean score: 3). The mean score for all the strategies for direct instruction ranged from 1.2 to 1.3, indicating high frequency of use.

The strategy of drawing all students into the discussion is illustrated by a teacher who reported that in chat sessions she called' each student one by one to give them the chance to speak. the floor when it was their turn to speak. This regulated the flow and pace of the chat and at the same time gave students the sense that their voices were being heard.

Among students, the strategy that was always employed was the observance of class consensus (Table 6; mean score: 1.2)) as a way to create understanding. Among the indicators of direct instruction, the raising of clarificatory questions was reported as most frequently used (mean score: 1.5).

The prevalent strategies for cognitive and teaching presence point to a more dominant role of the teacher performing classroom management roles and teaching. Using the cultural variability dimensions, this may be understood in light of the dimension referred to as power distance, or "the extent to which less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede, 1997). Malaysia, Philippines and Indonesia have been observed to be high power distance cultures (Hofstede, 2001). In such cultures, hierarchy is emphasized and expected to be observed strictly.

Table 5. Teachers' use of strategies of teaching presence, by mean scores. N: 18

Categories and Indicators	
Instructional Management	**Mean Score**
set discussion topics for each week.	1.3
comment on each post	2.0
respond to technical questions.	2.2
urge students to comment on each others' works	2.0
give feedback to assignments within a reasonable time	1.3
design varied teaching methods	2.0
enforce house rules.	1.5
Building and Understanding	3.0
share personal experiences.	1.3
seek consensus for class activities	1.4
draw all students into the discussion	1.4
Direct Instruction	
pose questions/talking points to kick off discussions	1.2
pose questions/talking points to kick off discussions	1.3
ask questions to center or focus discussion.	1.2
ask questions to expand discussion.	1.3
seek to detect and correct misconceptions.	1.2

Table 6. Students' use of strategies of teaching presence, by mean scores. N: 55

Categories and indicators	
Strategies	Mean Score
Building understanding	
Abide by class consensus	1.2
Direct Instruction	
Ask clarifying questions	1.5
Ask questions/ post messages to focus discussion.	2.2
Ask questions / post messages to expand discussion.	2.3

Future trends

When the ACFJ master's program began, the principal focus was on print journalists., Most of the students and faculty accessed the courses by 56 kbps dial-up lines. Video and audio streaming were commercially available but at prohibitive costs. Because of these limitations, the course materials had to be text-based and relatively small in size for ease of download. Interactions were limited to discussion postings and chats, both of which were text-based.

As word about the success experiences of the first batches of students spread, as ACFJ grew more comfortable with the online learning technology and the technology itself evolved, courses which required higher levels of technology such as those in broadcast journalism and photojournalism could be developed. There will be further development of these courses as video conferencing, voice-over-Internet, Internet radio, and video streaming become widely used, These curricular changes and technological advances have created opportunities to extend and expand the bandwidth of communication and interaction among teachers and students. The ACFJ anticipates that, in the future, online courses will enjoy greater video and audio support, as well as interactive multimedia materials. As this happens, synchronous methods will play a greater role in online learning, the master's program will evolve to be more specialist rather than generalist in orientation, and more journalists from across Asia will be attracted to it, creating greater diversity.

Conclusion

Data suggest that a community of inquiry is built in the online journalism program as a result of various strategies that assert social presence, cognitive presence and teaching presence. The differentiated use of the strategies suggest that there are some strategies which are consistent with the roles and cultural traits of the learners and teachers.

In a further study it may be sought to examine the relationship between online learning strategies and cultures. Findings will be useful in devising strategies that are particularly effective in multicultural settings and at the same time foster rather than repress diversity.

It will be noted that the strategies examined pertained more to strategies of asynchronous communication. In a future study, strategies specific to synchronous communication via chat or video conferencing should also be examined. This becomes particularly relevant in light of the growing ease of access to such technologies.

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