Culture, Ethics of Care, Community, and Language in Online Learning Environments: Supporting Adult Educators in a Digital Era

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Abstract

Considering the increase in the number of online courses and programs across the globe, preparing educators for creating inclusive online environments for learners

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to thrive is imperative. The worldwide pandemic of 2020, in a sense, only accelerated the already rising trends of online course offerings in higher education and further expanded it to other sections of education and geographical locations. Reviewing the existing literature and building on the authors' experiences, this chapter uses a cultural and ethical lens to examine issues related to community and language to contribute to the design of equitable and inclusive online learning environments. Although these issues impact all segments of the educational enterprise, given the authors' experiences with adult learning, the focus in this chapter will be on adults as learners.

Introduction

One way to address the challenges and disparities highlighted during the worldwide pandemic of 2020 is to pay attention to issues of ethics and inclusion in education. In a sense, now, with thousands of courses going from face-to-face to online delivery, it might be the time to revisit how faculty and instructors around the globe can be supported to create a more equitable and inclusive space for students to prosper. Education is an empowering platform that can transform individuals and their communities. This chapter would help educators recognize and address underlying ethical issues that they might encounter online.

In this chapter, first, concepts including ethics and culture will be defined, and examples of ethical issues that might arise will be provided. The next sections are organized as follows: (1) community, where the question of "how social presence contributes to the relational dimension of online learning" will be explored, (2) ethics where some of the ethical issues of online education, including issues of power, silence, privacy and confidentiality, and accessibility, are explored, and (3) language where relevant concepts for creating a linguistically inclusive learning environment will be briefly discussed. The chapter concludes with implications for incorporating cultural inclusivity in designing learning experiences and future research.

Concepts of Culture and Ethics in Online Learning Environments

In examining culture, this chapter focuses on how culture influences online communication and learning. Ethical issues are often not very evident in online learning environments. However, they affect how learners and educators negotiate their communications and expectations online.

Culture and Context

For this chapter, culture is defined as a "collection of shared perceptions of the world and our place in it. These values and beliefs affect both identity formation and societal roles. Each of us belongs to many tribes, and these memberships overlap sometimes in unexpected ways" (Gunawardena et al., 2019, p.3). The authors note that cultural affiliations can be considered broad or narrow. While national cultures can include millions of people, culture is also found at the regional, organizational, communal, and familial levels. Early studies that examined culture online (Uzuner, 2009) used Hofstede's (1980) national cultural dimensions (i.e., power distance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term orientation) to describe online cultures. But these bi-polar dimensional constructs can be limiting when applied to the online context. Ess (2009) provided a critique of the applicability of Hofstede's framework to the online context and noted that what interests researchers is how national as well as other cultural identities, such as ethnicity, youth culture, and gender, interact with intercultural communication online. Therefore, defining culture from the national culture perspective, which is constantly changing, can lead to stereotyping. Cultures that emerge online transcend national culture, as culture online is negotiated by the interacting participants whose ethnic, gender, and religious identities are enacted, concealed, or merged into hybrid identities. Culture is experienced as part of a communication system of the interacting group where culture is developed through communication, dialoguing, sharing experiences, and interacting with each other.

Culture is generated from context and needs to be understood within context, and "context" refers to the setting or environment in which something exists. Hall (1959) made a distinction between high context (indirect) communication where many things are left unsaid, letting the context explain, and low context (direct) explicit communication. Hence, providing the context when messages are communicated online will reduce the chance of misunderstanding. Examining context further, Weissmann et al. (2019) observe that academic culture in the United States (US) tends to value "low-context" approaches to learning, for example, encouraging individual work, rigid schedules, faculty-oriented perspectives, subscribing to compartmentalized, and linear learning among other values. They noted that many women, underrepresented minorities, and bilingual students come from "high-context" cultures. They found communal work, flexibility in time, and nonlinear and contextual learning salient to their academic experience. Therefore, they advocate a shift in academia to "multicontext" perspectives that value context diversity to ensure inclusive learning environments. Multicontext theory suggests people are multicontextual (able to change and display flexibility across the cultural context spectrum) and have unique cultural identities and orientations (Ibarra, 2001).

Cultural Inclusivity

With these conceptualizations of culture and context in mind, it is time to explore the question: What does it mean to be culturally inclusive in online design? A culturally inclusive learning environment must foster communication and community. Participants must feel a sense of belonging to a learning community, which values different beliefs, worldviews, and educational experiences (Gunawardena et al., 2019). Online courses that are individualized and designed without interaction with other learners or facilitators are not culturally inclusive learning environments. Cultural inclusivity moves beyond diversity. To be inclusive, diverse views must be heard, appreciated, and valued. Such an environment will help all learners feel welcome and appreciated for their unique perspectives and contributions. To develop a culturally inclusive learning environment, designers must encourage interaction and negotiation of meaning while at the same time anticipating the influence of their own, instructors,' and learners' cultural values and programming. Cultural inclusivity means understanding one's learners and learning from a cultural perspective, considering learning preferences, educational expectations, prior knowledge, past experiences, linguistic ability, and ...more.

Ethics in Online Learning Environments

It has been argued that helping learners, which involves ethical issues, is at the center of instructional design and technology (Inouye et al., 2005). To position ethics at the center of education, Inouye et al. (2005) suggested changes in what educators know and do. Specifically, among other strategies, they discussed the importance of understanding context to be able to take proper actions and using learner-centered rather than instructor-centered approaches to teaching. Similar to Campbell et al. (2009) ideas regarding instructional design, morality in online education is not about right and wrong decisions. Rather, it is about the "importance of relationships in which mutual commitments are made, with integrity to enhance success – success in teaching, success in learning, success in service – success for positive social change" (Campbell et al., 2009, p. 646). Teaching in a digital era should go beyond offering courses in a technological format. In our view, the role of an educator is to build a community of engaged learners with empathy and care. From the existing ethical frameworks, ethics of care can be a good fit for discussing the ethics of online education, as several recent studies have argued for its promises (Rabin, 2021; Robinson et al., 2020). Ethics of care, also known as care ethics, is an ethical framework first introduced by Carol Gilligan (1982). It is a unique approach to moral theory that emphasizes responsibility and relationships over consequences (i.e., utilitarianism) or rules (i.e., deontology) (Nair, 2005). The use of ethics of care in online learning is not an intuitive task, as "the automation and standardization characterized by the online environment" (Rabin, 2021, p. 40) might seem antithetical to caring.

In this chapter, ethics of care has been used as a framework to look at ways online educators can create inclusive spaces for learners to prosper. The argument is that the mere switch of the mode of delivery from face-to-face to online, without adjusting and customizing existing educational content and techniques to the learners' needs and situations, is not sufficient and is, in fact, against the principles of care. The literature on ethics of care in online education has been grounded in social presence as it focuses on understanding the relational dimension of learning in an online environment (Rabin, 2021). Social presence is an essential ingredient in an online community as it focuses on the relationships between online participants.

Community

According to Watson (1998), community implies a basic connection to communication, and communication is a tool to create shared cultural meanings. "We should begin thinking of community as a product not of shared space, but of shared relationships among people" (Watson, 1998, p. 120). Community supports the social dimension of online learning and is the key recipe for an inclusive online learning environment. Building a culturally inclusive community is a gradual process that takes a collective effort from designers, facilitators, mentors, community experts, and participants. Several ingredients contribute to the community and a sense of community; "a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group" (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 9). Among these ingredients, "social presence" takes the lead in helping educators focus on the relational dimension of an online community.

Social Presence

Social presence contributes to a sense of community online, the feeling that one can connect with other participants. Social presence was defined as the degree to which a person is perceived as a "real person" in mediated communication (Short et al., 1976). Researchers have shown that social presence is a key ingredient of the social environment of online learning (Kreijns et al., 2011; Richardson & Swan, 2003), a strong predictor of learner satisfaction in online environments (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997), and a predictor of perceived learning in online courses (Richardson & Swan, 2003). Increased social presence, interaction, and collaborative learning among participants can support the development of each other's zones of proximal development (Whiteside, 2017).

Tu (2001) showed that engaging Chinese students in a more interactive online learning environment would increase social presence. These students perceived online communication as a more comfortable medium to express their thoughts due to lack of confrontation and face-saving concerns but were concerned that their messages may appear in public areas that may cause them to lose face and privacy. For Arab students, the lack of physical presence in the online environment

was a positive feature because it provided a reduced risk of social embarrassment (Al-Harthi, 2005). In a study comparing online group process and group development in the USA and Mexico, Gunawardena et al. (2001) found that US participants needed an increased level of social presence to connect with each other, while Mexican participants felt that having personal information about the participants was not so important. For Mexican participants, how their peers contribute to the discussion is far more important than knowing personal information about them. Many of these prior studies of culture online have used Hofstede's definitions of national culture as a framework to understand culture and have missed out on the interactions that happened between participants.

Approaching the online environment as one in which culture is generated by the interacting participants, Gunawardena et al. (2006) found that social presence played a key role in the communication patterns of chat users in their study of chat forums in Morocco and Sri Lanka. Properties associated with social presence in both cultural contexts included: self-disclosure, building trust, expression of identity, conflict resolution, interpretation of silence, and the innovation of language forms to generate immediacy. In developing an inclusive community, social presence is critical to building online connections and relationships as it impacts participation, interaction, trust, group cohesion, and social equality.

Identity

Dennen and Burner (2017) observed that "Social presence and identity are closely intertwined" (p. 174), as identity (the sense of self) conveys the unique characteristics communicated by a person's presence. Identity in online learning environments involves both self and group identity. In their study of groups, Rogers and Lea (2005) found that social presence was enabled by emphasizing the shared social identity at the level of the collaborating group rather than the creation of interpersonal bonds between individual members of a group. Therefore, to develop a sense of community among group members, they recommend that identity online be "collectivized," reflecting the identity of the group rather than the individuals that make up the group. One technique that helps develop group identity is to allow groups to manage themselves, which will contribute to a shared group identity rather than prescribing roles and restrictive procedures for group members. Dennen and Burner (2017) observed that finding the appropriate balance of individual identity sharing and group identity creation remains an active topic of inquiry.

Therefore, when determining the appropriate level of social presence in an online environment, educators need to be mindful that participants have different perceptions of the degree of social presence necessary for online connections and interactions.

Ethics of Care in a Learning Community

Research on ethics of care in online education has been grounded in social presence. Robinson et al. (2020) explored how online students describe being cared for. The authors suggested that strategies "such as proper training for online faculty with explicit consideration to the affective/emotional element of online learning, timely communication with learners, and personalized feedback" (Robinson et al., 2020, p. 107) could help create an environment that makes students feel cared for.

Despite its importance, research on the ethics of instructional design and technology is limited (Moore & Ellsworth, 2014). Yusop and Correia (2012), critiquing the emphasis on approaches that neglect professionalism in preparing students in the field of instructional design and technology, argued the need for the formation of civic-minded instructional designers "who are both socially aware and technically competent in performing their job" (p. 180). In response to the lack of awareness of ethical issues, Gray and Boling (2016) analyzed the content of a selected number of instructional design cases to extract the ethical concerns of these cases (Gray & Boling, 2016). Lin (2007) conducted an empirical study to identify ethical issues experienced by instructional technologists and their coping mechanisms. This study identified six ethical issues, including (a) copyright, (b) privacy, (c) accessibility, (d) diversity, (e) conflicts of interest, and (f) professionalism/confidence to design quality courses. When asked about strategies to address these ethical issues, the participants of this study reported various coping mechanisms, including (a) team communication, (b) laws and policies, (c) management consultation, (d) professional integrity, and (e) technical solutions.

Teaching with empathy and care is at the core of an ethical approach to education in a digital era. Grounding in such aspiration, in the next section, some of the ethical issues of online education will be reviewed and discussed.

Issues of Power

Closing the gaps related to power and access to resources among students from different backgrounds is imperative. Although communication technologies have the potential to equalize the playing field and enhance knowledge acquisition, they can be misused and widen the gaps that exist (Lin, 2007). This raises an important ethical issue for educators in online settings. Ethics of care provides a unique perspective on the issues of power. According to de la Bellacasa's (2011) view, "care connotes attention and worry for those who can be harmed by an assemblage but whose voices are less valued, as are their concerns and need for care" (p. 92). Care ethics can expose how an understanding of needs might be twisted by people in power to maintain their positions (Tronto, 1993). Educators should be aware that no matter how hard they try, they may not fully understand their students' situations. As stated by Tronto (2005), "It would seem that by putting oneself in the other's situation, [the] distance can be overcome. But, . . . there is no way to guarantee that, in taking the place of the other, . . . the moral actor will recognize all of the relevant

dimensions of the other's situation" (p. 257). This emphasizes the importance of hearing students' needs from their perspectives instead of making assumptions. As stated by Held (2006), "ethics of care advocates attention to particulars, appreciation of context, narrative understanding, and communication and dialogue in moral deliberation" (p. 158). Thus, teacher-centered online learning environments with little opportunity for interaction are not conducive to promoting ethics of care.

Rabin (2021) argued that issues of power in online settings "make understanding the cared-for's needs complex" (p. 42). As stated by Covarrubias (2008), "as central bearers of power in our classrooms, we shoulder the sometimes difficult challenge of negotiating diverse interests, perspectives, and emotions on behalf of our students" (p. 247). Online educators have the ethical obligation to ensure learners are treated equitably. The first step is to review course materials, ensuring they are not offensive or exclusive (Lin, 2007). Similarly, stereotyping students based on age, race, and gender is another issue that can happen in online settings and needs to be recognized and avoided (Lin, 2007). Educators have the responsibility to reflect on their approaches to teaching so that they create an inclusive environment in which learners feel respected. Only in such an environment can students from different backgrounds engage in the course meaningfully.

Intercultural understanding is at the core of learning in today's world (Morong & DesBiens, 2016). Effective intercultural learning involves a "direct experience of difference in supportive contexts" where participants are provided with a culturally safe environment and equal opportunities to engage in learning activities (p. 476). This is in line with "authentic caring," a term coined by Valenzuela (1999). Rabin (2021) stated that such caring "requires transcending a false veneer of neutrality and equality to affirm students' cultural, racial, and community identities and further their well-being beyond narrowly conceived academic achievement" (p. 40).

Silence

Although individuals often focus on what is seen or spoken when thinking about cultural differences, culture is also expressed through silence; silence has different meanings in different cultures. Researchers have looked at the meaning of silence among students from diverse backgrounds, including Native American and Chinese students and its implications in educational settings (e.g., Covarrubias & Windchief, 2009; Liu, 2002). The difference in meanings and interpretations of silence has important implications for teaching and learning. Global educators should create inclusive environments that are sensitive to issues of silence and its meaning in different cultures.

Another related issue is what Covarrubias (2008) defined as discriminatory silence, which is "the withholding of voiced objections to statements that dismiss, disconfirm, or alienate a person because of racial, ethnic, or cultural origin when the ethical action would be to speak up" (p. 246). Online educators are ethically responsible for speaking up against discriminatory statements that might be made by participants in discussion forums or synchronous meetings. According to

Covarrubias (2008), "unvoiced objections to them gave the persons to whom the statements were addressed the impression that the discriminatory statements had been disregarded, shrugged off, and dismissed" and lead to the promotion of an exclusionary learning environment (p. 242).

Privacy and Confidentiality

Learners have the right to control their data. Technologies, if misused, can lead to the loss of control of personal data. One example of such a loss is the inappropriate use of learning management systems that keep learners' records. Another example is disseminating a student's work to future students without receiving proper permission.

Learner privacy was among the top ethical issues raised by participants (65%) in Lin's (2007) study. Examples provided by the participants included tracking students' activities using technology and the possibility of breaching students' privacy by sharing their postings in online discussion forums in conferences, etc., without obtaining proper permissions.

Accessibility

Accessibility is another issue related to the ethics of educational technology (Lin, 2007). Removing barriers to help learners with disabilities access equitable educational opportunities is a critical component of an inclusive community. As Moore and Ellsworth (2014) discussed, accessibility is rooted in the notion of "barrier free design," which emerged in the 1950s in some countries, including the United States. While the focus on accessibility has traditionally been from a regulatory and compliance perspective, educators need to go beyond that to ensure equal access by focusing on the actual outcomes for learners (Moore & Ellsworth, 2014). This aligns with the ethics of care in which specific relationships with individuals, instead of general rules or principles, guide one's behavior. The discussion on accessibility in online education is about the learner-focused considerations that need to be taken into account by educators.

Some researchers in the field have used universal design to inform the practice of design for online learning (e.g., Pittman & Heislet, 2014; Rogers-Shaw et al., 2018). Universal design is "the theory and practice pertaining to design, development, and implementation of communication, information and technology products and services that are equally accessible to individuals who are both disabled and non-disabled" (Crow, 2006, p. 20). Universal design for learning (UDL) emphasizes accessibility, collaboration, and community (Rogers-Shaw et al., 2018). Rogers-Shaw et al. (2018) shared their teaching experience and suggestions on how to apply the principles of UDL to an existing course, including simplifying the syllabus, offering multiple ways of communication and representation, and providing various options for learners to show what they have learned. However, inclusivity

should go beyond UDL to ensure all learners are valued and their perspectives heard. Careful attention to the unique needs of each learner helps create a learning environment, which is accessible to all learners.

Language

Language, Translanguaging, and Linguistic Inclusivity in Online Learning Environments

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines language as "the words, their pronunciation, and the methods of combining them used and understood by a community." Language reinforces cultural values, perspectives, and worldviews. Learners from oral cultures may not embrace the abstract discussions prevalent in Western discourse. Individuals from collectivist cultures may not feel comfortable providing critical comments in online discussions to avoid disagreement and maintain interpersonal harmony (Hu, 2005). Limiting the communications of an online course to text-based interactions negatively influences the richness of a learning experience and diverse ways of communication.

Using English as the international lingua franca instead of one's native language leaves learners disadvantaged. Learners might have little to no opportunity to use English daily, and English might be a learner's third or fourth language. Communicating in English requires non-English speakers to refer to dictionaries frequently. These learners might need additional time to read and reflect on reading materials and review other course content.

Another issue is that when non-native English speakers are present in a group, learners from dominant cultures (because of misconceived generalizations) may deauthorize these group members by assigning fewer responsibilities and therefore limit the learning experiences of non-native English-speaking members (Smith, 2005). Perceiving non-native speakers as "others," in a sense, mirrors hierarchical structures within the society and creates an unsafe learning environment (Smith, 2005).

Translanguaging and Communicating as Second-Language Speakers

Educational systems have long taken a monolingual orientation towards learning and forced learners to use the dominant language to make sense of the world (Makalela, 2015). However, through the recent shifts in technology and educational practices, the "monoglossic orientation towards language systems has lost space in the global, fluid and mobile communicative spaces" (Makalela, 2015, p. 16). Translanguaging techniques, by allowing more than one language, enable students to use more of their linguistic repertoire, assuring a deeper understanding of the knowledge (Fernández, 2019; Makalela, 2015). Using this approach, language becomes a resource rather

than a barrier for meaning-making, specifically in contexts where learning the language is not the primary goal (Fernández, 2019).

Fernández (2019) suggested that translanguaging is a good strategy for culturally and linguistically diverse students to learn science as it contributes to equity. Another research confirmed that translanguaging within a dual language classroom increased opportunities for meaning-making for students as they could share the entirety of their ideas (Hamman, 2018). In addition, conducting an ethnographic study of an adult English as a Second Language (ESL) program among Hispanic restaurant workers, Emerick et al. (2020) found that translanguaging is most powerful if it is viewed as a component of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) rather than an independent strategy. CSP supports students "in sustaining the cultural and linguistic competence of their communities while simultaneously offering access to dominant cultural competence" (Paris, 2012, p. 95).

Despite the increasing interest in translanguaging as a learning strategy, it has not been sufficiently discussed in adult education or online settings. The number of studies on translanguaging in the context of adult education is limited (e.g., Emerick et al., 2020; Wilkins et al., 2014). This calls for more research on the effectiveness of using translanguaging strategies for educating adults. Moreover, the limited research on translanguaging in online settings has focused on teaching language online (e.g., Adinolfi & Astruc, 2017). More research is needed to explore and investigate the role translanguaging can play in online learning.

Linguistic Inclusivity

Translanguaging promotes linguistic inclusivity in online courses and focuses on communication rather than language. Improving communication and improving fluency in a language are not one and the same. Communication involves more than fluency in a language; it consists of listening and sending a message that is understood for its intended meaning. Therefore, the question is how online learning facilitators can enable students to draw from their full linguistic repertoires relevant to the context of the communication and help them feel accepted and welcome in an online environment.

Another aspect of linguistic inclusivity that facilitators need to address is the use of nonstandard English in discussion forums. How can an educator provide positive feedback to students focusing on the meaning of the communication online rather than nonstandard English? In Fig. 1, we provide an example from a discussion on the definition of culture.

Linguistic inclusivity encourages the exchange of information, building on the full linguistic repertoires of learners. Linguistically inclusive learning environments are aware of how linguistic conventions in our disciplines reproduce inequitable social structures. Educators have an essential role in maintaining linguistic inclusivity and an equitable social environment.

> **Kate:** Thanks for your response Rita. I thought I could respond quicklier than you, but I am late. This here is my response. When I think of culture I think of holidays. Though some of them don't have meaning, I not relate them to my culture. We celebrate Christmas, but it is different in my culture. It is quieter and less fancy. Do our holidays have to *be* a special meaning to be cultural?
>
> **Rita:** Yeah, I get what you sayin because sometimes I look at all them fancy lights and think yeah back home we ain't never done nothing like that. My mama would say you got stock in the electric company girl?
>
> *Initial Reaction Focused on Language*
>
> Kate and Rita, it is important to remember that we need to use Standard English even if we are having a discussion online. It is difficult to decipher your meaning because of grammatical mistakes. Please review what you have written, edit it and post a meaningful response.
>
> *A More Thoughtful Considered Reaction Focusing on the Ideas Expressed*
>
> Kate and Rita, this is an excellent suggestion that holidays reflect culture. Yes, as you say the same holiday can be celebrated differently in different cultures. Your question is a good one. It is one we should consider as a group. Class, what do you think of this excellent question: Do holidays have to have a special meaning to be considered "cultural?"

Fig. 1 Example of feedback focusing on communication and not the language

Recommendations for Inclusive Online Course Design

Drawing implications from our discussion, the following guidelines for inclusive online learning design are offered.

1. To develop an inclusive learning environment, engage in creating community and a sense of online community. Use greetings as a strategy to build relationships and trust. Greetings and introductions that generate social presence, including a separate page that summarizes the community talents where members are invited to share stories or short videos, will enrich the sense of community. Be mindful of expressions of identity, difficulty in self-disclosure, and discomfort in posting photographs. For example, provide guidelines for self-introductions allowing a degree of anonymity, perhaps having participants introduce each other online rather than themselves. For those uncomfortable with posting photographs of themselves, provide the option to post a picture/image that represents them with the explanation of why and how it represents them. Design greetings that facilitate online connections and avoid greetings that might detract from an egalitarian/equitable learning community.

2. To encourage trust-building, consider small group activities that focus on hobbies or mutual interests in large classes during the orientation session or as part of precourse activities.

3. Moderators/facilitators/instructors play an important role in relationship building, creating community, and maintaining a safe and conducive environment for all participants, and therefore, should be present online frequently.
4. Synchronous sessions can increase the sense of community and social presence.
5. Paying attention to the context of learning and learners is an important element of care. Educators need to actively identify learners' needs, take responsibility and action to address those needs, and rely on the feedback they receive from learners to adjust and adapt.
6. As a facilitator/instructor, clearly communicate expectations for the online course (preferably in the syllabus) and demonstrate how these expectations might be different from face-to-face learning environments and prior expectations students may have had. Provide the opportunity to ask questions about class expectations. A useful initial activity might be to have participants ask questions about the syllabus in a discussion forum.
7. Diversify ways to participate – synchronous, asynchronous, video, audio, text, etc., and create opportunities for learners to choose among learning activities that enable different ways to communicate, process, and produce.
8. Interactions in online communities can sometimes lead to conflict and misunderstandings and, if left unresolved, can derail the work of a group. Gunawardena et al. (2019) recommend safeguarding against five counterproductive patterns: Devaluing a participant's perspectives or contributions, disrespecting beliefs or values, disrupting conversations or activities, disengaging from a collaborative learning experience, and deceiving community members by misrepresenting one's work or intentions. Therefore, establishing explicit community standards such as a charter is the first step to ensuring constructive communication and minimizing disputes. Participants should be encouraged to use e-mail to resolve misunderstandings and post mutually agreed-upon understanding for the group when conflict situations arise.
9. Develop Netiquette or communication protocols addressing issues such as language and discourse, including translanguaging and the use of Standard English. Recognize translanguaging is a normal practice for multilingual people. Allowing for an element of multilingual communication and diversity in the expression of English will promote cross-cultural understanding and a comfort zone in online communication. Context is essential to understanding messages, and therefore, participants should be encouraged to provide the context to enable the deciphering of messages communicated through an ephemeral and fluid medium.
10. Discriminatory language by participants needs to be confronted immediately. Include some guidelines in the Netiquette protocol or syllabus to prevent such comments. Such guidelines will also help you as an educator address the issue more easily if it arises by referring to those resources.

For an extended discussion of many of these techniques, including learner support and co-mentoring, see Gunawardena et al.'s (2019) framework "Wisdom

Communities" (WisCom) for developing culturally inclusive online learning environments.

Future Research and Directions

When a cultural perspective to research online learning is used, educators can be more attuned to the unique context and needs of learners who form the online community. Without such careful attention to the uniqueness of the learners and their communities, empathy and care for learners, as required elements of ethical education, cannot be achieved. Therefore, it is imperative for future researchers to take a cultural perspective to conduct their research in online learning while attending to "the unique qualities and characteristics of individuals" and avoiding "simplistic stereotyping" (Jung & Gunawardena, 2014, p. 190). In this regard, an approach of "cultural humility" (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998), or "cultural humbleness," rather than "cultural competence," which includes self-reflection, self-critique, and self-evaluation, is preferred. Individuals can never really be culturally competent and may never get at the cultural nuances present in the contexts they interact, teach, and work. With this approach, the following future research areas for consideration are suggested:

- Exploring ways in which ethics of care is related to online learning outcomes, including learner satisfaction.
- Examining the meaning and the role of silence in online learning environments.
- Exploring ways to use translanguaging in adult education and examining its benefits in improving online learning outcomes.
- Analyzing issues of identity, gender, and language in online spaces.
- Studying how learners are transformed by their interactions and engagement with diverse online learners.
- Exploring how to collaborate and create in the next generation of digital learning environments.

Concluding Reflections: Striving for Excellence in Students' Online Learning Experience

Designing courses attentive to learners and their specific context and needs is an ethical issue. As stated by Woodley et al. (2017), "as educators and instructors of culturally and linguistically diverse students it is our responsibility to meet the needs of our students by using the best possible methods in curriculum and course design" (p. 477). In addition, as Morong and DesBiens (2016) argued, "in design for learning the focus shifts from instructional inputs to learner experience, activities, and what students actually learn" (p. 476). In the context of teacher education, Rabin and Smith (2013) stated that attending to care from a multicultural perspective and questioning one's implicit assumptions are essential aspects to consider in preparing

for caring relationships. The existing literature suggests that "engaged pedagogies, which highlights learner agency, group work and learning communities," can better support learning among culturally diverse students (Morong & DesBiens, 2016, p. 476).

A digital environment can provide effective learning experiences only if the educator is familiar with the learning technology and its possibilities so they can design the course accordingly. As Lin (2007) discussed, possessing the credentials to create quality learning modules and courses using appropriate technologies is an ethical issue. An ethical course design in this context involves going beyond the mindset of merely changing the delivery mode of a course. Instead, it should involve thoughtful reflection on the context, the subject, the learners, and the technology and how to best build on the strengths of the online platform and avoid the potential pitfalls while addressing specific needs of learners in a caring manner.

Cross-References (if applicable)

▶ Include a list of related entries from the handbook here that may be of further interest to the readers.

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