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From the Editor

Welcome to the second issue of The Excellence in Education Journal. The Excellence in Education Journal is (www.excellenceineducationjournal.org) an open access, refereed, online journal that promotes and disseminates international scholarly writing about excellent practices in all aspects of education. The goal is to share these practices to benefit the education of children and adults worldwide. For this reason, there are no publications fees and the journal is available free of charge on the internet. Typeset and graphics are intentionally simple in order that the journal can be more easily accessed worldwide to fulfill the mission of the journal.

We were pleased to have received many submissions for this issue. I would like to thank those who submitted manuscripts for this journal, the review team for their work in reviewing these submissions, and the authors whose writing is published herein. Additionally, I would like to thank Carrie Young, M.Ed., M.S.W. for assisting in the editorial process

This issue focuses on both excellent practices as well as reshaping current practices to attain excellence. Dr. Orelus describes the learning experience of colonized subjects being educated in colonial-based school systems. Dr. McDonough provides a case study to describe the journey that one professor took in transitioning from face-to-face course instruction to a blended model at the graduate level. Dr. Özturgut discusses the achievement gap and developing cultural competency skills for post-secondary teacher education program faculty. Dr. Gibbs discusses a university program transitioning from traditional to hybrid on-line format. Finally, Professor Alexander examines how Second Life can be utilized in a middle school classroom.

I hope that the excellent practices discussed in this journal will be helpful to those who are involved with education of children and adults worldwide.

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Decolonizing Schools and Our Mentality: Narratives for pedagogical possibilities from a former high school teacher and colonized subject

Pierre Orelus

Abstract

Using personal narratives as a form of inquiry, the author describes the learning experience of colonized subjects being educated in colonial-based school systems. The author goes on to juxtapose such experiences with the challenge of teaching racialized, culturally, and linguistically diverse students in a standardized test-driven school context such as that of the United States. Further, the author talks about the way and the extent to which the colonial legacy, sustained by western neocolonial and neoliberal policies, has continued to influence the teaching practices of teachers as well as the learning of students both in the West and so-called Third World countries like Haiti. Drawing on these experiences, the author makes suggestions as to how one can counter neo-colonial and hegemonic practices affecting the learning, the well-being, and the teaching practices of both students and teachers.

Keywords: Decolonization, linguistic domination, linguistically and culturally diverse students, colonial-based schools, standardized tests, student learning

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For many critical educators, colonialism is still at work; its legacy continues to shape the practices of many institutions, such as schools, governments, churches, workplaces, and the mass media (Fanon, 1965; Kempf & Dei, 2006; Wa Thiong'o, 1986). Colonialism has been implemented through different educational, socio-economic, and political policies that have had a negative impact on the school system of many countries, particularly formerly colonized countries, as well as those that are currently occupied (Author, 2007; Dei, 2009; Loomba, 2002; Nkruma, 1965). The educational, socio-economic, political, and cultural disaster that colonialism has engendered may not be as obvious as neoliberalism, for example, partly because those in power have used the corporate media to gain the consent of people, including the poor, leading them to believe that they have benefited from global capitalism and the *free market*.

However, those who have presence of mind and are thus able to critically reflect on their direct experience with neocolonialism know this system mostly works for those who have created it (Fanon, 1963, 1965; Loomba, 2002; Wa Thiong'o, 1986; Young, 2006). In light of this view, I draw on personal and professional experiences teaching and being educated in a colonial-based, capitalist test-driven school system to examine the ways and the degree to which the legacy of colonialism continues to impact the learning, the subjectivity, and cultural and material conditions of colonial subjects, including linguistically and culturally diverse students. In the section that follows, I critically reflect on and examine my mis-education in a colonial-based school system. I go further to articulate what a democratic and participatory form of education should look like in a classroom context, arguing that this form of education aims at preparing students to become well-educated and informed critical citizens.

My Mis-education in a Colonial-Based School System: A critical self-reflection

As a high school student, who was educated in a school system that mimicked and

followed the rules and teaching codes of the French colonial model of education, I was taught to believe that knowledge is something that is transferred mechanically from teachers to pupils. I was not allowed to challenge and engage in a dialogue with my teachers and peers during class. Instead, I was expected to sit, listen, and copy what the teachers wrote on the board. I was also expected to memorize and regurgitate back to my teachers what I “learned.” Needless to say, the teaching procedure involved rote behavior, and most of my teachers failed to create space where I could use what I “learned” and linked it to real life situations beyond the classroom’s walls and the collapsing fences that encircled the school building. I was not encouraged to make decisions on my own, to be a creative and an independent thinker, and to be a problem solver. While there was ample room in my classrooms for plenty meaningless activities, there was little room for teacher-student and student-student interactions.

As a prime example, I had to follow whatever my teachers assigned to me. My work was evaluated based on how well I followed what teachers did in class. I was mostly tested on what I was expected to copy in my notebooks even though my teacher’s explanation was often unclear. I felt that poor thinking, writing, and reading skills that I acquired could only prepare me for routine and menial types of jobs in the real world. Freire (1993) in the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* eloquently synthesizes this oppressive style of the education that I received. Freire summarizes it in these terms:

the teacher teaches and the students are taught;

the teachers knows everything and the students know nothing;

the teachers thinks and the students are taught about;

the teacher talks and the students listen-meekly;

the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined;

the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply;

the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher;

the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who are not consulted) adapt to it;

the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students;

the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects. (p. 54)

Similarly, in *Cries from the Corridor* McLaren (1980) describes the horrible and anti-democratic conditions in which poor urban school students are expected to learn. McLaren argues these students often have to memorize and regurgitate to teachers what they “learn” via rote teaching and learning mechanisms. Those who manage to do so are usually considered the best students. At some point during my high school and college years, I was perceived like one of these students, for I managed to regurgitate to my teachers what I was taught in my classes. It was not until I came across and read avidly a book called *Emile Ou de L’education* written by a French writer named Jean Jacques Rousseau that I realized I was being mis-educated. Specifically, thanks to this book, I was finally able to draw the conclusion that the form of education that I was receiving from my teachers was essentially domesticating my mind. The overarching argument Rousseau (1966) makes in *Emile Ou de L’education* is that pupils should

be allowed to learn at their own pace and should not be expected to engage in any learning endeavor that is abstract and meaningless to their life. Education in this sense is conceived as a self-discovery learning process where pupils explore their learning without any forcible control of a teacher. Kneller (1964) captures Rousseau's philosophy of education and states:

[Rousseau] stated that it was useless to expect a child to indulge abstract intellectual pursuits until he had reached the age of reason. Instead, a child should learn the things that he is capable of understanding through personal discovery. Followers of Rousseau urged teachers to connect what the child learned in school with what he would experience at home in his community, that is, to connect education and life. (pp. 104–105)

Although later in my learning curves I partially rejected Rousseau's view on education, at that time I found his radical philosophy of education refreshing and inspiring, especially after being mis-educated by almost all my high school and college teachers. I later refuted some of Rousseau's view on education because I felt and still feel that it is essentially a laissez-faire learning style that he consciously or unconsciously promoted through his book, which is worth reading nonetheless. Unlike Rousseau, I believe that if students are to learn, they need to be clearly guided and challenged by their teachers, although there are people who manage to learn on their own. However, even the so-called autodidacts do not construct knowledge alone. They do so collectively with others, whether it be in school settings or other settings.

Furthermore, before I became familiar with the scholarly work of the Russian philosopher Bakhtin (1986), the American educator John Dewey (1997), and the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1993) who believe in co-construction of knowledge, my learning experience had already taught me that knowledge is constructed collectively. In other words, I

already knew before being introduced to the work of these theorists that knowledge is not something that is automatically passed on from a teacher, who is believed to know everything, to a student, who does not know much or, worse yet, does not know anything.

Centuries before Dewey, Freire, Plato and Socrates already illustrated for us that knowledge is dialectically constructed through dialogue between teachers and students, and/or mentors and mentees. Plato (1992) demonstrated in *the Republic* that through open dialogue, a mentee learns from his/her mentor and vice versa. The dialogue in which he and Socrates engaged in is a case in point. By creating space for a genuine dialogue between him and his mentee, Plato, Socrates does not merely guide, teach, and challenge Plato, but he also learns from him. Although one might think that he is playing the role of a master, by dialoguing with his mentee, Plato, Socrates learns from him in the process. In my view, teachers' philosophy of education and teaching practices should reflect the dialogical learning relationship that Socrates and Plato established between themselves as teacher and pupil. In other words, as Kneller (1964) argues:

The Socratic method is the ideal mode of education, since by it the student learns what he personally asserts to be true. The teacher-pupil relationship becomes intimate and personal. The teacher persuades the student to think by questioning him about his beliefs, by setting before him other beliefs and thus forcing him to probe the workings of his own mind. In this way the student accepts the truth, but only because it is true for him. (p. 70)

My Evolving Philosophy of Education and Teaching

My philosophy of education is grand yet simple. I believe that teachers first and foremost ought to be aware of what they are teaching students to become. In other words, before engaging in the act of teaching, they need to ask themselves questions such as: Am I going to teach my

students a set of fragmented knowledge and how to regurgitate it to people as tangible evidence that they are “smart” and prepared to meet certain academic, intellectual, and professional expectations, and fit certain social norms? Am I going to help them develop critical thinking skills to dismantle this set of fragmented knowledge and reconstruct it based on their prior knowledge, lived experience, imagination, and own understanding of it? Am I going to encourage my students to take intelligent risks informed by their intellectual curiosity and personal interests? Or am I going to censure their learning by expecting them to open up their mind and fill it up with a pre-packaged information and knowledge that I prepare for and impose on them? Am I going to encourage them to interrogate that information and knowledge and to figure out what piece of it they can relate to their interests and goals? Am I going to single them out in my class for daring to question what I teach them and for disagreeing with my teaching approach and philosophy of education?

More importantly, am I am going to be willing to engage in a dialogue with them to find out more about their previous learning experience, different approaches of teaching and philosophy of education, and be open to learn from them new ideas about learning and teaching? Or am I going to be continuously stuck in my comfort teaching zone expecting my students to passively receive and repeat like parrots the knowledge that I pass on to them? Am I going to cultivate the intellectual and moral courage, the respect for human intelligence, and self awareness so I am prepared to treat my students as intellectual beings who have the innate ability to think critically, reflect actively, decide for themselves, and with whom I can deconstruct knowledge while, at the same time, constructing new ones in the process?

Teachers guided by a progressive philosophy of education help students develop creative and critical thinking skills to continuously question their own learning, which should always be

in the making. These teachers assume a responsible task to help their students understand that education is not how about many theories they “learn” through rote memorization. Rather, it is about challenging students to interrogate, constantly search, and figure out how these theories come into being; how they can connect them to their interest, intellectual needs, and life; and how they can use these theories to effect social change. Teachers who teach students to become critical and independent thinkers also take on a gigantic teaching task to help their students develop sociopolitical, cultural, and historical awareness and consciousness to challenge social norms, instead of preparing them to become mere docile adapters to these norms. Equally crucial, progressive educators are the ones who urge students to discover their own path through continuous search and exploration of novel ideas while providing them with genuine support and mentorship.

What students are expected to learn in school is meaningless to the extent they are not able to read their own meaning into it, that is, linking their own experience and interests to it. Students study and learn best when the relevance of what they study or are expected to learn is made clear to them or, better yet, when they themselves see its relevance to their intellectual interests, needs, or curiosity. Stated otherwise, something is meaningful to students so long they feel they can connect it to their own real-life situations and those of others.

Since their real life situations might change as they go through higher stages in their academic and intellectual journey, students ought to be encouraged and helped by their teachers to cultivate intellectual flexibility and openness to try novel ideas, deconstruct prior ones, construct news ones, and take on new challenges. Their teachers ought to help them develop intellectual awareness so that they understand that the knowledge they acquire, as a result of personal intellectual search and interaction with their teachers and peers, is not a fixed entity.

Simply stated, they need to fully comprehend that knowledge is not like a beautiful piece of art they buy at an art studio, take it home, hang on the wall in their living room, and leave it there. Rather, knowledge is acquired through social, cultural, and historical transactions with people and exposure to varying sources of literature. While knowledge should be highly appreciated and valued, it needs to be continuously expanded on, re-examined, questioned, and constantly put to tests.

As noted earlier, students should not be expected to develop all these critical skills on their own. They ought to receive assistance and guidance from their teachers. However, in order for all this to be a reality, educators need to make a conscious effort to reach out to and know their students, which can only be possible through genuine dialogical relationships. Knowing their students will enable educators to have a sound understanding of their learning styles, their cultural, linguistic, and historical repertoires, their prior knowledge, and how to help them build on that knowledge. Building on students' various repertoires and prior knowledge facilitates the learning process of students and the teaching practices of teachers and most importantly validates students' identities while strengthening their confidence and self-esteem.

Equally important, teachers have a professional and moral obligation to find ways to make the school curriculum accessible and meaningful to students whose backgrounds might not match with the content of this curriculum. In other words, since education is the essence of life but not the means and the end to it, therefore in order for students to be able to relate what they learn in school to their lived experience, school materials should be based on real life circumstances, but not on abstract ideas. To this end, it is critically important that students and teachers collectively question how school materials and curricular are selected and developed; what shapes them and where they come from. It is equally imperative that they interrogate which

voices are being represented in these written curricular, as occupied and colonized students' voices often are not represented in the learning materials they are often required to use in class.

Since "the curriculum is often seen as the driving force for instructional practice, the framework within which day-to-day decisions are made" (Auerbach, 1995, p. 15), should not school materials, such as textbooks and school curricula, then emerge from students' world and lived experience? In other words, should not school curricula student-centered to allow space students' active participation and interaction with other students and teachers? As Auerbach (1995) maintained, when teachers "start from the students to the curriculum rather from the curriculum to the students" (p. 16) students are able to arrive to construct their own knowledge and act upon it.

Drawing on Auerbach's contention above, I argue that in order to understand what fundamentally causes the mis-education of students, it is educationally vital that one looks closely at what is going on in the classroom in terms of how teachers teach, interact with, construct or fail to construct knowledge with students. I am not implying here that the mis-education of students should be placed on teachers' shoulders alone because such an argument will take off responsibilities of the school system, policy makers and the government, and overlook other factors, such as the negative effects of the legacy of western colonialism and neoliberal education policies have had on the learning of students, particularly linguistically and culturally diverse students, and teaching practices of teachers, especially urban school teachers. However, teachers' teaching practices, attitude towards, level of trust in students, and level of investment in the learning of each student need to be taken into consideration, for arguably these factors play a crucial role in students' academic achievement.

Lessons Learned

As a social justice educator, it took me a long time before I finally understood the vital role a culturally relevant and meaningful curriculum plays in student learning. It also took me a long time to understand how crucial it is to know first and foremost my students and use their prior knowledge as a building block in order to help them achieve academically. I come to that understanding through my personal schooling experience; the contact with the great works of Dewey (1997), Vygotsky (1978), and Freire (1993); the acquisition of various teaching methods and theories in multicultural education articulated by Nieto & Bode (2011) and Sleeter (2005); and through constant self-questioning on what kind of teacher I want to become and how I would teach my students to become what they want to be.

Before I became a teacher, I questioned myself as to whether I had the human understanding and political and cultural awareness to teach effectively. I also wondered if I had a strong enough sense of social justice, responsibility, and commitment to begin this long journey. This was when the immensity of the teaching profession seemed really challenging to me, for I knew whatever I taught my students in the classroom would impact their lives. These puzzling questions were left unanswered until I started teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students from poor working class background. Working with these students made me realize that I could not teach them these subjects without considering their cultural background and identity, which constitute an integral part of their learning process.

My Experience Teaching Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Students

I taught minority students in the most marginalized high school in Boston, Massachusetts. This experience helped me better understand how racial and social inequality impacts the

learning and academic growth of poor minority students and poor White students. This high school was underfunded, so many caring and dedicated teachers had to teach their poor students of color and Whites under horrible working conditions. For example, school materials were scarce, consequently many of my colleagues and I had to use our own money to buy school supplies. Worse yet, many of us were forced to leave our teaching jobs because of budget cuts. I was one of the teachers who were laid off. I question why schools in poor neighborhood serving poor children of color and poor Whites are always the first ones to drastically suffer from state and federal budget cuts. Shouldn't these schools be the least affected by these cuts?

I was fortunate to be hired as a bilingual reading and ESL (English as a second language) teacher at a high school located in Boston, Massachusetts. This experience has shaped my teaching experience and philosophy. I remember the intensity of inner fear that I experienced when I first became a high school teacher, especially during my first year. Though my Master's degree provided me with the necessary critical and analytical tools to look at the world with a critical eye, I did not feel that it prepared me to teach. Consequently, during my first year as a teacher I experienced much fear that nearly paralyzed me. I incessantly questioned myself if it was ethical to dare teach students, especially marginalized groups of students, as I did not feel adequately prepare to do so. Suddenly, this type of self-questioning led me to reflect on many ill-prepared teachers that I had in high school and even in college. I did not learn much from them. Hence, I did not want to reproduce what I was done to me: being mis-educated by poorly prepared teachers.

However, I was and am still sure that I have much love and passion for teaching and, more importantly, for co-constructing knowledge with students. Such passion and love enabled me as a first year teacher to make the effort to find enough humility in myself to reach out to

colleagues, especially those who had extensive teaching experience. Some of these colleagues tremendously helped me by sharing with me teaching material resources, while others served as my mentor.

For example, during my first and second year as a high school teacher, I asked two of my colleagues, who were like mentors to me, if I could go to their classrooms and observe how they taught. They both happily honored my request. They also came to observe my class while teaching. They gave me constructive feedback on my teaching methods. In fact, one of them invited me to come to his class during recess, so that he could share with me some of his teaching methods and strategies, which I experimented in my reading and ESL. These two colleagues were very kind, friendly, and welcoming, and showed genuine concern for their students who were from poor working class background and living in marginalized neighborhoods. However, I would soon be disappointed by one of them who made a value judgment about one of his students. He said that his student, who apparently was not doing well in his class due to a temporary language barrier and cultural shock, should drop out of high school and go learn how to be a mechanic because he did not think that this student was college materials. His judgment suggested that he had very low expectations for this student.

As a teacher I felt hurt. It was sad to hear such a harmful comment from a colleague for whom I had much respect and to whom I was and am still grateful for his mentorship when I needed it the most. At first, I wondered whether I should distance myself from him because of his insensitive comment, which is, in my view, a deficit view about his student. Because my colleague was white and middle class and this student was black from a poor working class background, the idea of him being possibly racist and classist inevitably crossed my mind. I challenged such a thought, however, asking myself: Could a teacher like my colleague, who said

that he cared for his students, be racist and classist? I am still puzzled by this question, to which I have not yet found an answer.

Reflecting on the example of my former high school colleague, I felt that by remaining silent I was in complicity with my colleague's dehumanizing way of looking at his student's potential. I regret not having taken a stand for this student by challenging my colleague's comment. In my mind, by choosing to not challenge him I thought I was trying to be tolerant and respectful to him as a dear colleague and a mentor.

Now reflecting back on this professional experience as an educator, I have come to the conclusion that teachers who are biased and lack political and cultural awareness can negatively affect students' self worth and the course of their learning. In other words, a teacher can psychologically and educationally break his or her students in small pieces, especially those working in schools that are colonial-based and corporate driven. Echoing Freire, I argue that my colleague's comment about this student suggests that he did not have a humanizing approach of education. Freire and Betto (1985) states, "A humanizing education is the path through which men and women can become conscious about their presence in the world. They way they act and think when they develop all of their capacities, taking into consideration their needs, but also the needs and aspirations of others" (pp.14-15).

The majority of the students who attended this high school were African Americans and Cape Verdeans from poor working-class backgrounds. During my three years teaching at the high school, teachers were pressured to teach to the test. Students, including my bilingual students, were taking tests almost every two months regardless of their limited English skills. I constantly had to administer tests to my students. I was required to use a scripted curriculum to

teach my students how to read. The curriculum required giving my students a pre-test on Mondays and a post-test on Fridays. These tests were supposedly designed to help my students build on their vocabulary words. This curriculum did not allow me enough space to engage my students in sufficient critical literacy activity. Despite my opposition to these tests, I had to administer them to my bilingual students, including those who just arrived in the United States and could barely read, write, and speak English. In fact, in my class there were many students who did not receive formal education in their first language. For this category of students, taking these tests was much more painful.

When I was not under the surveillance of my supervisor and the school's assistant principals, who came to my class whenever they wished, I engaged my students in activities that I thought would be meaningful to their lives. For example, I knew that what I taught had to matter to them, therefore I incorporated in my lesson plans thoughts and ideas generated from their classroom group discussions. Writing exercises and class discussions were usually generated from the questions that I encouraged them to ask about their family, living conditions at home and in their neighborhood, and the socio-economic and political realities that they were facing in their daily lives. The concerns they expressed and questions they asked in class about these factors were part of the classroom experience. For example, my students were always eager to talk about their culture and experience as immigrants. Thus, to make what I taught in the classroom meaningful to them, I produced a unit about culture and immigration. They wrote short essays in which they compared their culture with American culture and talked about their experience as immigrants living in the United States. Repeatedly, I was amazed to see that all of my students were actively engaged in the class discussion and activities.

As a result of this experience, I have learned that teachers have an obligation to find ways to teach their students what is practical and relevant to their lives. From this experience, I have concluded that it is crucial that the school system has well-trained educators who are capable of effectively teaching students necessary writing, reading, and critical thinking skills so they are prepared to face multiple challenges in the real world. Teaching students of various ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and social class backgrounds has made me fully aware that students need full support and encouragement from their teachers to preserve their cultural heritage and identity. This might help them connect with the past, make sense of the present, and prepare them for the future.

Conclusion

It is hoped that my narratives in this essay about my learning and teaching experiences in a neocolonial, capitalist, test-driven school system would not discourage the reader from believing that educators, especially those who believe in social justice, can play the role of agents of social change by helping their students develop a language of hope to believe that the creation of a better school system and society is possible. It is also hoped that these narratives would not dissuade the reader that there are educators who have helped students develop a language of critique, which has enabled many to counter the negative consequences of the colonial legacy on their learning. Even though the neocolonial context of countries whose school systems continue to be affected by the colonial legacy entrenched in the capitalist system, many progressive teachers have risked their jobs to ensure that we have a democratic school system where students are treated fairly and are given the opportunities to fulfill their potential irrespective of their backgrounds. This is what has given hope to many teachers, parents, and students. We need to build on this hope for a better future where all students will have the opportunity to attend well-resourced schools and receive

high-quality education regardless of their cultural, linguistic, social class, and racial backgrounds.

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**A Case Study
Transitioning From Traditional Face-to Face Course Instruction to a Blended Format**

Darlene McDonough

Abstract

This case study briefly describes the journey that one professor took in transitioning from face-to-face course instruction to a blended model at the graduate level. The blended lesson format was based on the 14 Learner-Centered Psychological Principles developed (1993) and revised by the American Psychological Association Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs (1997). The professor developed a student survey specifically to evaluate the blended course in areas not included in the university's evaluation. After the first and second semesters, data from the professor's course evaluations as well as the student surveys were used to improve the blended course design and implementation for the third semester. The professor comments on the challenges and the advantages of the blended format for both the professor and students including the impact on student achievement.

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My challenge, as a new faculty member, was to combine best practices in a standards-based learner-centered curriculum and concepts of educational administration using the blended approach in the teaching of graduate students. The blended approach combines face to face and online distance learning as the method of instructional delivery. Starting the third week in August, this was a pretty tall order that had to be completed in time for the first class, in three courses, by the last Saturday in August. To do so, an instructor needed a minimum level of technological skills and the belief that the new wave of the future for teaching and learning for all students, Pre-Kindergarten through higher education including doctoral coursework, needed to include the use of technology. This was a tall order to accomplish with only three weeks to read the texts for the courses, develop the syllabus for each course, learn how use Moodle for interaction with the students, and get all the information for the courses into the blended technology format.

The Task

The Educational Leadership Program had piloted the blended format the year before for some of the courses in the School Building Leadership Program. One reason for piloting the blended format was to reach a larger group of students who would be interested in this format because of the distance they lived and worked from the University. It was hoped that knowing that they would only need to physically attend class three times a semester would be more attractive. A second reason was to attract another group of students who because of their busy schedules would be willing to take courses that would allow them to participate asynchronously, at times and places convenient to them. The courses in the pilot proved to be successful in several ways. The use of the blended course format had increased enrollment, decreased dropout rate, increased active engagement by students through participation in the weekly threaded

discussions, and produced an increase in student achievement than when the courses were offered face to face. As a result, my challenge was to redesign the rest of the courses that I would be teaching in the School Building Leadership and District Leadership Programs.

The Research

The instructional process in the Educational Leadership Program is composed of three steps: instructional planning, instructional delivery, and assessment of learning. This instructional process is based on student-centered learning research. Our belief is that there is a direct alignment between the written, taught, and assessment curriculum (Glatthorn, 2000).

Preparation for instruction begins with the end in mind; the standard that the student is expected to learn and how that learning will be assessed. The following steps modeled after Wiggins and McTighe's Understanding By Design Model (2005) included: stage 1) identify desired outcomes and results, stage 2) determine what constitutes acceptable evidence of competency in the outcomes and results (assessment), and Stage 3) plan instructional strategies and learning experiences that bring student learning to these competency levels. Working from the end in mind, students are provided clear expectations through rubrics as to how to demonstrate their learning as well as a number of authentic, project based assessments from which to choose based on their prior knowledge and current educational and professional experiences.

The American Psychological Association Task Force on Psychology of Education along with the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory developed 12 Learner-Centered Psychological Principles. This document included guidelines for school redesign and reform (1993). The principles were divided into four categories: 1) Cognitive and Metacognitive Factors; 2) Motivational and Affective Factors; 3) Developmental and Social Factors; and 4) Individual Differences Factors. The table below lists a summary of the factors in each of the

categories. The American Psychological Association Work Group of the Board of Educational Affairs (1997) revised the 1993 principles to the Learner-Centered Psychological Principles: A framework for school reform and redesign. The revision included two additional elements in the category of Individual Differences: 1) diversity focusing on differences in linguistics, culture,

Cognitive and Metacognitive Factors	
	Nature of the learning process-intentional
	Goals of the learning process-create meaning
	Construction of knowledge: connect new to known
	Strategic thinking: higher order skills
	Context of learning: environmental factors
Motivational and Affective Factors	
	Motivational and emotional influences: emotional state, beliefs, interests, goals
	Intrinsic motivation: creativity, higher order skills, curiosity, interest, choice, control
	Effects of motivation on effort, external effort, guided practice
Developmental and Social Factors	
	Developmental influence on learning, differential development in physical, intellectual, emotional, and social domains
	Social influences: social interactions, interpersonal relations, communication
Individual Differences Factors	
	Individual differences: different strategies, approaches, capacities based on prior experiences and heredity
	Diversity in linguistics, culture, background (1997)
	Standards and assessment regarding procedure and process (1997)

social background and 2) standards and assessment centering on high standards, diagnostic data, and procedure and outcome assessments of the learner and the process.

Laird (2003) indicates that blended courses transform the why, when, where, how, and what of learning that occurs in the 21st century. The courses are characterized by interactions between the learner and peers as well as the learner and instructor that can occur with any learner at a convenient time and place, with compatible equipment (Govindasamy, 2002). According to Lindsay (2004), blended courses improve communication and interactions between students and the professor and between students and students. Active engagement with the content material is also increased because all students are required to respond to the discussion question in some way (Sand, 2002). Research from the University of Illinois (2011) indicates threaded discussion used in the blended format increases adult learning because the discussion is interactive and is how most adults learn best. It is interactive and participatory. Included are opportunities for learners to analyze alternative ways of thinking and acting while assisting learners in exploring their own experiences so they can become better critical thinkers. Learners who have difficulty attending the traditional weekly classroom instruction can have their needs met by the blended course since it meets only three times a semester.

At the University, the blended format has transformed traditional instruction into on-line learning experiences based on the 14 Learner-Centered Psychological Principles with three face to face meetings during the semester. Instructional delivery contains multimedia presentations, simulations, videos, audio sequences, text commentaries, small group activities, and student contributions to the threaded weekly discussions. Based on research, hands-on learning experiences that actively engage students impact the amount of knowledge gained when compared to lecture and chalk talk of the traditional classroom. This provides the instructor the opportunity to be very creative and opens up the world of virtual field trips in the delivery of instruction. In this way, the learner has the ability to collect and organize digital content material

and resources as well as electronic textbooks on laptops in place of physical textbooks. This decreases the cost of textbooks and eliminates the transporting the large textbooks for the learners and the instructor. According to the University of Illinois, (2011), blended courses support self-directed learning by providing individualized, self-paced activities. The learner is proactive and takes the initiative in the learning. The learner has greater motivation which makes it more purposeful. As a result, there is a greater retention of new knowledge which increases the ability to apply the learning to new situations. Research indicates that the greater the expertise of the student in the area the technology usage, the higher the student attainment of knowledge and the more motivated the student is to participate in a blended course (Black, 2002). Black asserts that students learn more in blended formats, write better papers, produce higher quality projects, and are able to participate in more meaningful conversation on the subject being taught.

According to the research, there are some disadvantages or pitfalls to avoid when designing and implementing a blended course. Katela, Garnham, and Aycock (2005) state one challenge for a professor is to insure they have a working knowledge of the technology that will be used to provide instruction. This may be a learning curve that is different for each professor. The development of the course should be conducted slowly to insure it is done accurately. The more accurate the online materials are, including the syllabus and resources, the less frustration there will be for the students. Since this is a change from the traditional way of providing instruction, professors need to commit to spending the time to redesign and transform their traditional lessons to the technological format. It is also important for the instructor to set aside time to read and provide feedback to students on a regular basis. There will be students who do not participate as directed in the threaded weekly discussions and will attempt to complete the entire course the last

week of the semester. Carefully established due dates for assignments need to be determined and adhered to. The situation will then be avoided. The connection between the online assignments and the face to face class activities is crucial to avoid the ‘course and a half syndrome’ that can develop if the two parts of the course are not carefully aligned when designing the course. Course creation needs to focus on instructional design and delivery using technology. It is not just a matter of transferring the traditional lecture mode of delivery of content into the online tool. What is required is a rethinking the design of the course as well as adopting a new approach to teaching that will make the blended format a success. Course goals and objectives which include online learning activities make the learning more learner-centered with greater student active engagement. Learning to facilitate online discussions and providing more project-based assessments of student learning are challenges that professors face in the creation and implementation of hybrid courses (Learning Technology Center, Hybrid Courses, 2011).

It is important that students thinking about participating in the blended format are interviewed to determine that they are independent learners with the level of technology skills to be successful and have well developed study habits and time management skills. All these are needed for student success in a blended course (Katela, Garnham, and Aycock, 2005).

The Process

The first steps I took were to review the traditional course syllabus for each course that I would be teaching in a blended format. Also reviewed, were blended courses that had been changed from the traditional format the previous year. I conducted research to determine what the most important characteristics needed to be part of a blended course. Based on the data gathered, I determined the following elements were crucial: 1) making connections to the 14 Learner-Centered Principles as determined by the American Psychological Association Work Group

Board (1997), 2) using the lesson plan format model of understanding by design created by Wiggins and McTighe (2005), 3) integrating the online course content with the face to face components of the blended course (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2005), 4) keeping the course plans and the technology simple (Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System, 2005), 5) developing a way to effectively and efficiently monitor the design and online communications to ensure they are productive and effective (Lindsay, 2004), and 6) using the format of threaded discussion to provide timely feedback from the instructor while allowing students to provide feedback to each other through required online responses (Lindsay, 2004).

Several individual tutoring sessions on the use of Moodle, the University's online teaching tool were needed. After developing the syllabus for each course, which included the sequence of assignments for each week, the information was put on Moodle. The students were divided into three groups-Group A, Group B, and Group C, according to the student's home location. The purpose was to assign a group each week to answer the discussion question and the other two groups to respond to the first group's answers. The assignments were posted on Sunday of each week. The first group's answers were due by midnight of the Wednesday that the discussion question was assigned. The second and third groups' responses were due by midnight the following Saturday. The group assignments and due dates were included with each discussion question to eliminate any confusion. The dates of the face to face meetings were included in the syllabus. It was determined that the first meeting would be the first day of class to discuss the syllabus, the course requirements, and the assessment system as well as introduce the course content by activating prior knowledge.

Strategies to activate prior knowledge were used. One of these strategies is introduced in each of the first class so that when they appear in the threaded weekly discussion, the students will have an understanding of how to complete the graphic organizer. The KWL chart is composed of three columns as indicated in figure 1. In the column labeled ‘KNOW’, the students make a list of information that they know about the topic that is being discussed based on the title of the material that is being read. In the second column, the students list several questions that they want to have answered as they read the text. It is sometimes suggested to the students that the use of the question words ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘where’, ‘when’, ‘why’, and ‘how’ be used to help formulate the questions. As the students read and find the answers to their questions, the information is listed in column three along with the page and paragraph number where the information was found. Any prior knowledge they listed in the KNOW column that is confirmed during reading, the student also lists the page and paragraph number as by the information in column one. The students are then asked to write a summary of the information listed in the KWL chart including what they knew about the topic that was confirmed and what information was learned as what question still remain unanswered. APA citations are used in the summary to support ideas so this can conveniently be done using the KWL chart. During the weekly threaded discussion, when the KWL chart is used, all groups complete the chart and the first group shares their summary of the chart. The second and third groups respond to the summaries and extend the discussion by including in their responses similarities and differences in the completion of their charts. APA citations are used by students in the second and third groups to support their ideas.

Figure 1

KWL Chart

KNOW	WANT TO KNOW	LEARNED

Free writing on the topic is another way to activate prior knowledge before reading. Students spend five minutes writing, without stopping and skipping lines, everything they know on the topic. As the students read, information written in the free write is either confirmed or revised. Page and paragraph numbers are listed below the information that is confirmed and revised. In class, students use their summaries as a starting point for class discussions. During the threaded weekly discussions, students in the first group share their summary and indicate what was confirmed or needed to be revised after reading, including APA citations to support the ideas. The second and third groups respond to the first group's summaries and compare and contrast their learning using APA citations to support the ideas.

Another way to activate prior knowledge is to survey the text. The students turn all the boldfaced print into questions. These questions are written in a dialogue journal. To create a dialogue journal, students fold their paper in half, lengthwise. The questions that are developed from the bold face print are written in the left column with enough space allotted in the left column between questions so that the answer to the question that will be written on the right side,

will have enough space. In the right column, after the answer, the page and paragraph numbers are listed. During the class session, the answers are starting points for class discussion. When this strategy is used during a weekly threaded discussion, students in the first group write a summary of their answers using APA citations for support. The second and third groups respond to the first group's answers and expand the discussion through including similarities and differences in their thinking. Support for their ideas is provided through APA citations.

The list-group-label strategy activates prior knowledge that the student has on the topic that has been assigned. The students are given a topic and are requested to list all the words that they know that are related to the topic. During the class, students work in groups to combine their respective lists into one, eliminating duplication. The second step is for the students to put the words into groups in which there are commonalities. When this is completed, the students then label the groups based on the group's characteristics. During class, each group shares out their lists and labels. This begins the conversation on the topic. When used during the weekly threaded discussion, each student is asked to brainstorm a list of words and place the words into categories. As the students read the text, they indicate the page and paragraph number where they have gained information regarding the words in the list group label exercise. The students in the first group then complete a summary of the understanding gained from the reading. The summaries included the words from the lists with APA citations from the text to support the ideas. The second and third groups respond to the first group's category labels, words, and the summaries by indicating similarities and differences between their lists, categories, and summaries. APA citations are used to support their ideas.

The use of the online teaching tool, Moodle would be demonstrated and the students would be given an opportunity to practice how to use it. In the syllabus, three project

assignments were included with due dates and the grading rubric. Some courses included small group projects. The small group project members were the same as the groups assigned for the discussion questions but they had the opportunity to choose their group project based on interest, experience, and prior knowledge during the first class. Opportunities were provided during the first and second classes to meet as groups in person to organize the assignment. It is believed that the wave of the future is working on group projects using technology as group members will be no longer working at the same location but at multiple locations. This form of collaboration and communication is an important skill to develop in students. Other project-based assessments require the analysis of data to solve work association problem where the student prepares a solution options in form of short and long term actions plans. Any additional resources were placed on Moodle either as websites, multimedia presentations, simulations, videos, audio sequences, or text commentaries.

The second meeting would be a class half way through the semester when a follow-up to the weekly threaded discussions would take place and any concerns or issues regarding the blended format would be addressed. Experts in the field would be invited to share their expertise in the application of the course concepts. The last meeting would be the last class of the semester where the students would present their final projects with a whole class presentation in a variety of formats.

The Results

In the Educational Leadership program, students were immersed in the new information where the new information is connected to known to make meaning from experience and information. Demonstrations were conducted using explicit action, giving a visual or auditory representation of the new learning while being clear about what students are expected to know, be able to do, or

value using various skills and strategies. Every lesson started and ended with a focus on the expected learning. Students were encouraged to reach for the highest level of performance. Rubrics were provided when large tasks were assigned and anchor charts were used to define high quality work. Students were given the responsibility for their own learning as well as opportunities to use the new knowledge when choices of how to demonstrate their understanding were provided through various means of authentic activities and projects -based assessments related to real life experiences based on interests and intrinsic motivation. Project-based assessments were used since learners need time and opportunity to use, employ, and practice their developing control of new concepts in functional, realistic, non-artificial ways. It is important to keep contexts authentic and provide many practice opportunities to use the new information. Students began with near transfer practice by using their understanding of new concepts in the weekly threaded discussions. They moved to far transfer practice as students gained confidence with the new skill or knowledge by using the course concepts in project-based assessments. Opportunities that involved whole group, small group, and individual practice were included.

Differentiation of instruction occurred when students were given the opportunity to choose from a variety of assessments which was a way to demonstrate their understanding of the knowledge they gained during the course. The blended format of the courses encouraged interaction of all students on a weekly basis as they responded to discussion questions based on their prior knowledge and understanding of the new information. Learners received “feedback” from exchanges with more knowledgeable “others.” The knowledgeable “others” included their peers as well as the instructor. Students were given realistic continuous feedback that was specific about the strengths and weaknesses of the weekly threaded discussions as well as the

project-based assessments that included next steps for learning helped to expand student knowledge and application of the course concepts.

The additional assessments, three research papers for each blended course that included a presentation of the last paper during the final class were graded using a rubric. The three assessments and the rubrics to determine student acquisition of knowledge were assigned during the first class. The papers and the presentations of the students participating in the blended courses were of higher quality than the students participating in the traditional face to face courses.

The university has a standard procedure that students use to evaluate each professor at the end of the semester. Students complete a five point Likert scale for each course of 50 questions that focus on six areas. A narrative section is also available for students to write additional comments. Not all questions pertain to the curriculum, instruction, and assessment of a blended course. Data was collected from my evaluation at the end of the 2010 fall semester to help me to reflect on the design, implementation, and assessment of the blended courses from a total of 16 students. The following information helped to guide my development of the blended courses for the spring 2011 semester. Students stated that the readings were always read and that the assignments connected to the readings were helpful was 100%. The syllabus was viewed as always useful, students indicated 100%. Students evaluated that the feedback from the instructor was viewed as useful was scored 100%. When receiving a grade, the students understood why they received the grade and the discussion board was very useful were both evaluated as 100%.

Some direct comments included:

“The professor always took the time to respond to our online discussion and highlighted the positives. This was helpful to me in knowing that my responses were appropriate and on point.

She always presented us with additional thought provoking questions (no need to respond to them) related to the content of the readings.”

“Each of the assignments was beneficial in helping me to understand the depth of school law and its impact on what I do on a daily basis as an educator.”

“The online discussion format facilitated thoughtful and critical analysis of the concepts presented in the readings.”

“The professor insured that class discussions and presentations were relevant and applicable to our daily responsibilities as educators.”

I reviewed my spring course evaluations to help me make adjustments and revisions to the fall 2011 course syllabus. Thirteen students completed the evaluation and the following data collected helped me prepare for the fall 2011 semester. The discussion board was somewhat to very useful. The course information (i.e. the syllabus and policies) were somewhat to very useful. The number of hours spend per week on the class were 2-4 (15%), 4-6 (38.5%), 6-8 (15.4%), and 8 or more (30.8%). The readings were useful to always useful. The student consulted the syllabus usually to just before class. The instructor response to email/phone was 100%. The instructor’s availability during office hours or by appointment was 100%. The instructor encouraged students to ask questions was evaluated as 100%. The instructor stimulated interest in the subject was 100%.

Below are listed direct quotes from students which will guide this process.

“Emails were answered very quickly, much appreciated.”

“The textbook was easy to read and offered practical ideas. It was relevant to principalship.

In the Moodle format, the readings were critical to the weekly assignments. The text selected was very useful and well-chosen for gaining knowledge and applying within the answer and response format. The feedback the professor provided was also integral within the assignment, and well versed in the knowledge she presented and commented on regarding the readings and the course. “

“The course was informative and aligned well with the requirements and expectations of what one needs to learn in order to be knowledgeable and effective in an administrative position. The course parameters and the content outlined by the instructor brought concepts and practical knowledge to fruition through a variety of textbook applications and also 'real world' working exercises.”

Additional data were collected through a student survey that was developed by the instructor based on survey questions that were not asked in the University instructor evaluation and that were deemed important in the research conducted on blended courses. The survey was submitted to the Institute Review Board and was approved. Surveys from fall 2010 and spring 2011 were analyzed and the findings showed several areas for consideration in planning blended courses for the spring 2012 semester. For the analysis, levels 5, 4, and 3 were combined. One statement “I feel comfortable in the on-line environment.” indicated a percent of 89. “I had the ability to effectively communicate with the instructor.” was a statement that resulted in a percent of 96. “The course organization was defined and implemented.” had a 96% rating. The statement, “The instructor was interested in me and helpful with my academic progress.” was evaluated at a total of 96%. “The instructor was an effective teacher.” obtained a total of a 96%. The statement, “The organization of the material presented was well done and easy to follow.”, received a rating of 100%. “The professor helped me gain valuable knowledge about the subject

matter.” was determined to have a 99% rating. The statement, “I was satisfied with the availability of the instructor.”, received a rating totaling 91%. “The work requirement for this class, when compared to that of other similar classes were appropriate.” was given a rating of 100%.

Of particular interest were the comments that were for question 32, “What did you like most about the course?” The following are a snapshot of the responses.

“Moodle was easy to navigate.”

“I could work independently.”

“Working within a cohort group was valuable.”

“Alternating the group assignments weekly was beneficial.”

“The guest speakers who discussed the practical application of the course concepts were useful.”

“Weekly threaded discussion questions could be completed within my own personal schedule.”

“The course layout of meeting face to face three times and then completing the threaded weekly discussion the other weeks worked well.”

“Getting peer feedback during the weekly threaded discussion was eye-opening.”

“Getting a clear, cut agenda with established due dates in advanced help me plan out the semester.”

“Graded assignments were clarified at class meetings.”

The analysis of the data from narrative data will be used in revising the blended courses for the spring 2012 and fall 2012. The feedback included:

“Too many questions to complete on some weekly discussions.”

“Blended course, not for me.”

“Moodle postings overwhelming with more than 10 students in a class.”

The Conclusions

Several conclusions have been made based on the review of the results from this case study. It takes time and out of the box thinking to transfer a traditionally taught class to a blended format. The redesign process needs to be conducted in small steps which included specific learning goals that were easy to manage and assess. Keeping the technology simple helps the students be more successful and provides a greater opportunity to focus on the content instead of focusing on the learning of technology. Careful attention needs to be paid to aligning the blended part of the course to the three face-to-face meetings to avoid developing a ‘course and a half’.

Understanding that online course activities take time to implement is necessary so that the course does not become overwhelming for the students. Placing the students in groups and assigning specific groups tasks with due dates, helped to maintain continuous, consistent, and valuable participation of all students in the threaded weekly discussions. Even those students in a traditional format who would have not participated in a class discussion, did so in the weekly threaded discussion because of the safe, secure, non-threatening environment. Students were given a rubric that indicated how the weekly threaded responses would be graded. Strong weekly responses included a discussion of the major concepts, citations from the text and outside sources for support of the thinking, personal experiences that showed application of the concepts,

questions regarding the concepts, validation of the thinking of peers, and multiple responses throughout the week. Weekly feedback from peers and from the instructor that was specific and meaningful to each student helped sustain threaded weekly discussions that were high quality, were purposeful, expanded the concepts, included citations from resources for support of ideas, and contained personal experiences as examples. Weekly discussion questions included the application of the concepts to new situations through case studies, to personal experiences within the students' school or district, and to situations where the students were in an administrative position making leadership decisions.

There are several challenges that need to be considered to make the blended courses successful. They included: 1) rethinking the course design, 2) continuing to adopting a new approach to teaching, 3) managing two learning environments (on-line and face to face), 4) integrating online and face to face instruction to avoid the course and a half syndrome, 5) keeping the technology and course design simple, 6) spending additional time in planning, designing, and implementing the blended course including providing timely, specific, meaningful feedback, and 7) preparing the students to understand their role in the blended course and how it is different from the traditional face to face course.

The advantages to the blended course format are: 1) new teaching opportunities, 2) more actively engaged students in the learning, 3) increased student learning due to more active engagement, 4) new pedagogical approaches (i.e. learner-centered practices), 5) differentiation of learning, 6) efficient use of student resources including time and money because the learning can take place at any time or any place there is computer access and the many of the course materials are on-line, 7) interaction takes place not only between the student and the instructor but also between students 8) students gain insights from multiple perspectives, 9) students drill down

deeper into concepts, and 10) documentation and assessment of the process of learning as well as the knowledge gained.

The advantages far surpass the challenges. The blended model is a way for this university to move into the 21st century in the use of technology so high quality, equitable educational opportunities are available for adult learners. The structure of the model includes meeting face to face three times a semester; assessed asynchronous, threaded weekly discussions; and three research papers with one presentation during the last class. Based on the successes this year, the next steps in my journey of continuous improvement in the development of my blended teaching and course design is to include more during reading instructional strategies that I have used during my traditional face to face teaching.

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Achievement Gap and Developing Cultural Competency Skills for Post-Secondary Teacher Education Program Faculty**Osman Özturgut****Abstract**

The emphasis on multicultural education and cultural competency has been a popular subject among teacher educators and scholars (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Ladson-Billings, 2003, 2006; Perry, Moore, Acosta, Edwards, & Frey, 2006; Sleeter, 2008, 2009; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005; Sleeter, 1991, 2001, 2008; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Lindsey, R., Robins, K., & Terrell, R., 2003). Teacher education programs in the United States (U.S.) are struggling to prepare competent teachers especially to teach underprivileged minority children mainly in urban areas. The argument of this paper is that the emphasis on or struggle for, if you will, a multicultural education is leading to significant handicaps within the education system in the U.S. One reason is that university professors are not necessarily taking responsibility for failing to educate culturally aware teachers for these classrooms. What we need to do is, not to associate failure with color, ethnic and cultural background but accept failure with an open heart, looking deeper into the practices of teacher education programs rather than pointing out fingers at others while distracting the whole education system. That is, we do not need to explain the failure and underachievement by the weaknesses of classroom teachers, but confront it.

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Introduction

The emphasis on multicultural education and cultural competency has been a popular subject among teacher educators and scholars (Cochran-Smith, 2001; Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1999a, 1999b; Ladson-Billings, 2003, 2006; Perry, Moore, Acosta, Edwards, & Frey, 2006; Sleeter, 2008, 2009; Sleeter & Stillman, 2005; Sleeter, 1991, 2001, 2008; Sleeter & Bernal, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Lindsey, R., Robins, K., & Terrell, R., 2003). Teacher education programs in the United States (U.S.) are struggling to prepare competent teachers especially to teach underprivileged minority children mainly in urban areas. Teachers have been held responsible for the achievement gap present in the education system. One of the key reasons for this achievement gap is that new teachers are not skilled enough to teach minority children, referring mostly to African-American children (black children) in certain States (i.e. Missouri) and Hispanic and Latino students in others (i.e. Texas, Miami) (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2000). The Federal government then steps in and implements new strategies, places new regulations, and pours money into universities that are promising to help the new teachers with their challenges in teaching these children. This 'new' strategy of the federal government helps produce more literature exploring the multicultural education and offers programs to train culturally competent teachers. However, even with multiple pre-service and in-service training programs, further widening of the gap still becomes a fault of these new teachers. The responsibility for the achievement gap stays with the new teachers that are ignorant about how to function in so-called multicultural classrooms. The purpose of this study is to explore the issues with teacher preparation programs in the U.S., and provide recommendations for developing cultural competency for teacher educators. This study further intends to provoke a discussion to

help us understand how the teachers are prepared and why teacher educators should take a bigger responsibility in the widening of the achievement gap.

Rationale

It has been recognized that for students to become successful in a diverse world, they need to have the ability to communicate and negotiate among diverse cultures (Banks, 2001) and this could be achieved through adopting a culturally responsive pedagogy (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994) with trained instructors facilitating it (Nieto, 2000). When the cultural diversity and global tolerance are promoted within multicultural education, traditional elitism and its shortcomings would be overcome (Schugurensky, 2002). That is, multicultural education is important for students to be successful in a diverse world, and the sole responsibility lies with the classroom teachers.

Scholars usually agree with the necessity for an education system to emphasize multicultural education. One argument of this paper is that the emphasis on or struggle for, if you will, a multicultural education is leading to significant handicaps within the education system. University professors are not necessarily taking responsibility for failing to educate culturally competent teachers for these classrooms. Insisting on the current methods and strategies for multiculturalizing the education will not eventually make it work. Therefore, the solution that the current literature suggests becomes obsolete for it is misguided and presents only partially factual information, thus creating a partial truth. To reach to a finding close to the truth currently being offered, we need to ask several questions:

- Who teaches these teachers that are sent into urban schools without necessary skills?
- Are these university professors aware of the presence of students from diverse backgrounds in their classes?
- Are these university professors qualified and skilled enough to train culturally competent teachers?

The 2004 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty identified that the largest proportion of full-time faculty and instructional staff were White (80 percent), compared with Asian/Pacific Islander (9 percent), Black (5 percent), Hispanic (3 percent), and other racial/ethnic groups. That is, the demographics of postsecondary education faculty members are not conducive to training multicultural teachers. Given these facts, it is reasonable to assume that these faculty members had little exposure to diverse cultures themselves.

Another significant finding was that full-time faculty and instructional staff were more likely to be male than female. Indeed, the field of education was reported to be the only field with a dominance of females (58 percent were female, 42 percent were male). Adding to this, when the average age for an assistant professor is 42 and the average age of an associate professor is 47, we can further assume that these professors were not necessarily exposed to multiculturalism during their formative years. With this in mind, not having a diverse composition of faculty members in the field of postsecondary education, it is questionable whether a multicultural education is indeed possible in the near future.

This study does not argue against the necessity of a multicultural education and for major reforms in the current teacher education system but intends to bring new insights into the discussion of multicultural education. Do teacher educators know who they are as individuals?

Do they acknowledge their weaknesses in cultural competency before pointing the finger at the “other”? Why do we avoid the discussions of white supremacy and Eurocentrism?

This paper first explains how achievement gap is tied to the lack of understanding of the multicultural education by current scholars and practitioners. Then ethnocentrism is explored in the context of acknowledging the ‘self’ in multicultural education. Next, why a lack of sincerity and appropriate emphasis cause dysfunctionalities in the current education system is discussed. Finally, the researcher argues that how socially just teachers of teachers are born out of white guilt and the attempt to create a socially just curriculum and instruction is rather a shallow attempt to multiculturalize the education in the U.S.

Achievement Gap and Multicultural Education

Despite increasing ethnic diversity in the United States, many educators do not seem to understand that the multicultural education is the broader understanding, involvement, and appreciation of more than two cultures. Jay (2003) explains that “Despite a tendency to equate ‘Americanness’ with ‘Whiteness’ by individuals both outside and inside the United States, the United States is comprised of many different racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural groups” (p. 3). For example, King (1991) argues that culturally relevant teaching that is successful helps produce a relevant black personality. His argument is relevant in the sense that culture is significant for individual and group identity. It “gives people a sense of who they are, of belonging, of how they should behave and of what they should not be doing” (Harris & Moran, 1991, p. 12).

Garcia (1994) argues that research on African American students tends to focus on dropouts, literacy gaps, and educational delinquency. Another example to arguing the

dominance of the White race is Critical Race Theorists' argument that official school curricula are designed to maintain a "White supremacist master script" and they are "culturally specific artifacts" (Delgado, 1995, p. 21). Regarding instruction, Delgado suggests that the "current instructional strategies presume that African American students are deficient" (p. 22). When African-American students are given tests, Gould (1981) argues, that it is a movement to legitimize African American students' deficiency. Tate (1997) argues that the current multicultural paradigm, currently popular in the U.S., exists to benefit whites. The question Bell (1980) poses is whether whites are promoting advancing blacks when only blacks promote White interests.

Whatever the real reasons behind the so-called achievement gap between the European-American and minority student population in the U.S. are, the lack of a multicultural curriculum and monopoly of middle class European-American, mostly female, teachers living in the suburbs are considered to be the underlying causes. However, neither whites nor non-white minorities necessarily take responsibility of failure. One thing is for sure: It is never "I" but always the "other" that are responsible.

In order for learning to occur in classrooms, we need to examine a wide variety of perspectives, including our own (Curtis, 1998). Lawrence (2005) claims that for an antiracist multicultural education to be more than superficially effective, it must go beyond the lack of multicultural ingredients in the curriculum, policy and structure issues within schools and how school personnel, specifically teachers, interact with students and with each other (see also Banks & Banks, 1995; Lee, 1995; Nieto, 2000). It is the innate rejection of culture difference as threatening as it is because "it challenges an individual to reconsider ethnocentric views of the

world and negotiate each intercultural encounter with an open mind and as a unique experience” (Mahoney and Schamber, 2004, p. 312).

Through this study, the author postulates that the solution to the challenges of establishing a multicultural education lies in the understanding of the relationship between the individuals rather than implementation of a policy model or educational reform within an educational system. An education system, which does not recognize its problems and challenges as they are, rather than creating superficial challenges and solutions, is bound to fail in the long run. Therefore, a realistic approach to why a 30 year old multiculturalization of education attempts cannot offer a practical solution may help explain the reasons behind a failure in an educational system. It is not necessarily the “other” that are not able to achieve to close the achievement gap in urban schools, but the real achievement gap is among university professors’ (mis) training of these future teachers and then distancing themselves from the failure, while also ensuring that they have enough classes to teach for coming semesters. If classroom teachers are not culturally competent, teacher education programs are to take the largest responsibility for not ensuring that their students are indeed ready for diverse classrooms before they certify these teachers. Smith (2009) asserted that success or failure of multicultural education depends on the effective preparation of teachers and administrators. When the teachers and administrators understand the learning needs of students and recognize how these needs can be different than the needs of the students from the dominant culture, then the actual learning occurs. That is, when “we really see, know the students we must teach” (Delpit, 1995, p. 183), we start making a difference in the lives of these students.

Ethnocentrism

Banks and Banks (1993) use the term “ethnic encapsulation” to refer to the cultural deprivation that results from the limited knowledge of any culture other than one's own. Not knowing other cultures significantly handicaps the attempts to help them. More importantly, misconceptions and stereotypes about other cultures limit the solutions. Antal (2002) argues that misunderstandings and conflict occur when people interpret and judge what they see, the tip of the iceberg, according to their own norms, values, and assumptions. Thus the behavior of others may seem strange, illogical, or “barbaric” (Barnlund, 1998, p. 39).

The National Geographic - Roper Public Affairs 2006 Geographic Literacy Study assesses the geographic knowledge of young American adults between the ages of 18 and 24 (Roper Poll, 2006). In this report, the researchers found that knowing about foreign countries and languages were seen as less critical skills as “slightly over a quarter (28%) say that it is necessary to know where countries in the news are located. Half of the respondents say that it is important but not absolutely necessary and a fifth (21%) say it is not too important” (p. 15). It is further explained that young Americans have limited contact with other cultures outside the U.S.:

- Three-quarters (74%) have traveled to another state in the past year, but seven in ten (70%) have not traveled abroad at all in the past three years.
- Six in ten (62%) cannot speak a second language .fluently..
- Nine in ten (89%) do not correspond regularly with anyone outside the U.S.
- Only two in ten (22%) have a passport. (p. 9)

In the light of these findings, teachers, students, and administrators who have limited (and are often misinformed and stereotyping) knowledge of other cultures are part of the problem rather than part of a solution. If the young Americans do not have a broader understanding of different cultures, it is partially the fault of professors teaching these students. Undsey (2005) explains that when students live in and observe a different society than their own with different concepts of social justice where the dignity and worth of individuals and human relationships are more highly valued, it helps U.S. students develop a deeper sense of appreciation for these values. If this is true, for example, teacher educator programs should encourage study abroad programs to expose their students to different cultures.

Sincerity

An essential part of intercultural communication is sincerity. When in-group interaction differs from out-group interaction in a way that it goes out of the honesty limits, then, it becomes an issue. Poskanzer (2002) claims that “we live in a litigious age, one in which faculty conduct (or misconduct) is increasingly likely to be challenged by students or colleagues, perhaps to become the subject of institutional discipline” (p. 2).

The United States, for the sake of democracy and freedom, has become a society where people are scared of being labeled as “racists” and, “discrimination” has been a very thin ice to walk on: “Boon, bane, or something in between, legal considerations now exert an enormous impact on the day-to-day work of colleges and universities (Kaplin & B. Lee, 1995, quoted in Poskanzer, 2002, p. 1). In this, it is important, for all the races within the U.S. educational system, to exercise their rights to freedom of speech. However, intercultural communication requires a great deal of accountability between what we say and how we act. A big step is how

close these two are to each other. Teacher education programs, while acknowledging the legality and other realities of post-secondary education, need to be sincere in their discourses.

Unfamiliar Seas

Once we place a young female European American teacher in a classroom where she is called 'White' rather than 'Madam', or 'Miss', it is rather unfair to expect her to disengage her from her convictions about the race relations. That is, calling the teacher "White" enforces the difference and widens the gap. Educated in a system where there were only similar cultures, we cannot expect her to grow as a teacher, while also disregarding the behavior she is receiving from students and teachers of color. Rather than blaming the 'young female European American teacher of suburbs,' we need to understand that with the education and life experiences she had, more help needs to be extended to her especially during her first few years in the profession. If white students label their teachers as "Black", their Hispanic teachers as "Brown", and Asian teachers as "Yellow", it is as unacceptable and discriminatory as labeling the students of color labeling their white teachers, as "White".

Furthermore, once we add the pressure of being a new teacher to the pressure of maintaining racial sensitivity, it is therefore natural for any color [teacher] to be less effective. Macphee (1997) posits that rural children do receive images of socio-cultural diversity mostly through the media, but these images alone cannot provide a complete or accurate portrayal of any cultural group. Barta and Grindler (1996) explain that despite the teacher's best intentions, cultural differences are not always perceived positively. This is particularly true when viewed from the perspective of the mainstream culture and bias against diversity, not diversity itself,

becomes the cause of the turmoil. It is their responsibility to make sure that the students are informed about what they will be facing when they enter diverse classrooms.

Socially Just

It is in the human nature to justify the behaviors through various situations that they have encountered. It is the selective perception and acceptance of the partial truth as it is psychologically comforting. It is the avoidance of acknowledgment of the ‘self’ and accountability that it brings along. Since our childhood, we have been blaming others - our sister or brother for breaking mom’s most valuable vase - . When we are young, it is our siblings. When we are older, it is other people, but it is never “I”. While an advocate of the popular discourse, Lewis (2001) explains, “Color-blindness enables all members of the community to avoid confronting the racial realities that surround them, to avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings, and to avoid dealing with racist events” (p. 801). It is rather questionable whether such attributes can be expanded to the overall society. Sonio Nieto (2000) argues that multicultural education “challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts” and “affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender among others) that students, their communities, and teachers reflect” (p. 305). She does not argue that multicultural education “rejects racism”, but rather confirms the importance of teachers’ cultures in the learning process. When we are emphasizing social justice within the society, we need to have an operational definition of social justice, while also putting it into context. If not, social justice simply becomes a tool for guilt-driven professors, who are playing the role of saviors, to collect the social, economic, and political benefits. This further creates a model minority when whites elevate some non-white

groups or give them ‘honorary white’ status so as to create a middle level buffer (Tuan, 1998; Wu, 2002).

White Guilt

Someone has to take responsibility for the achievement gap. Parents, poverty, culturally irrelevant pedagogy, or the fact that white supremacy gives whites greater protections and material advantages than other races (Lipsitz, 1998; McIntosh, 1997) can help explain the achievement gap to a certain extent. The achievement gap between, for example, blacks and whites is not a direct result of unskilled, white, young, suburban (middle class), female teachers as argued by Darling-Hammond & Bransford (2005), Ladson-Billings (2001), U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2004), and Nieto (2004). Even though Delpit (1995), Ladson-Billings (2001, 2005), Lazar (2004), and McIntyre’s (1997) argument that race has had a central part in the education of students of color is certainly correct, however, their further argument that well-intentioned yet misinformed prospective and current classroom teachers integrate racist pedagogies in their teachings is not necessarily complete.

What does not make sense is why the students of color are more segregated now than ever before (Orfield, 1988; Bell, 1983; Hawley, 1988; Schofield, 1989) with all the emphasis by scholars, practitioners, and federal funding of teacher education programs in the U.S.? Is it indeed the marginal benefits of white guilt, where blacks and as well as whites, through capitalizing on white guilt to achieve some sort of political and ideological gain, collecting the fruits of white guilt (Steel, 2002)? Is color being a credit to institutions as they provide the moral authority? Is America moving from the dark ages of racism into an age of white guilt

where both sides have marginal benefits without significant consequences of long term spillover costs?

This is how white guilt starts: Whites (and their institutions) first acknowledge the presence of historical racism. However, once they acknowledge it, they lose the moral background and authority, creating a necessity to gain back the ground to hide their vulnerability. Then, promoting white guilt becomes their stance, which then eventually becomes a mirror reflection of black power. McIntyre (1997) and Titone (1998) argue that we should not be surprised that white educators working in urban communities act out roles as white knights, whose mission is to rescue people of color from oppression. This generosity of the whites with white guilt merely stays as attempts to redeem themselves of the wrong doings of the past.

Conclusion

Throughout this paper, it is argued that the university professors should redefine multicultural education, self-explore, and open their eyes on the upcoming danger of racializing the education system. Postsecondary education faculty members see themselves as the saviors of minorities, however, oppressors do not wish to see themselves as an oppressive class because “discovering himself to be an oppressor may cause considerable anguish, but it does not necessarily lead to solidarity with the oppressed” (p.31) as Freire (1993) stated. Academic elitism and ethnocentrism is a significant limitation for teacher education programs. The discussion of social justice does not go beyond providing a race surplus, and as “strategy for securing to some an advantage in a competitive society” (Ignatiev, 1997, p. 1) under the leadership of mostly white males.

What we need to do is, not to associate failure with color, ethnic and cultural background but accept failure with an open heart, looking deeper into the practices of teacher education programs rather than pointing out fingers at others while distracting the whole education system. Of course, white people do not necessarily reinforce whiteness any more than heterosexuals promoting hetero-sexualism, or men are necessarily sexist (Bonnett, 1997). That is, we do not need to explain the failure and underachievement by the weaknesses of the classroom teacher, but confront it, as Ray McDermott (1987) stated:

[Failure] is a culturally necessary part of the American school scene. We do not need to explain it; we need to confront it.... [T]he ethnographer's work might be better focused on how Americans have become so preoccupied with failure, and how, being so preoccupied, we have found ways to make so constant the attribution of failure to particular children or particular kinds of children. (p. 364)

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Accommodating Advanced Learners: Hybrid Format

Greg Gibbs

Abstract

The article entitled “Accommodating Advanced Learners: Hybrid Format” deals with the moving a university program from traditional to hybrid on-line format. The process of program examination through student responses to the changing of curriculum delivery is touched upon. Elements of instructional theory are touched upon through a personal review of the way in which elements of this educational leadership program had been taught and are now moving towards a new delivery model. The model has been now in effect for 4 years and reflections of how this came to be and how it is now viewed are also present in this descriptive piece. Moving to an online delivery model is a big step for traditional faculty this article focuses on that journey as well.

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In the Spring of 2007 it was determined that there would be a detailed examination of the educational leadership program at the typical course evaluation time but this time the analysis would really delve deeply into the students responses. There always had some responses saying how difficult the program was or how rigorous the course load was, etc. It was simply believed this was some level of a normal, standard response and the faculty was actually pleased that the program challenged the learners.

But that spring the faculty opened up the usual formatted evaluation sheets and allowed for narrative to each specific question. They even added a few that dealt with the negative areas we had logged for the past couple of years so they could get at the details or at least the level or degree of the negative responses. The faculty provided three by five cards in addition to the usual evaluation form that the university provided. On these three by five cards (anonymously) students could add details of anything you would like to see different or changed.

The professors sat with these cards from all the educational leadership program course groups and reviewed them long after the students were gone. Analysis included going over them several times and categorizing them into several sets, mostly dealing with structural points of the program. Faculty often felt they had little control over some of these elements and went back to their previous conclusion that some of this is just a normal student response.

The educational leadership program's student numbers were fairly consistent over the years and saw neither major influx nor potential change toward decline on the horizon. Faculty were all aware of their own competition and graduate programs in nearby colleges and universities as well as online sources. The university had always dismissed these and stood fast with our little niche of the world. This simply would not cut it in the future. The educational

leadership program needed growth and needed some level of excitement about the program if they were to continue to support future administrators in our region.

Determined to change this for the better, the faculty had conversations with the Dean of the graduate school who said go for it, make some changes, send in a proposal for doing business differently. After studying some of the local models that the competition used, the faculty only came to the conclusion of what they didn't want the program to like. This guided much of the discussion early that summer. Education is a people business, who better than school administrators – they must be people oriented. Could the university make the educational leadership program online and not meet or see the “people” (students) regularly? The faculty and professors were not in favor of that option. What was left, online or not online?

It was determined that the university would go with a hybrid format, partially online and partially face-to-face for each course within the program. Also decided, at that time, keeping the practicum and internship phase the same, traditional, face-to-face activity as it had been with university supervisors and site supervisors regularly meeting with the student candidates.

That fall it was announced that the educational leadership program had become hybrid and explained the format to potential students. There was an increased number in the cohort group that fall and an increased group every fall since.

The students all expressed, at the time of their admissions, that this is a better fit for their needs and as the faculty went back to the student concerns from previous years, that too matched. Students wanted some flexibility of time and ability to complete a rigorous and valuable program while still maintaining their educational jobs and family life. Not that some compromises were not obvious but this certainly stayed within some limitations. Faculty also wanted the students to

be the best teachers they could be while they were attempting to become administrators; no one wanted to see any compromise of good work ethic, etc. while they were a student at the university.

The faculty and professors, were pleasantly surprised about the learning levels of the students that first semester and many of the fears were allayed. It was thought that meeting the students in August and then not meeting face to face until early October would present a serious problem in the loss of knowing the students. Faculty found that reading postings from each student, each week of the online portion helped them to actually know the students better than if they merely sat in a class face-to-face with the faculty each week.

Thinking back to the traditional classroom scenario, a student may sit there during an entire class session and contribute nothing. Class closes and they leave. The professor knows no more about them than they knew if they had been absent.

The anonymity of responding also allows all to respond with few hesitations and faculty really see a student's voice through their electronic responses as the time goes by. A key element of this is the level of questioning that allows for such a dialogue. Professors must ask higher order questions and give options so that each student has a response that can provide additional information to the overall question/problem scenario. Without such a format faculty might as well do a multiple choice exam online each week. The depth of the responses, bringing in student backgrounds, their knowledge bases, and their own syntheses of information has been a piece that has helped to transform the educational leadership program curricula.

Faculty must focus on issues that are truly cognitive, contemplative, transformational and worthy of an in-depth analysis, questions and problems that provide platforms for thinking

outside the box and helping the university students become the change agents that all the professors wish to have the students become. Bloom's Taxonomy has truly been dusted off throughout this process!

As a result the curriculum has actually become more rigorous, more in-depth, and more challenging of the students' presuppositions. The faculty still base the curriculum on the ELLC Standards (Educational Leadership Licensure Consortium) but they believe they are making a measurable impact even more so now that the format includes this diverse elements of both online and in-person. Now that the educational leadership program is past year four of doing this hybrid fashion, the program has its own in-house data that truly supports that this move was transforming for the students as well as the faculty.

Learning is different. There is built in wait-time for students to read the question and think about their answer, research it a bit, talk it over with a non-student colleague, etc. It makes the level of response certainly more engaging than before, across the student's entire life. This allows for knowledge from the text, online sources, student generated research, professor's notes, lectures, PowerPoint's, etc. all to be synthesized in a manner than was simply not possible before. The level of rigor in each assignment has risen because of these elements, the quality of the responses has increased, and the transfer of knowledge, skills and dispositions has been made much more efficient than in a traditional course framework/format.

Students begin to quickly realize the level of development that each weekly response needs to take. Since all students are required to respond each week, they often set a standard higher than even a professor might. The student that comes back with a well documented, citation laden, response to a question sets the stage for others to follow. Faculty reiterate to the

students that their opinions too must be based upon some knowledge and therefore should have back-up citations and references. But, this weekly exchange that begins on the first week of each course, soon has an expectation set by the best and brightest student(s) that raises the bar for everyone.

Faculty and professors enjoy this level of dialogue and have come to accept it for the norm now after four years of teaching this way. All faculty and professors would not choose to go back to the more static, traditional classroom filled with lecture and little responses from students except when prompted.

When students first come to the educational leadership program most of them are coming from a previous master's degree or at least bachelors' degree taken in the traditional fashion usually a few years ago. The median student in this educational leadership program is in their mid-thirties with a masters' degree and several years teaching experience. They often ask, "How does this work?" since they are not sure how twenty different people are going to respond to a question each week and how the answers wouldn't just be redundant. So, the first person to answer the question correctly would merely set the answer for all others to say they agree or propose a different solution. That simply is not the case, the questioning strategies developed by faculty and professors has had to evolve to make sure this does not happen and has required better preparation on their parts to instill a rigor and excellence that was not so well developed prior to this hybrid format. Spending time at the higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy has been required to make sure our questioning techniques not only get to the crux of the material but also provide for multiple answers to problems based on multiple scenarios and solid confirmation through data and research of all those possibilities.

Teaching to the ELCC Standards has been the focus of the educational leadership program since its inception but this is more clearly in each student's mind since going to the hybrid format. Every assignment is based in some way in the standards, and documented appropriately so by the professor. The curriculum fits into the Standards and our assignments and check points for knowledge, skill, and disposition acquisition are out there for all to see but much more integrated into the student learning than previously. Faculty had felt that this was necessary since we would be seeing the students physically, face-to-face less and it may be important to keep them into the Standards constantly. Whether or not this would have happened without a hybrid format is hard to say, but since the university has gone to this it is much more evident that each student clearly understands the ELCC Standards and the place that those standards hold in their own learning.

Each question, case study, problem, and assignment is clearly rooted within an ELCC Standard and should be responded to as such. This has become a norm the faculty are now used to after four years, something that has developed through the format, purposefully or not. It has been the way the faculty keeps the curriculum relevant and focused while on-line.

There certainly still is the ability for academic freedom within a course but the content is also much stronger and the relationship to the standards upon which the curriculum is based is also much more evident to the students through the multiple levels of interaction and integration, an element that the hybrid format helps to provide. Faculty know this through their evaluation comments over the past four years but they also see it weekly in the quality of the responses to the assignments. The fact, that the faculty have had to significantly modify past assignments and adapt other elements to this format, has provided for, and even in some cases forced, an increased and regular analysis of the program curriculum as faculty attempt to meet the needs of

the students and impart elements of the ELLC Standards to them as future administrative certification candidates.

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**The Effect of Second Life vs. Internet Technology
in a Sixth Grade Reading Classroom**

Erica Alexander

Abstract

In America, there is a growing consensus that educational video games should be used in the classroom to meet the needs of 21st Century learners. According to the American Federation of Scientists (2006), students that “have grown up with digital technology and video games are especially poised to take advantage of the features of educational games” (p. 3). Because students are digital natives, educators must utilize technology in the classroom, especially computer games, to stimulate curriculum. This paper will focus on an action research study that I conducted in order to understand how Second Life can be used during sixth grade reading instruction. Research data was analyzed to determine whether or not the virtual game increased student self-efficacy and reading achievement. This was a pilot study; at the time of the investigation, there was a lack of literature in terms of the effectiveness of utilizing Second Life in sixth grade reading instruction to increase student self-efficacy and reading comprehension.

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Introduction

Although video games have been in existence for decades, the education world gave little attention to their educational value – until now. Educational video games are quickly becoming “a promising technology forum that provides students with opportunities to explore real-world issues through authentic learning experiences” (Moos & Honkomp, 2001, p. 231). National technology standards are currently being implemented, so teachers are expected to embrace 21st Century learning tools.

Students already use technology on a daily basis. Texting, social networking, and virtual gaming are appealing to young people; therefore, integrating the enjoyable features of video games with educational subject matter can offer an elevated educational experience for students. In addition, video games “reach beyond the classroom to the larger community, asking students to apply their developing analytical skills and ethical judgment to concrete problems in the world around them, and to connect theory with the insights gained from practice” (Hancock, Smith, Timpte, & Wunder, 2010, p. 37).

Second Life is an example of an online video game that connects students to the outside world. The creators of Second Life shaped a virtual environment that is increasingly being used for educational purposes. Barkand and Kush (2009) stated that users can “create an Avatar and travel around a 3D world” (p. 216) in Second Life. The program allows users to explore diverse locations, fictional and non-fictional, in a collaborative setting. Users can also engage in “rich, immersive, and engaging tasks” (Hancock, Smith, Timpte, & Wunder, 2010, p. 38) in Second Life. Unfortunately, there is a drawback to using Second Life in a middle school classroom: some content is not suitable for children. To remedy this problem, some academic institutions are creating private islands for their students in order to avoid inappropriate video game content.

Fortunately, Second Life shows evidence of motivating students and increasing their reading abilities in a sixth grade reading classroom when used in a controlled environment. According to Hutchinson (2009), “Social software technology seems to play a positive role in improving linguistic power relationships and in developing interactive writing abilities. Social software can engage and motivate students, and forge a connection between education and real life as students use it in their social lives” (p. 2).

Sixth grade reading teachers are being challenged to enhance their instruction by combining content standards with technology. Educators must also construct lessons that:

- (a) Promote, support, and model creative, innovative thinking and inventiveness; (b) Engage students in exploring real world issues and solving authentic problems using digital tools and resources; (c) Promote student reflection using collaboration tools to reveal and clarify students’ conceptual understanding and thinking, planning, and creative processes; and (d) Model collaborative knowledge construction by engaging in learning with students, colleagues, and others in face-to-face and virtual environments.

(Hearrington, 2010, p. 65)

Facing all of these requirements can be daunting, but teachers can utilize virtual reality games to help their students learn essential standards in an entertaining way. According to research conducted by Squire (2005), e-learning games “have developed a reputation for being fun, engaging, and immersive, recruiting deep thinking and complex problem solving” (p. 2).

Conversely, virtual reality games do not always engage and motivate students. Squire (2005) completed a research study where students played virtual reality games in the classroom; some of the participants encountered failure (pp. 1-20). In one section of the article, the author discussed students who experienced disappointment and became frustrated. “These students

lacked either sufficient interest in the game or the requisite self-efficacy with games, or perhaps they just had bad days during which playing such a difficult game was unattractive” (Squire, 2005, p. 6). In this instance, the video game was not motivating to learners.

Fortunately, if educational video games are designed with the proper learning outcomes in mind, such as increasing reading achievement, and the students are motivated, the “games can provide a training environment in which users can perform tasks without facing the real-world consequences of failure” (Garris, Ahlers, & Driskell, 2002, p. 453). Students that played video games with varying levels of difficulty gradually built their motivation, reading skills, and confidence, otherwise known as self-efficacy. As per Garris, Ahlers, & Driskell, “Individuals with greater confidence in their task capabilities are more resilient to the difficulties faced when applying skills learned in a real-world environment” (2002, p. 453).

Self-efficacy is crucial throughout the learning process. According to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy can be defined as “a generative capability in which cognitive, social, emotional, and behavior subskills must be organized and effectively orchestrated to serve innumerable purposes” (p. 36). While educators understand the importance of student self-efficacy in the sixth grade reading classroom, many students are unaware of their motivating factors. As per Davis (2010), “The ways in which children interpret and experience literacy teaching in the classroom have consequences for their achievement and motivation” (p. 54). It is for this very reason that educators must “endeavor to locate curriculum and teaching methods that are effective in both promoting academic achievement and in engaging students as they experience early literacy” (Davis, 2010, p. 54). If instructors use entertaining and educational games in their classroom, they can help their sixth grade students increase their self-efficacy in the reading classroom. If students “are more interested and involved in the task, they devote more time on task,

they actively pursue challenging activities, and they are more committed to continued task activity” (Garris, Ahlers, & Driskell, 2002, p. 454).

In this study, I incorporated the educational video environment of Second Life in my sixth grade reading lesson. Quantitative and qualitative data was analyzed to see if the use of Second Life increased student self-efficacy in the classroom. In addition, quantitative data was examined to determine if using Second Life enhanced reading instruction.

Literature Review

Hands-on learning in a middle school reading classroom can be difficult. Groff and Haas (2008) stated, “Hands-on, real-world learning experiences are the ideal way for students to learn anything. Often though, doing an activity hands-on, in the real world, is not an option in the classroom - there are constraints such as time, accessibility, and resources” (p. 12). While every classroom has its limitations, hands-on learning is not impossible. Technology can offer teachers and students “the opportunity to move within a digital space to explore new ideas and try tasks that they would otherwise not have the opportunity to do in the real world” (Groff & Haas, 2008, p. 12). Numerous middle school reading teachers are constantly looking for 21st Century learning tools that will enhance their curriculum and instruction. Many reading teachers already use Web 2.0 tools, such as Wikis, Blogs, and video and photo sharing in their classrooms. “These tools are changing how people, including our students, interact with the world. The changing nature of information and the new ways our students understand and make sense of the world signal that we need new strategies and new tools for teaching and learning” (Solomon & Schrum, 2007, p. 1). Besides Web 2.0 tools, educators can also use educational video games to enhance their instruction.

Many middle school students like to play video games at home. The games are appealing, fun, and give the children immediate feedback. Since young learners are motivated by video games, why not use educational video games in the classroom? An educator in Wyoming asked herself the same question. Ms. Johnson felt the materials and teaching techniques in the school were not motivating or engaging to students. With the help of the Albany County School District, Johnson was able to integrate educational video games into her classroom. Since the digital learning appealed to students, their learning classroom engagement was sufficiently increased. In addition, the games gave students immediate feedback, so the learners could correct their mistakes and move on. Most of the students enjoyed learning with video games (Simpson & Clem, 2008, pp. 4-11). This evidence confirms the impact that educational video games can have on student engagement in the classroom.

In addition to engaging learners, it is imperative to increase student self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is vital to the education experience. Students that have a robust sense of worth are more apt to face challenges in the classroom and put forth the effort to attain their learning goals. According to studies by Bandura (1995), “efficacy beliefs are influenced by acquisition of skills but are not merely a reflection of them. Students with the same level of cognitive skill development vary in their intellectual performances depending on the strength of their perceived self-efficacy” (p. 209). In other words, the students that put forth more effort to complete their assigned tasks are more likely to achieve their personal goals and aspirations. In comparison, students with low self-efficacy do not feel they are successful. In Bandura’s (1995) opinion,

When faced with difficult tasks, they dwell on their personal deficiencies, on the obstacles they will encounter, and all kinds of adverse outcomes rather than concentrate

on how to perform successfully. They slacken their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties. (p. 11)

Ultimately, negative learners usually put forth less effort than their counterparts, which results in poor academic performance.

It is crucial for all students to develop self-efficacy when it comes to academic achievement. Research shows a significant correlation between student motivation and their class grades (Bandura, 1995). Educational video games, such as Second Life, are extremely effective learning tools and can increase student reading achievement if used properly. Second Life can offer teachers and students “the opportunity to move within a digital space to explore new ideas and try tasks that they would otherwise not have the opportunity to do in the real world” (Groff & Haas, 2008, p. 12). The video game is a hands-on activity where students can have control over their learning. Learners can explore different environments, museums, and historical sites. Teachers can be facilitators while students conduct research.

While the possibilities seem endless, there is a drawback – Linden Labs, the creator of Second Life, “has very limited control, if any, over the quality, safety, morality, legality, truthfulness, or accuracy of various aspects of the Service” (Bugeja, 2007, p. 18). Griefing is an example of Second Life’s clients misusing the game. Griefing is “where one player harasses another for the sake of doing so” (Bugeja, 2007, p. 18). Fortunately, if educators are well-informed about the realms of Second Life, they can take the necessary precautions to protect their students during its use.

With the exception of griefing, Second Life is motivating and allows students to network with one another; thus, the game creates a sense of community. “Sense of community is an important aim for educators, and for many students, it is a key factor in promoting motivation,

confidence and enjoyment of their learning” (Kear, 2011, p. 2). Besides being a motivating factor for students, Second Life allows instructors to merge learning objectives with games and tasks that capture student interest, motivate them to learn, and guide them to learn real-life skills (Prensky, 2003). Fortunately, using video games in the middle school reading classroom is becoming a reality. “An emerging coalition of academics, writers, foundations, game designers, companies such as Microsoft and, increasingly, the U.S. Military is working to make parents and educators aware of the enormous potential for learning contained in the gaming medium” (Prensky, 2003, p. 2).

Besides instilling a sense of community, it is imperative for educators to use strategies in their classroom that increase student self-efficacy. Even though they are young, middle school students know their motivating factors in the classroom. Evidence of this can be found in a study conducted in a North Carolina middle school. By using multiple forms of study, including focus groups and surveys, the researchers found the students' perspectives on school; in addition, the authors found what technologies interest students and actively engage them in the classroom. The experiment presented the following: students use computers at school more than they use them at home, most of their research comes from the internet, the majority of the learners use technology at home to play web-based video games, and students mainly prefer to work on the computer and work collaboratively instead of listening to direct instruction (Spires, Lee, Turner, & Johnson, 2008, pp. 500-506). This data reveals that educators need to incorporate 21st Century learning tools in their curriculum, especially in the form of educational web-based video games and collaborative learning. Students are more actively engaged and can communicate more effectively when they use technology.

We are currently living in an interactive age where communication is literally at our fingertips. Twittering, Facebooking, texting, and instant messaging allow us to communicate with one another within seconds. Social networking has changed the way we correspond with one another. Middle school students are actively engaged in social networks at home. Educators should not stifle this type of socialization in the classroom. As per Williams, Karousou, and Mackness (2011), “social networks provide the necessary conditions for an exponential expansion of emergent learning, including openness, interaction, and self-organization” (p. 44). It is important for teachers to use social networking because it prepares students for the 21st Century workforce. Fortunately, researchers are “beginning to explore the educational benefits of social networking technologies. By connecting students and teachers, they can create strong communities of practice, essential aids to good teaching and learning” (Groff & Haas, 2008, p. 12). Second Life fosters networking, because students can create Avatars and speak to one another in the virtual world through chat. In addition, learners can teleport their friends to specific locations and share experiences. Social networking, such as the chat option in Second Life, should be utilized in education because it permits teachers to extend their students’ learning into an additional space; in addition, networking allows everyone to collaborate and share ideas.

Statement of Research Questions

Several research questions were considered during the course of this study. Most importantly, I wanted to know if I could enhance classroom instruction to increase student self-efficacy and reading abilities by using the virtual learning environment of Second Life. I developed this query on my own during a Master’s technology class at West Liberty University. My instructor, Dr. Li Wei Peng, had us explore the realm of Second Life.

During one of my excursions, I teleported my Second Life Avatar to Jaguarland (see Appendix A1). I was immediately met by a miniature donkey. "Bama Xue" spoke to me through the chat option and asked if I was a Southern Alabama student joining the university's virtual Second Life campus. I explained that I was a graduate student from West Liberty University, and I was conducting research on Second Life. Even though I was not one of her students, Bama Xue immediately welcomed me and introduced herself. She was actually one of the co-creators of Jaguarland and working on her PhD in Instructional Design. Bama Xue was also a graduate assistant in the USA Online Learning Lab, and taught educators how to incorporate technology in their classrooms. Bama Xue took me on a tour of the campus and allowed me to visit a few virtual classrooms. Refer to Figures 1 and 2 to view screenshots of Southern Alabama classrooms in Second Life. I enjoyed my learning experience, which made me wonder how I could use Second Life in my classroom to benefit the sixth grade students.



Figure 2. Second Life Screenshot of an Educational Assessment Classroom in Jaguarland



After considering the needs of my students, I decided it was important for my sixth graders to gain self-confidence in the classroom and improve their reading comprehension

scores. I immediately remembered the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum from Second Life. Please see Figure 3 to view a screenshot of the museum experience.

I discovered the museum on June 5, 2010. After viewing the exhibits and artifacts, I found USHMM to be an amazing resource for my students. My sixth graders could use Second Life to increase their background information on Kristallnacht, which would enhance their understanding of their class novel, Number the Stars. In addition, the learners would probably enjoy using Second Life, which could increase their self-efficacy. Therefore, I developed the idea for a research project on Kristallnacht.

Figure 3. The Synagogue at Second Life's United States Holocaust Memorial Museum



Subquestions: The following subquestions were utilized to sustain the research question:

1. How did the reading teacher attempt to enhance lesson plans by utilizing Second Life?
2. What did the educator do to prepare students to conduct research using Second Life and the Internet?
3. Did students view the use of Second Life as motivating and fun?

4. Did the students who conducted online research feel the assignment was motivating and fun?
5. Did Second Life increase the students' reading abilities compared to the students who conducted online research?
6. Did the reading teacher observe the educational game as being a vital tool in the sixth grade classroom?

I carefully developed subquestions one and two to guide me in the construction of my Second Life lesson plan. Subquestions three and four were developed in order to determine whether or not students increased their levels of self-efficacy and learn if one educational process was more beneficial than another. Subquestion five was utilized to ascertain if educational process had an effect on the students' reading abilities. Lastly, subquestion six was used as my reflection tool to determine whether or not I felt Second Life was a beneficial tool for my sixth grade classroom.

Methodology

Course Description: A case study methodology was applied in order to determine how or why Second Life should be used in a sixth grade reading classroom. I focused on the “how” or “why” case study question, then the research study commenced in the reading classroom. Since I could not control the sixth grade participants, the overall outcome could not be controlled (Yin, 2009).

The study investigated a sixth grade reading classroom at Bridge Street Middle School. The students were divided into two groups, which were the comparison group and the experimental group. All sixth graders read Number the Stars by Lois Lowry. While reading this piece of realistic fiction, twenty-one of the participants used Second Life to research information about the Holocaust, most specifically Kristallnacht, through the virtual Holocaust Memorial

Museum. Students learned about Kristallnacht events, artifacts, and vocabulary. The remaining twenty participants used the Internet to conduct online research on the same topics.

The Second Life participants traveled in small groups made up of their Avatars through the United States Memorial Holocaust Museum (refer to Appendix A2). Their task was to play the role of journalist, collecting data from eyewitness accounts on Kristallnacht while exploring a replica environment of Kristallnacht. They maneuvered their Avatars through the museum and collected note cards, read bulletin boards that contained pertinent vocabulary, listened to victim accounts, translated graffiti sprayed on Jewish businesses, and watched video testimonies. At the end of their journey, students wrote notes about their Second Life experience; in addition, the learners created a Microsoft PowerPoint to present their findings.

In contrast, students who conducted Internet research used the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (see Appendix A3). They read information on the website including historical reviews, explored the online exhibition of artifacts, and even watched videos on the eye-witness accounts of Kristallnacht victims. Students took detailed notes to explain their experience and what they learned and created a Microsoft PowerPoint to showcase their research.

While reviewing the observation research to answer the aforementioned subquestions, I compared and contrasted data from the pre-surveys, post-surveys, journal questions, in-class observations, PowerPoint projects graded by a rubric, and Acuity Benchmark testing. The data determined whether or not I could enhance instruction in my sixth grade classroom to increase student self-efficacy and reading achievement with the use of Second Life.

Participants: Data was collected from 41 sixth grade reading students at Bridge Street Middle School. Bridge Street is located in the northern part of Appalachia in the city of

Wheeling, West Virginia. In the 2010-2011 academic year, 58.6% of the sixth grade research participants successfully passed the reading portion of WESTEST 2, which is West Virginia's state-wide assessment test. Out of the 41 students tested, 19.5% scored Novice, 14.6% performed at the Partial Mastery level, 41.5% achieved Mastery status, 17.1% attained Above Mastery, and 7.3% earned the Distinguished level (West Virginia Department of Education's Graphical Assessment Data, 2011).

Of the sixth grade Bridge Street students included in this study, 18 were female and 23 were male. According to Bridge Street Middle School's enrollment data, 37 of the participants were identified as Caucasian, 2 as African-American, and 1 as Pacific-Islander. In addition, 13 students were of low socio-economic status because they qualified for free or reduced lunches. Consequent to their socioeconomic status, many students do not get to travel to different places and seldom visit museums or academic institutions. On occasion, I have heard a student say, "I've never been to a restaurant," or "I have never been out of the city limits." These informal statements show the students' economic disparity and lack of world experience. Finally, I must note I am certified to teach middle school reading and language arts, as indicated by the West Virginia Department of Education licensure.

There were two Tiers of students involved in the study. Tier 1 students were average in terms of academic achievement in their courses and on WESTEST 2; conversely, Tier 4 students were above-average on WESTEST 2 and typically scored well in all content areas. My students and I participated in this study over the course of two and a half weeks, from February 13, 2012 to February 29, 2012.

Instruments: Twelve Acer Aspire laptop computers were used by the students throughout the study. The laptops included the Windows XP operating system, Internet access,

the Second Life program installed with a desktop shortcut, and Microsoft Office 2010 PowerPoint. Random Name Picker (refer to Appendix A4) was used to indiscriminately select the students for the experimental group and the comparison group.

I administered pre-surveys and post-surveys in this study so I could compare and contrast student self-efficacy before and after the use of Second Life in the sixth grade reading classroom. The self-efficacy survey was based off of Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and the research of Schwarzer and Jerusalem (Luszczynska, Gutie'rrez-Don~a, & Schwarzer, 2005). The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) was designed to question participants on a scale of zero to ten to determine their ability and motivation levels. The range was from "Not at All" at zero to "Yes" at ten. Students took the surveys prior to using Second Life, and then answered the same set of questions at the culmination of the project (see Appendix B).

Acuity Benchmark reading tests were also administered to the students. The Acuity Benchmarking questions were modeled after reading questions found on WESTEST 2, which is West Virginia's assessment test. The reading portion of WESTEST 2 focuses on vocabulary and reading comprehension questions. Items selected were recognized as being valid and measureable items (West Virginia Department of Education, 2011). The sixth graders took Acuity Benchmark 2 on February 2, 2012, and their scores were counted as a pre-test. The students were administered the Acuity Benchmark 3 exam on March 20, 2012, and these results represented the post-test data.

I kept a journal throughout the course of the study. My notes contained observations of student research on Kristallnacht, group collaboration, and the construction of PowerPoint presentations. I also included quotations from the students as they conducted research and

worked in groups. This data collection strategy was used to answer the research subquestions and to confirm whether or not the data agreed Second Life enhanced instruction.

Furthermore, I answered a brief survey with short answer questions to conclude my perspective on the project. I answered the following queries: how I was able to enhance my lessons plans by utilizing Second Life, what I did to prepare my students to conduct research, and if Second Life was a tool I could employ in my sixth grade reading classroom.

Records of student experiences were also recorded. Sixth graders kept journals to jot down their favorite part of the learning experience, confidence levels throughout the research course, project preference, and their view of using Second Life or the Internet as an educational process (refer to Appendix C). The student accounts were viewed to verify whether or not they felt technology use was beneficial to the learning process. Group comparisons were also made between the Second Life and Internet students. All qualitative data collected was examined to answer the research subquestions.

The sixth grade students created a project rubric to grade their culminating project, which was a group PowerPoint presentation on Kristallnacht. The summative assessment rubric covered the following areas: discussion and collaboration, content, design, readability, and verbal explanation. The comparison group and the experimental group graded one another. I refrained from scoring the Second Life and Internet groups with the rubric to prevent any bias.

Data Analysis: The student self-efficacy pre-survey and post-survey data, as well as Acuity Benchmark Tests 2 and 3 figures, were analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program. I used SPSS to run a Two-Way ANOVA to obtain statistics to confirm or deny the null hypothesis. In other words, I input the student survey data and the Acuity Benchmark scores into SPSS to compare the Tiers, pre and post results, and the Second

Life and Internet groups. The collection of statistics was viewed to attribute the sources of variation.

Findings

Quantitative Findings: In order to gain an in-depth understanding about the collected data, various analyses were conducted. The acquired statistics provided the answer to the main research questions. Tier differences were analyzed with respect to four dependent variables: pre and post-scores of self-efficacy surveys and pre and post scores of Acuity Benchmark tests.

It must be noted that in respect to the two Tiers, the Tier 4 students already had high levels of academic success and self-confidence. I did not expect the Tier 4 participant self-efficacy scores to show significant gain. The Tier 1 learners attained average levels of achievement, so I anticipated there was more room for improvement in regards to these students.

Table 1 showed the self-efficacy survey scores from the Tier 1 Second Life group. The data revealed that nine out of the eleven participants gained confidence in terms of learning. I must mention the two students that did not show improvement were dealing with extraneous conflict during the study. Perhaps this conflict had an impact on student performance. As shown in Table 2, ten of the eleven Tier 4 Second Life students showed improvement in their self-efficacy results. Student H, a new student at Bridge Street, was the only learner that did not feel his or her confidence was boosted throughout the course of study.

As per Table 3, the survey results from the Tier 1 Internet group displayed achievement in terms of student self-confidence. Every student, except for AH, showed gain; the difference in learner AH's pre and post self-efficacy scores was not significant. According to Table 4, the Tier 4 Internet results also revealed an increase in learning assurance. Seven out of the ten participants increased their self-efficacy, and one participant maintained their current level of

confidence. There was a decrease in the scores of two students in terms of confidence. The variance in learner P's scores was minor. Participant M, however, had a significant decrease. I inferred student M's behavioral issues might have been a contributing factor.

Table 1. Tier 1 Second Life Participant Scores from Pre and Post Self-Efficacy Surveys

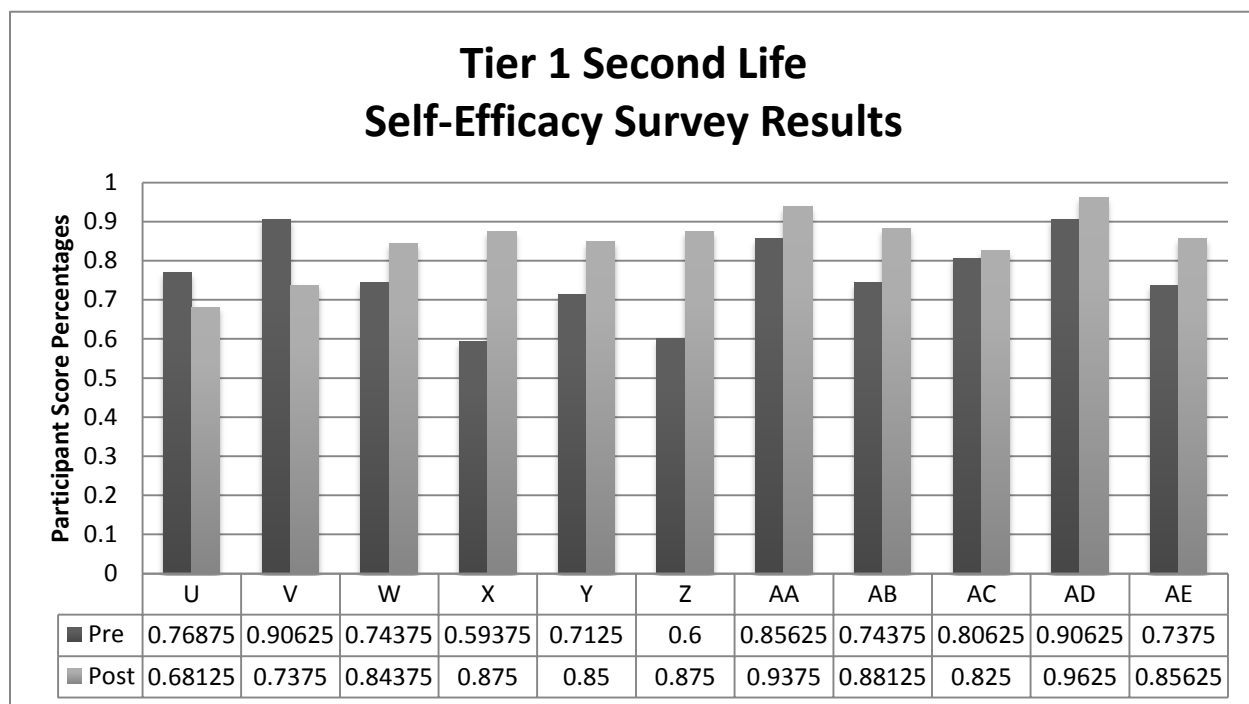


Table 2. Tier 4 Second Life Participant Scores from Pre and Post Self-Efficacy Surveys

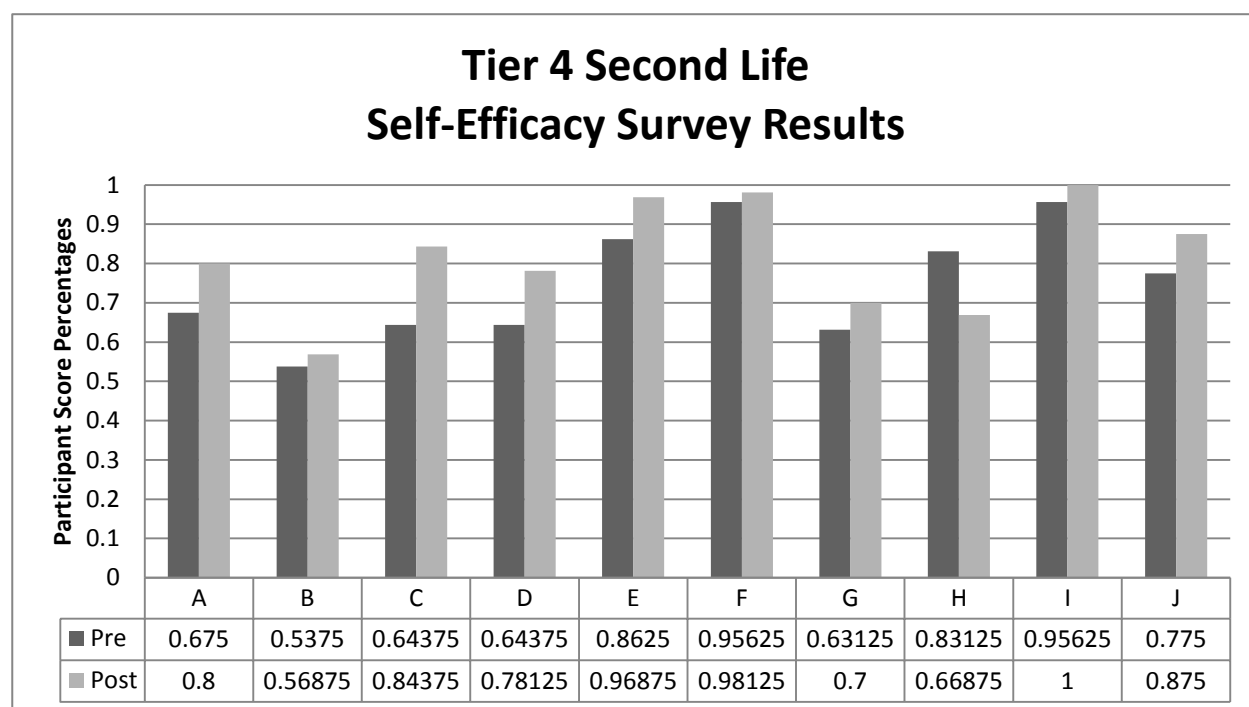
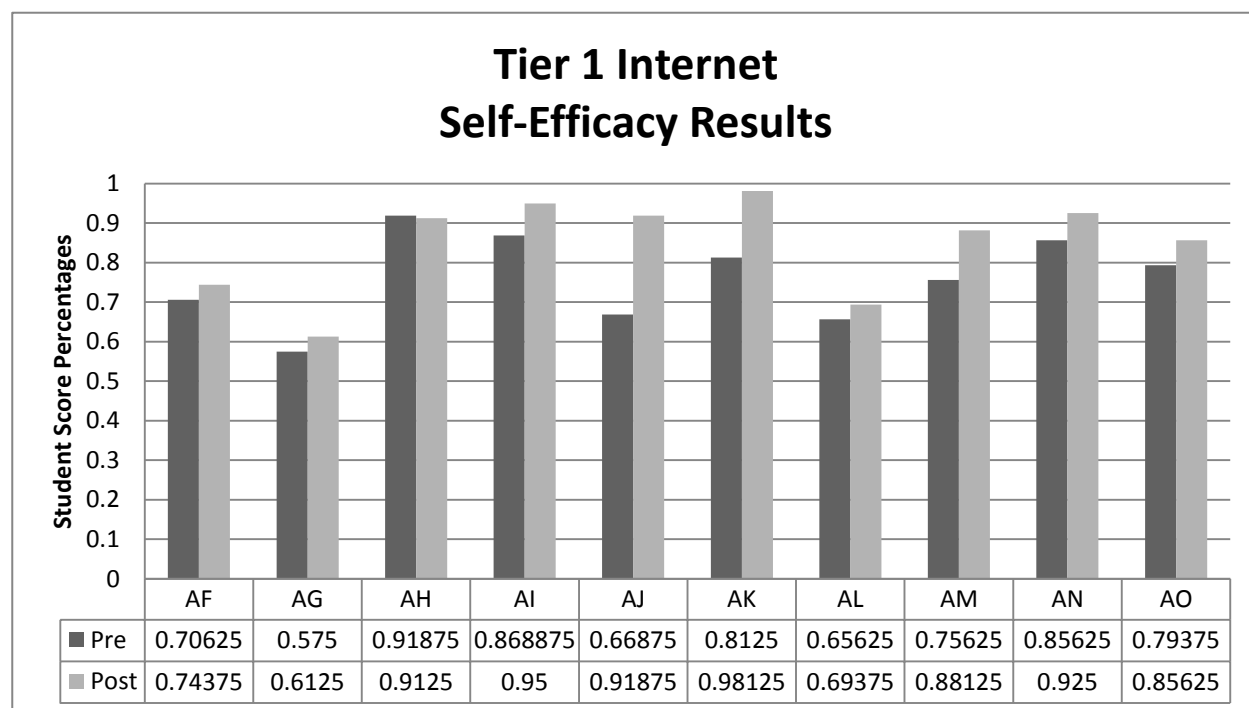
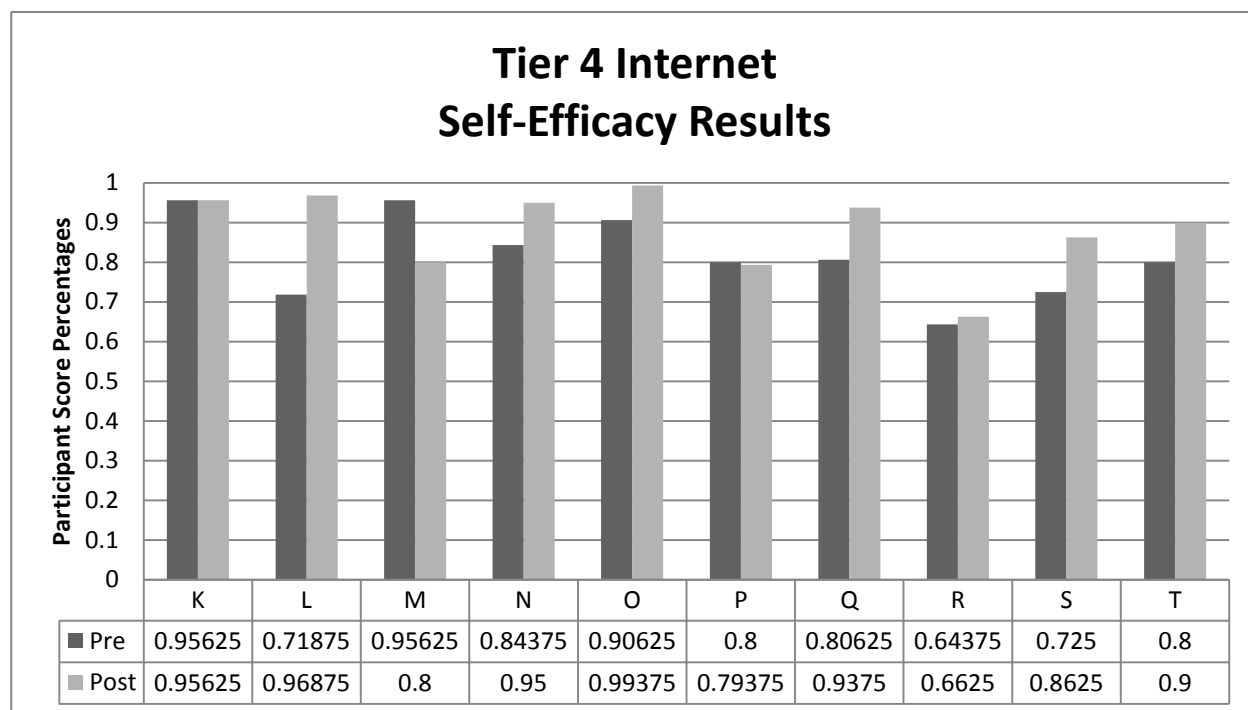


Table 4. Tier 4 Internet Participant Scores from Pre and Post Self-Efficacy Surveys





Overall, the Second Life students showed higher percentages of improvement in terms of self-efficacy. With the exception of three students, all participants showed improvement. The greatest increase in self-efficacy amongst the Tiers was seen in Tier 1. In regards to the self-efficacy surveys, the Two-Way ANOVA was interesting because the pre-score (ScorePre) showed a significance. Regrettably, the data in Table 5 did not explain if the significance was a result of the participants, Tier, or educational process. Therefore, I concluded that based on the pre and post self-efficacy surveys, comparing the methods of Second Life and the Internet did not seem to impact student confidence. However, given the significance of the pre-score, I want to perform a repeated measures Two-Way ANOVA to see if the test reveals why the result was significant. However, I did not have access to the appropriate measuring tools at the time of the study.

Table 5. ANOVA Results from Pre and Post Student Self-Efficacy Surveys

→ **Univariate Analysis of Variance**

Between-Subjects Factors		
		N
Tier	1	21
	2	20
EdProc	1	20
	2	21

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects					
Dependent Variable: ScorePost					
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.177 ^a	4	.044	4.891	.003
Intercept	.146	1	.146	16.177	.000
ScorePre	.156	1	.156	17.305	.000
Tier	.001	1	.001	.097	.757
EdProc	.002	1	.002	.214	.646
Tier * EdProc	.002	1	.002	.219	.643
Error	.325	36	.009		
Total	30.061	41			
Corrected Total	.502	40			

a. R Squared = .352 (Adjusted R Squared = .280)

According to Table 6, the Acuity Benchmark score results showed six out of the eleven Tier 1 Second Life participants improved their reading comprehension. Students V, W, and Y showed a slight decrease in their scores. The researcher deduced this was because Acuity Benchmark Test 2 and Acuity Benchmark Test 3 were not the exact same assessment. While the Content Standards and Objectives being evaluated were the same, the actual questions were entirely different. Two learners, U and AB, showed noteworthy regression in terms of achievement. As previously mentioned, student U was going through personal hardship. Student AB was also dealing with Student AB was experiencing significant family issues, which could have influenced performance.

Seven out of the ten Tier 4 Second Life participants displayed an increase in reading comprehension from Acuity Benchmark Test 2 to Test 3, as per Table 7. While I could not ascertain why student G's score decreased, I did determine that student A was traveling a great deal due to sports. In addition, student F had multiple absences throughout the research period.

Table 6. Tier 1 Second Life Participant Scores from Acuity Benchmark Tests 2 and 3

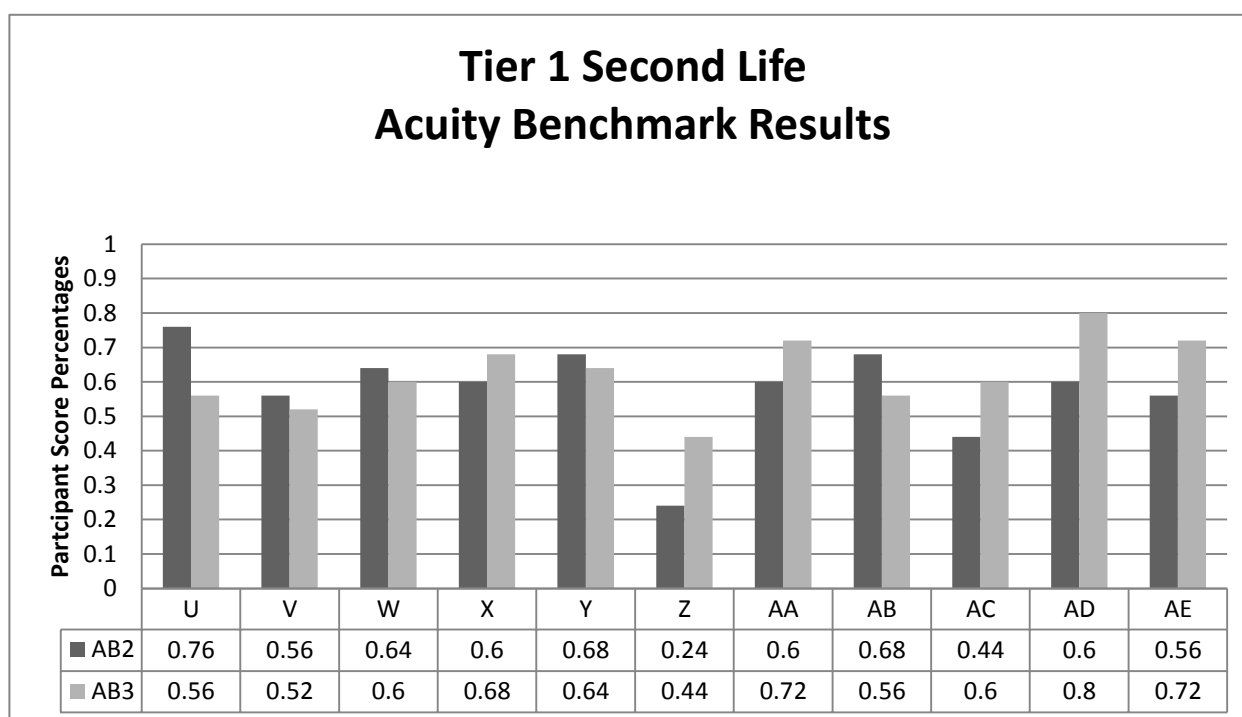
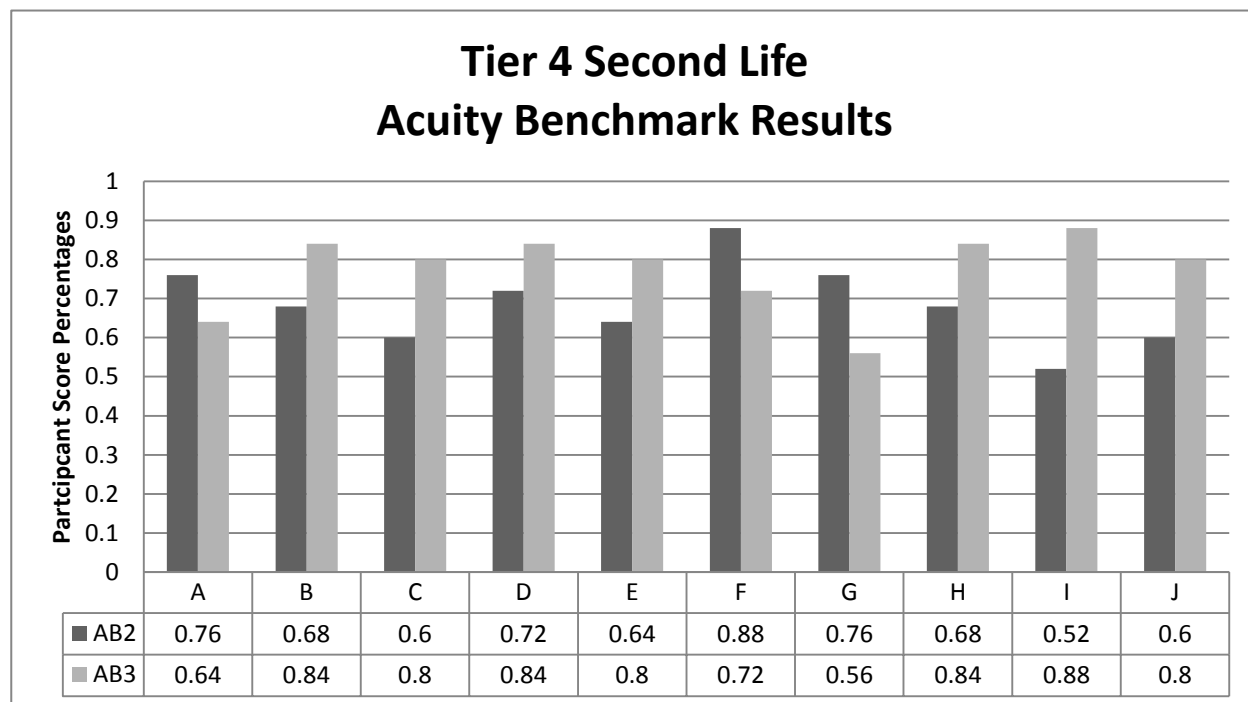


Table 7. Tier 4 Second Life Participant Scores from Acuity Benchmark Tests 2 and 3



The Tier 1 Internet participants showed an increase in reading comprehension as well. Seven out of ten students exhibited gain, while one remained the same. Two learners, AI and AO, showed a decrease. I could not deduce why student AO dropped in terms of achievement, but AI was dealing with emotional issues.

There were clear and significant gains in reading comprehension according to the Tier 4 Internet participant Acuity results. Nine out of ten students showed improvement in their comprehension of reading Content Standards and Objectives. One student, S, showed a decrease. I inferred that the decline was the result of the learner's behavioral issues.

Table 8. Tier 1 Internet Participant Scores from Acuity Benchmark Tests 2 and 3

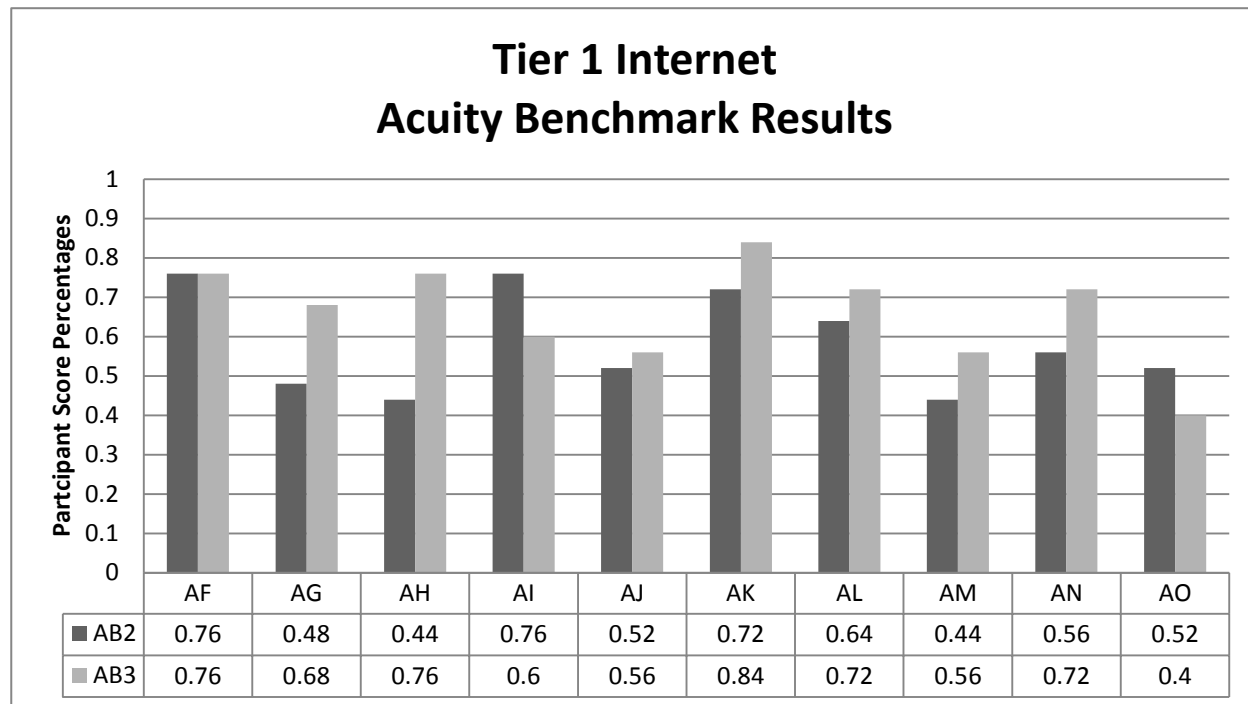
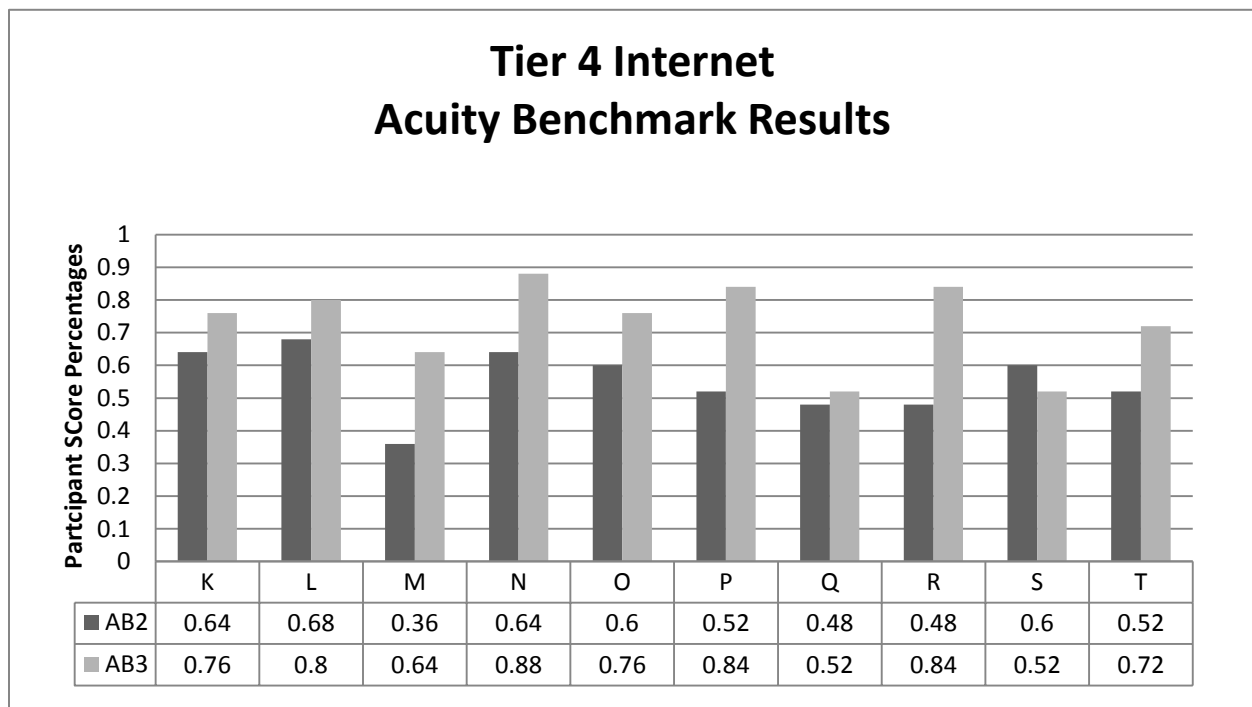


Table 9. Tier 4 Internet Participant Scores from Acuity Benchmark Test 2 and 3



The Two-Way ANOVA output for the Acuity Benchmarking data in Table 10 did not suggest any relationship to achievement between Second Life and the Internet. Specifically speaking, the educational process (EdProc) was insignificant. The only general significance noted by the researcher was in regards to Tiers, but even then, the significance was not relevant enough, because the difference was .005 or less. The Acuity results firmly suggested that one process did not offer an advantage over the other in regards to academic achievement.

Table 10. ANOVA Results from Pre and Post Acuity Benchmark Tests

➔ Univariate Analysis of Variance

Between-Subjects Factors

		N
Tier	1	21
	2	20
EdProc	1	20
	2	21

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Dependent Variable: BenchTwo

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	.117 ^a	4	.029	2.098	.101
Intercept	.229	1	.229	16.435	.000
BenchThr	.016	1	.016	1.124	.296
Tier	.003	1	.003	.183	.671
EdProc	.040	1	.040	2.872	.099
Tier * EdProc	.038	1	.038	2.694	.109
Error	.502	36	.014		
Total	15.331	41			
Corrected Total	.619	40			

a. R Squared = .189 (Adjusted R Squared = .099)

Despite the insignificance detected in the ANOVA results in terms of reading comprehension, I did find that the students' self-efficacy had increased. As per my classroom observations, the students were incredibly motivated by the technology use in class, especially with Second Life. According to their journals, the children were excited about learning and felt the technology benefitted them. Further statistical work may uncover this finding. Although the ANOVA suggested no difference, that does not mean there was none. The limitations of the study, such as brevity, the small number of participants, the lack of differentiation amongst student ability, and prior use of Internet research in the classroom might have flawed the results of the experiment.

Qualitative Findings: The researcher received insightful comments from student journals. Learners were asked about their educational process preference. Of the 41 students questioned, 72.22% stated they would rather use Second Life to conduct research.

Student E responded, “I would rather use the online video game (Second Life), because it is fun, interacting, and we get to see everything for ourselves.”

Student AD said, “I would rather use Second Life because I can experience the information rather than just read it.”

Ten students disagreed. Student X said, “I would rather use the Internet to conduct research because I feel I can get more information from educational websites.”

Student AO responded, “I would use the Internet because I don’t want to be distracted by a video game.”

In terms of self-efficacy, 91.6% of the learners said they were confident about their educational experience, especially because of the technology use. Student O stated, “I would feel confident using the technology I operated today because I learned so much. It was an easy experience, and I would be able to show another student how to use the Internet to do research, because I don’t think it would take that long to teach.

Student I said, “Second Life was a lot of fun, and I would definitely want use it again. I’d feel confident teaching another student what to do (using the game).”

One of the three learners that disagreed stated, “I would not feel confident using the technology I used because I have not used it enough.”

Overall, I felt the sixth graders were incredibly motivated by the technology use. Since I frequently incorporate technology in my classroom lessons, the students are accustomed to 21st Century tools. It is important to mention that at the beginning of the year, I teach all of my students how to conduct online research, cite sources, and create PowerPoint presentations with summarized information. I believe this gave the Internet students an advantage, because none of the sixth graders had ever used Second Life before. There was a definite learning curve for the Second Life students.

Personally, I attempted to enhance my Number the Stars unit by having my students conduct research on Kristallnacht to build background knowledge on WWII events. In reality, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. contains eye-opening exhibits that teach visitors the perils of anti-Semitism. In addition, the USHMM explains how to prevent genocide and other crimes against humanity. I frequently have my students view the USHMM site (view Appendix A5), but I found the Holocaust Museum in Second Life to be an engaging resource for my students, especially because the video game allowed the sixth graders to have an experience they otherwise would not have been able to have. For these reasons, I developed the research project that pitted Second Life against the Internet. Even though the investigation was laborious, the project was worth the time. Either way, using technology in the classroom is advantageous. Next year, I would like to introduce Second Life to my students earlier in the school year and attempt this experiment again.

While observing the students, I found both the Second Life and Internet students to be driven and inspired. They genuinely enjoyed working together and using technology while learning the content. The Internet participants networked well, were thorough in their research and note-taking, and thought about pieces of information that needed to go in their PowerPoint

from day one. While walking around the room, I overheard Student Am say, “Hey, I just found a really good video of a Holocaust survivor. Go to this link and watch it. It’s interesting!”

Student N declared, “I really want to focus on the meaning behind Kristallnacht. We know the literal meaning is “night of broken glass.” I found a great picture of a Jewish business with shattered windows that I want to use. Is it okay with everyone if I used the definition and picture for our group’s opening slide? I think it would make an impact.”

The Second Life members also communicated with one another in a constructive and positive manner, were detailed in their investigations, and carefully contemplated what material was vital to their PowerPoint presentation. Student A said, “I’m in the synagogue, which is a Jewish place of worship. The walls are blackened because the Nazis torched the building. The Germans also destroyed sacred scrolls.”

Student AD asked, “Has anyone found the secret hiding place? If you go to the elevator in this building, there is a secret room where Jewish families hid. It’s kind of like Anne Frank! This is so cool! I want to explain this to everyone in our PowerPoint.”

All participants did an excellent job in creating their PowerPoint slide with pertinent Kristallnacht information. I believe this was due to three factors: the sixth graders created their rubric, so they understood what elements needed to go into their project; the learners had conducted research in the past and already knew how to create PowerPoint presentations; lastly, the students had fun using technology for their project, which motivated them to work together and accomplish their learning goals.

Conclusions

Even though there were no significant reading comprehension gains during this study, I noticed the larger benefit of using Second Life to motivate students. The sixth graders

thoroughly enjoyed using the educational video game. On several occasions, I overheard students stating they “loved using Second Life.” I even heard a few sixth graders say, “Second Life makes me want to come to class.” The aforementioned statements are illustrations of student engagement. I am extremely optimistic as to the future use of Second Life in the classroom in terms of motivation; however, since this was a pilot study, further research must be conducted in order to determine whether or not Second Life is truly beneficial to students in terms of increasing self-efficacy and reading comprehension. Despite verifying the null hypothesis and not my own, the sixth graders’ attitudes have changed with the use of Second Life. Further statistical research may support my hypothesis; however, I feel it is prudent to conduct a long term longitudinal study to successfully demonstrate any advantages of Second Life.

There were several limitations during the exploratory research. The first constraint was the limited amount of time allotted for the study. Initially, a three month long research period with multiple projects was to transpire; unfortunately, the internet in the school building was down for almost two months, which drastically reduced the project. Another restraint was the limited number of participants. My sample size was only 41 students, which is small. To compound this matter, the sixth graders who partook in the research were average and above average in intelligence.

I would like to expand this study to obtain more significant data on the benefits of Second Life in a sixth grade reading classroom. The period of research must take place over the course of several months. During this time, it will be necessary for the learners to complete multiple projects in Second Life. I will include all sixth grade students from Bridge Street Middle School, which will boost the number of participants to approximately one hundred and ten. If all sixth graders are able to participate, I will also be able to discover how Second Life benefits gifted

scholars, below average students, and pupils with disabilities in addition to the average and above average learners. These measures should ensure conclusive results, which will allow me to determine whether or not Second Life significantly increases self-efficacy and reading comprehension.

If additional studies prove to be effective, I will ask Ohio County School's technology coordinator if Bridge Street can acquire the funds to create and implement a Second Life private island. It is my goal to develop virtual classrooms on Second Life, just as "Bama Xue" did for the University of Southern Alabama. My sixth graders would definitely be more motivated to participate in virtual world activities and discussions with Avatars.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Websites

A1 <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Jaguarland%20USA%20Education/92/126/35>

A2 <http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/US%20Holocaust%20Museum1/1/35/26>

A3 <http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/kristallnacht/>

A4 http://classtools.net/main_area/fruit_machine.swf

A5 <http://www.ushmm.org/>

Appendix B: Self-Efficacy Survey

6th Grade Reading Self-Efficacy Survey

Name: _____

Please circle the choice that is closest to how true you think each statement is for you. Rate your degree of each statement by circling a number from 0 to 10 using the scale given. **There are no right or wrong answers.**

1. I can always answer literature questions correctly if I try hard enough.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

2. I can express my ideas freely in reading class without feeling embarrassed.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

3. I am able to take what I have learned in previous lessons and apply it to a new reading lesson.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

4. I feel confident working with other students on group work using technology in reading class.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

5. I find it interesting to use technology during reading class assignments.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

6. Even after I have tried my best and failed a reading task, I will still try the assignment again.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

7. Using technology in reading class is easy for me.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

8. I can successfully complete research during reading class while using technology.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<i>Not at All</i>				<i>Sometimes True</i>				<i>Yes!</i>		

9. I keep trying, even when I struggle to complete online reading assignments.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

10. I have a positive attitude when I am using technology in my reading class.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

11. I feel confident using educational materials and technology I need to succeed in reading class.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

12. I achieve higher scores in reading class when I am able to use technology.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

13. I feel confident in my ability to answer comprehension questions in reading class.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

14. Using technology improves my reading ability.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

15. I believe technology is vital in reading class because it is motivating and fun.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

16. I feel that using technology in class increases my reading abilities.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
Not at All *Sometimes True* *Yes!*

Appendix C: Student Journal Questions

Journaling Questions

Name: _____

1. List the following: 3 things you learned today; 2 things you'd like to learn more about; and 1 question you still have.
2. What was your favorite part of your learning experience today?
3. If you were to conduct research again using Second Life or the internet, what would you do differently?
4. In your opinion, are you more confident in learning material while using technology? Why or why not?
5. Would you rather use an online video game or use the internet to conduct research? Why?
6. Do you believe that using Second Life or the internet to conduct research was motivating and fun? Why or why not?
7. Would you feel confident using the technology you operated today again? Would you feel comfortable showing another student how to use the internet or Second Life? Explain.



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