Globally Networked Learning Environments as Eduscapes for Mutual Understanding

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Globalization is a geo-spatial process that connects geographically distant actors and that allows global flows of people, ideas, and educational activities to intertwine with local action. Taking advantage of these recently developed “eduscapes,” new initiatives have emerged in higher education, such as globally networked learning environments (GLNEs). GNLEs are assumed to be built upon close and equal transnational partnerships that allow students and instructors to build a mutual understanding while enhancing the learning experience (Starke-Meyerreing et al., 2008). Using Bennett's (1986) development model of intercultural sensitivity, Evans and Davies' (1999) structuration theory, and Harman's (1988) classification of the intensity of collaboration, this paper examines the assumption that GNLEs develop student intercultural sensitivity and enhance their learning experience. A qualitative analysis of seven cases presented in various books and scientific articles suggests that while some GNLEs are associated with higher student intercultural sensitivity and learning experiences, student intercultural sensitivity might actually be positively related to the closeness of faculty member collaboration. It also seems that power imbalances in terms of language, technology and resources, can undermine the success of GNLEs as alternatives to the current globalization “master-discourse.”

Keywords: Globally networked learning environments, mutual understanding, intensity of collaboration, cosmopolitanism, globalization, Higher Education.
The purpose of this article is to examine the structure of globally networked learning environments (GNLEs) as well as their impact on students' learning and intercultural competencies. According to Scholte (2005), the current globalization process is characterized by transplanetarity (the Earth being imagined as a unified space within which territorial barriers tend to disappear), and suprateriorality (new kinds of interactions emerging between actors who are geographically distant). Both transplanetarity and suprateriorality create porosity within territorial and national barriers, thus allowing global flows of people, ideas, information, and finance to intertwine with local actions. Appadurai (1996) calls these rapid and disjointed flows ethnoscapes, ideoscapes, mediascapes, and financescapes. Looking at international student recruitment, world university rankings, trade agreements, and transnational research networks, it becomes clear that the world of higher education is shaped by these “scapes.” But with an increase in the use of new technologies, higher education also hosts emerging eduscapes (i.e., the flows of pedagogies, educational activities, and research collaborations that connect local and global actions) (Beck, 2012).

Neo-liberalism has encouraged public and private organizations to navigate these eduscapes in order to generate revenues and impose their educational tradition (Duin & Starke-Meyerring, 2001). Yet other institutions and individuals, driven by progressive ideologies—such as post-colonialism, cosmopolitanism, and critical pedagogies—have promoted a globalization that supports local cultures and seeks to sustain local capacities (Niyozov, Dastambuev, 2012). With supra-territoriality, geographically distant individuals, such as faculty members at a university, have used technologies to network, collaborate on research projects, share practices, enhance their students’ learning experience, and promote mutual understanding between people (Trentin, 2010). One initiative is called “globally networked learning environments” and is believed to increase students' intercultural competencies and learning experience, as well as faculty members' professional development. Focusing on the local scale and analyzing seven cases, the intent of this article is to test these assumptions and observe if they are in any way related.

GNLEs can be considered eduscapes since they are educational settings dependent on transnational partnerships extending across institutional, linguistic, national, and other boundaries (Starke-Meyrerreing et al., 2008). GNLEs allow students, faculty members, and professionals to negotiate and build a shared learning culture. Taking the form of transnational joint activities, courses or degree programs, GNLEs are believed to have an impact on both students and faculty members. Starke-Meyerring et al. (2008) conceive these GNLEs as critical sites in which students work with peers in different geopolitical locations to question and re-think how globalization affects their own environments. Bringing together the expertise of two or more professors while increasing the number of student participants, GNLEs favour cross-boundary knowledge-making and enhance the educational experience of students. Faculty members also benefit from GNLEs in that they learn and develop new teaching practices while acknowledging and revising their perceptions of the “other.” Yet, Starke-Meyerring and colleagues note that, in order to nurture these various benefits, GNLEs must be built upon grassroots partnerships, mutual engagement and respect, similar institutional and technological support infrastructures, and a close, longstanding and sustainable relationship.
It is therefore my understanding that GNLEs rest on two assumptions about their outcomes and two assumptions about their structure. In terms of outcomes, it is assumed that GNLEs enhance: 1) students’ learning experience; and 2) their intercultural sensitivity. Regarding structures, it seems that GNLEs entail: 3) a close collaboration between participants; and 4) the equal distribution of power. The next section will present the conceptual foundations upon which I will analyze these four assumptions. Thereafter, seven cases of GNLEs will be analyzed in order to assess their compliance with these assumptions. The paper ends with a tentative model that establishes a relationship between the structure of GNLEs and their impacts on students.

Background

Outcomes: Intercultural sensitivity and learning experience

Both concepts of mutual understanding and intercultural sensitivity are supported by an idea of “dialogue among civilizations” (Hayhoe & Pan, 2001) and a cosmopolitan philosophy (Held, 2010; Unterhalter, 2008). The former refers to awareness and appreciation of deep-rooted cultural differences, while the latter considers all human beings of equal worth, proposes a global citizenship, and espouses transcendent moral obligations toward humanity. In that sense, mutual understanding is defined as “the deconstruction of ‘otherness’ through the reconstruction of others’ sensibilities, logic, reasoning and worldviews” (Hoffman, 1999). The concept of intercultural sensitivity falls within this philosophical tradition. Starke-Meyerring’s (2005) intercultural literacies, Bennett’s (1986) intercultural sensitivity, and Behrnd and Porzelt’s (2011) intercultural competencies can be broadly defined as the know-how, problem resolution strategies, flexibility, and empathy someone uses to understand, critically assess, and produce symbols to interact positively with people from other cultures. Ultimately, the underlying assumption is that an education for mutual understanding would favour peace among people.

In order to examine the level of intercultural proficiency attained by students and instructors in each of the seven cases, this study will use Fox’s (1997) concept of authentic intercultural communication and Bennett’s (1986) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. First, Fox defines an authentic intercultural communication as being sincere, normatively appropriate, comprehensible, and open to each participant’s contribution. Miscommunication occurs when the intentions are unclear or when there is a power imbalance. Second, Bennett (1986) elaborates a continuum of intercultural development that contains six stages: denial of difference (indifference regarding cultural differences), defense against difference (dualistic world views), minimization of difference (universalism), acceptance of difference (relativism), adaptation to difference (empathy and pluralism), and integration of difference (identity including and transcending cultures, and the person facilitating cultural transition between different settings).

Student learning is defined differently between programs and courses (Douglas, Thomsom & Zhao, 2012; Lonka & Lindblom-Yläne, 1996). Yet, generally speaking, Peppas (2005) reports that some internationalization initiatives can increase students' academic achievement and course appreciation. In addition to demonstrating that study
abroad programs promote the development of a comparative perspective and the acquisition of new working methods, Opper, Teichler, and Carlson (1990) suggest that benefits are different depending on the discipline. For instance, students in the natural sciences demonstrate an improvement in abstract thinking and their capacity to accept criticisms, while law students show a change in their capacity to work with others. Online learning is also known to increase interaction between students (Mills & Salloway, 2001), and to promote autonomy and flexibility (Kremer, 2012), as well as collaboration and field-related skills (Wong, 2011).

**Structure: Mutuality and intensity**

GNLEs are built upon 'bottom-up' partnerships between instructors, allowing each instructor to address course weaknesses by leveraging the partner's complementary expertise (Starke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2006). Yet, Luke (2010) is concerned with how geopolitics shape power relationships between participants. He wonders if the knowledge of a privileged region is only transmitted to the less privileged region or if there is co-construction of knowledge through the negotiation of learning traditions, values, and local habits. To investigate how structural factors shape social networks, comparativists working on the issues of policy borrowing and lending have elaborated useful tools. First, Johnson (2006) has observed the trajectories of educational change in developing countries and has come up with four metaphors that highlight power imbalances: 1) telling (A imposes a policy on B); 2) compelling (A forces B to take its policy in exchange for money); 3) selling (A sells its policy to B); and 4) gelling (A and B develop a policy together to solve common problems). Moreover, studying policy transfer networks, Evans and Davies (1999) operationalized Wendt’s (1987) theory to show how structural factors—economic, technological, ideological, and institutional—influence the nature of policy development. In her discussion of GNLEs, Starke-Meyerring et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of technology, language, and institutional support. In fact, in order to promote mutual understanding and shared learning, it is assumed that all participants should have equal access to computers and internet, be able to communicate with one another, and be supported by administrators. However, the authors do not provide any evidence to support a relationship between structure and outcomes.

In addition to power imbalances, one should look at GNLEs’ intensity of collaboration. Schulte’s (2012) social network analysis stipulates that social behaviours of participants are influenced by networks’ closeness (steps needed for one actor to reach another one), betweenness (dependency of one actor over the other), and connectivity (number of connections between all actors). This paper specifically looks at networks’ closeness and, in order to characterize variations, will use Harman’s (1988) classification of the intensity of collaboration between institutions. Studying higher education mergers, Harman defines three types of collaboration: 1) cooperation (loose and voluntary agreement for a short-term activity); 2) coordination (members using jointly decided rules to deal with their shared environment); and 3) amalgamation (autonomy transferred to a new supra-organization). These terms were originally applied to institutions, but this paper considers how their definition also applies to partnerships between individuals.
Methodology

The first objective of this article is to assess the following assumptions regarding GNLEs: they increase students' intercultural competencies and learning experience, and they are built upon mutual and intense collaboration between instructors. The second objective is to observe to what extent these assumptions about the structure and the outcomes of GNLEs are related.

Cases

GNLEs are relatively rare and have been scarcely studied. An extensive literature review revealed nine articles and book chapters about seven cases. These scholarly works have been selected because they offer both a description of the structure and the (potential or actual) outcomes of the GNLEs. All the selected cases belong to the university sector and the majority are in communication studies, the humanities, or the social sciences. Table 1 presents a short description of each case and its source. It is worth noting that four of the seven cases are drawn from a single source, the book Designing Globally Networked Learning Environments edited by Starke-Meyerring and Wilson (2008), a fact that may limit the analysis.

Table 1. Detailed description of the seven cases being studied

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Institutions/Countries</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>O’Brien &amp; Erikson (2008)</td>
<td>Stanford University (United States) and Orebro University (Sweden)</td>
<td>Cross-cultural rhetoric</td>
<td>Global curriculum for 15 students in 4-6 teams. Assignments include: presenting cultural artifacts; analyzing ads published around the world; examining websites; composing collaboratively a blog post about cultural artifacts.</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Crabtree, Malespin &amp; Norori (2008)</td>
<td>Farfield University (United States) and Universidad Centroamerica (Nicaragua)</td>
<td>Global justice, communication and journalism</td>
<td>The inter-institutional agreement includes a joint curriculum in communication, a joint capstone in global justice, faculty exchanges and study abroad programs.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Fitch, Kirby &amp; Amador (2008)</td>
<td>University of Wisconsin-Stout (United States), Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (Mexico), University of South-Dakota (United States), First Nations University of Regina (Canada)</td>
<td>Indigenous studies</td>
<td>The joint course includes: common syllabus, readings, lectures and discussions along with synchronous teleconference segments, asynchronous discussion threads and traditional seminars.</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Starke-Meyerring &amp; Andrews(2006)</td>
<td>University of Delaware (United States) and McGill (Canada)</td>
<td>Management communication</td>
<td>Joint course in which students analyzed the business communication practices at enterprises operating in both countries.</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Herrington &amp; Tretyakov (2005); Kennon (2008); Avery, Civjan &amp; Johri (2005)</td>
<td>Georgia Institute of Technology (United States); European University at St. Petersburg (Russia); and Belkinge Institute of Technology (Sweden)</td>
<td>Technical communication (Information, design and technology) and English</td>
<td>Classes are separated at first. Then, students introduce themselves through BlackBoard. 80% of the class sessions are asynchronous and 20% are synchronous (sessions being given simultaneously through video-conference).</td>
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<th>Authors</th>
<th>Institutions</th>
<th>Communication Type</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mousten, Vandepitte &amp; Maylah (2008)</td>
<td>University of Wisconsin-Stout (United States), Hogeschool Gent (Belgium), Aarhus School of Business (Denmark), Université de Paris-Diderot (France), Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz (Austria), Università degli Studi Trieste (Italy)</td>
<td>Technical communication and translation</td>
<td>In their respective courses, the American students write technical texts and send them to students in other countries who will translate them. Students communicate by email to provide feedback and to adjust their writing/translation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Du-Bacock &amp; Varner (2008)</td>
<td>City University of Hong Kong (China) and Illinois State University (United States).</td>
<td>Business communication and Professional communication</td>
<td>Joint project in which students communicate through email and videoconference in order to analyze McDonald’s operations in both countries.</td>
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### Analysis

The seven cases will be contrasted using a comparative framework that amalgamates three theories. In terms of outcomes, students' learning experiences will be described and discussed on a case-by-case basis since learning objectives vary across disciplines, and because a single conceptual framework can hardly take into account this variability. On the other hand, outcomes in terms of students' intercultural sensitivity will be categorized using Bennett's (1986) developmental continuum. For instance, if a book chapter or an article provides any evidence that students who participated in a given GNLE tend to minimize cultural differences among them, this will be understood as “universalism.” If they consider cultures as different but equals, the outcomes of GNLEs will categorized as “relativism.” If students can recognize the emotions, perceptions, and cognitions of another person, then they achieved the “adaptation” stage, and if they consider themselves as the junction of multiple, transcending, and competing cultural identities, thus facilitating their movement between different cultural setting, then it could mean that they have reached the stage of “integration.” Although these stages have been used to elaborate a standardized test measuring intercultural sensitivity (Hammer, 2011), this qualitative study uses the stages as broad categories to rank and order GNLEs' outcomes.

Similarly, Harman's (1988) classification of collaboration intensity will be used in order to rank and order GNLEs' structure. A collaboration in which two instructors organize a short transnational activity that is graded separately will be classified as this cooperation type. If instructors elaborate a joint course or a joint activity for which they establish common rules, the GNLE will be characterized as belonging to the coordination level. Finally, if instructors operate under a joint organization or follow an inter-institutional agreement that they cannot change easily, then the collaboration can be categorized as an amalgamation. Evans and Davies' (1999) types of structural factors—i.e., economic, technological, ideological, and institutional factors—will also be used to detect power imbalances between institutions. It is worth noting that these factors belong to the national and institutional scale, but that they determine the conditions under which the classroom/GNLE will work.
Relationships between outcomes and structure: A tentative model

The second objective of this paper is to understand how the assumptions regarding structure and outcomes might be connected. A comprehensive model should include five variables: intercultural sensitivity, learning experience, professional development (although outside the main purpose of this article), mutuality, and intensity of collaborations. Yet in a limited number of pages and with scarce data provided by secondary sources, this study fails to establish relationships between all these variables. In fact, even though students' learning is an important outcome (and will be extensively discussed), the core relationship revealed by the seven cases is the influence of collaboration, intensity, and mutuality on students' intercultural sensitivity. In the discussion, I propose a graph on which each case (identified by the level of intercultural sensitivity achieved by students) is positioned according to the intensity of collaboration (3 stages) and the level of power balance. The model is not intended to prove a significant relationship between these variables, but rather to establish a conceptual framework on which future studies could be based.

Results

Amalgamation and intercultural adaptation

Amalgamation is defined as a transfer of authority from two institutions to a superior organization. Among the seven GNLEs, only two belong to this level of collaboration. Case 1 concerns faculty members from Stanford University (United States) and Örebro University (Sweden) who developed a research project on cross-cultural rhetoric. In order to participate in the research project and receive funding from the Wallenberg Global Learning Network and the Stanford Center for Innovations, instructors had to comply with the project objectives and develop joint courses that increase students' intercultural competencies, political understanding, and ethical awareness (O'Brien & Erikson, 2008). Each course includes a joint session through videoconference, formation of globally distributed teams, the completion of various assignments such as analyzing university websites and writing a blog, and a final virtual conference.

Participants share equal power and, even if there are some language inequities between native and non-native English speakers, the rhetorical approach promotes authentic intercultural communication. This close and equal collaboration seems to foster intercultural adaptation. In fact, research findings indicate that 94% of students develop intercultural competencies and that 96% better understand how different cultures perceive and produce knowledge (O’Brien & Erikson, 2008). Students also report having developed collaboration skills, communication confidence, and computer literacy.

Case 2 reveals a similar level of collaboration, but a larger power imbalance that participants try to mitigate through an authentic intercultural communication. The collaboration between Fairfield University (FU), a American Jesuit university, and Universidad Centroamericana (UCA), a Nicaraguan Jesuit university, is comprehensive and includes capstone seminars, study abroad programs, research partnerships, and a joint program on global justice (Crabtree et al., 2008). Inspired by a Jesuit mission of solidarity, senior administrators have integrated this collaboration into their institutional
plans and they are said to communicate with one another on a bi-monthly basis. However, participants encounter economic and technological barriers that undermine the balance of power. For instance, Nicaragua is the second poorest nation in the western hemisphere, UCA is located in a free trade zone with difficult living conditions, and Nicaraguan professors teach eight hours per day and have limited access to computers and internet.

Despite these difficulties, participants have tried to build an equal relationship. Professors conduct participatory action research projects and adapt their cycle of scholarly production for their new colleagues. American students learn Spanish and do community work in Nicaragua while Nicaraguans receive funding to come to FU and do community work in poor American communities. The outcomes of this collaboration have not been assessed, but the structure of this GNLE seems conducive to intercultural adaptation for both faculty members and students. Participants have to learn their partners’ language, adapt to their societal norms and customs, and create a common definition of “global justice” that is then to be taught in courses.

Coordination: From acceptance to integration

Coordination happens when faculty members create a shared environment for which they establish common rules. For the three following cases, the environment is a joint course and the rules are defined in the course outline. This type of collaboration is less “intensive” than the amalgamation, but seems to be conducive to the development of intercultural sensitivity, student learning, and faculty members’ professional development. For instance, in Case 3, Fitch, Kirby and Amadaro (2008) describe an eduscape supporting indigenous knowledges that has been created by instructors from universities in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. The objectives of the joint project are to avoid the “euro-master narrative,” bridge geographic and cultural spaces, and help students to reflect, conceptualize, and apply intercultural knowledges. In fact, qualitative data suggests that at least some students achieved intercultural adaptation and/or integration. For example, one student said: “I have learned so many new things about other cultures and even about my own culture. This class has helped me to realize that I want to know more about my ancestors” (Fitch, Kirby & Amador, 2008, p.152). Another student said that, before taking the course, she never thought about the question of who writes history books. Finally, a third student said, “It was hard for me to hear how the other countries thought of the U.S. For once in my life, I was a minority” (p. 153).

In a different field (communication management) implicitly supported by a different rationale (preparing students to work for multinational corporations), Case 4 is a semester-long joint project, elaborated by two Canadian and American professors, which had an impact on all participants (Starke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2006). Gains for professors included developing virtual tools, comparing course material, joint correction of papers, and weekly discussions about the course. For their part, students were placed in “international teams,” which had to write a memo describing the team policies and draft a report on a business’ communication strategy. Students learned to work via digital networks, understood the importance of cultural contexts in business communication, and learned to correct for fundamental attribution error (i.e., the tendency to use personality-based rather than situation-based explanations for observed behaviours). Students reached
different levels of intercultural sensitivity, but this equal partnership has fostered inclusiveness and contextual awareness (Starke-Meyerring & Andrews, 2006). The level of mutuality seems high (i.e., participants have similar access to technology, professors are equally involved, and both countries are well-developed) and students recognize they have different views on some specific behaviours (e.g., the social acceptability of smoking), but they are not all capable of shifting cultural perspective and changing behaviour in authentic ways.

Case 5 concerns one of the first and most studied joint courses: the Global Classroom Project (GCP). Since 2000, American, Russian, and Swedish faculty members have offered a course in cross-cultural technical communication that asks students to discuss historical, political, or sociological issues, analyze cases on intercultural communication, and reflect on their own communication behaviour. Despite regional differences, GCP partners have tried to build an equal partnership (Herrington & Tretyakov, 2005). Every lecture, assignments, and grading systems are jointly decided; the asynchronous meetings accommodate time difference and semester timelines; the technology used is accessible and requires little bandwidth; and instructors try to integrate troubleshooting issues to the content of the course (Herrington & Tretyakov, 2005). Herrington and Tretyakov also report that this coordination process served as a professional development experience for the faculty members. For instance, they learned to reduce their control over the class, to set aside their political agendas, to negotiate pedagogies, and to value experiential knowledge.

Avery, Civjan and Johri (2005) studied students’ interactions in GCP and found that, in addition to developing leadership and teamwork skills, the online and asynchronous environment favoured a more equal and thoughtful class participation. Kennon (2008) was one of the American students enrolled in GCP and he explains how the course enhanced his learning experience. Russian students were studying humanities and American and Swedish students were studying computer design and technology. Henceforth, they could share their complementary expertise in their analysis of issues (e.g., conflicts in the Middle East). Through this semester-long collaboration, Kennon (2008) seems to have developed an acceptance of differences by overcoming his initial ethnocentric bias and understanding of how culture interacts with personality. For example, he says he learned that it is not because Russian students smile less often that it means that they are aloof. However, Kennon reports some power imbalances: groups in each country preferred to work on their own instead of relying on their foreign peers; American students had more influence because they were native English speakers; and Russian students could not provide immediate feedback nor could they download large documents because of limited internet access.

**Cooperation: Minimization and acceptance**

Cooperation refers to a type of collaboration that is both of short duration and that has a narrow scope. Case 6 is an example of a GNLE in which American students write technical texts (e.g., operation manuals) and send them to students in Belgium, Denmark, France, Austria, and Italy. They translate the texts and discuss them through emails with the authors (Mousten, Vandepitte & Maylath, 2008). Since technical communication and translation are required skills in a globalized economy, the objective of this project was to
teach American students to be more culturally sensitive in their writing and to help European students with their translation skills through feedbacks from the authors. Students did become more aware of cultural diversity. For instance, American students learned that a “jack-o'-lantern from a pumpkin” did not make sense for Europeans who do not celebrate Halloween, and Europeans learned that “door knobs” in the U.S. meant “door handles” in Europe (p. 131). Yet, it is not obvious that this one-way communication process led to any increase of intercultural sensitivity beyond that intercultural acceptance.

In the Case 7, faculty members from Hong Kong and the United States decided to build a joint project whose purpose was to teach cross-cultural communication through an analysis of McDonald’s operations in Hong Kong and the United States. Students formed teams in their respective countries, conducted field research with the restaurants, and prepared a business report. Then, in a single 55 minute videoconference, they teamed up with students from the other country and jointly decided which business practices seemed transferable (Du-Babcock & Varner, 2008). Students learned to adjust their vocabulary and speech rate, but their answers to questionnaires revealed that imbalances within the GNLE may have contributed to intercultural miscommunication. For example, because the project accounted for 80% of the course grade for Hong Kong students and only 25% of the course grade for American students, the former were more prepared and disappointed by the American business reports. Moreover, the absence of intercultural training and the short duration of the joint session may have limited students’ ability to modify their communication behaviour and to overcome intercultural minimization. Indeed, all students found the information exchanged between countries useful, but they did not report any significant differences between countries (p. 163). Students also reported a low capacity to convince counterparts of their viewpoints.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to assess the cogency of the assumption that GNLEs are based upon equal and close partnerships, and that they enhance students’ learning and intercultural sensitivity.

Outcomes: Student learning, intercultural sensitivity, and professional development

The first expected outcome of GNLEs is an increase in students' (and eventually instructors') intercultural sensitivity. As was reported in the above section, students participating in GNLEs understand cultural differences (Case 1, 2, and 6), the cultural basis of knowledge production (Case 3), and the importance of cultural context in communication (Case 4). As well, they can overcome their ethnocentric bias (Case 5) and try to adapt their communication behaviours to their partners' cultural background (Case 7). While the intercultural sensitivity seems more developed in some GNLEs (e.g., 1, 2 and 3), students in other settings (e.g., 4, 5, 6, and 7) appear to have achieved a lower level of intercultural sensitivity. Yet, the absence of any pre-post measure prevents me from asserting that GNLEs increase students' intercultural sensitivity.

In terms of learning outcomes, every GNLE seems to have contributed to students' learning experience in its own way. For example, students in Case 3 could
attend lectures from various international experts and thus increase their understanding of the issues faced by aboriginal populations. Students in Case 4 received feedback from two instructors, and, in Case 2, Nicaraguan students had access to more educated professors. Cases 1, 5, 6, and 7 also show how GNLEs can help students practice professional skills, develop leadership skills, and effectively use the complementary experience of their peers in order to analyse various documents’ cultural assumptions. These experiences reflect GNLEs' capacity to increase the quality of education locally by taking advantage of the virtual experience and foreign expertise. The “capacity building” potential of GNLEs could indeed be considered an innovative avenue to international cooperation and development.

The seven cases provided limited data on professional development, so it would have been unsound to include this component in the model. Yet, in all cases, GNLEs have been established on a voluntary basis through the initiative of dedicated individuals, which corresponds to a “gelling” policy transfer dynamic (Johnson, 2006). Indeed, in each GNLE, instructors participated in a process of co-creation of new pedagogical practices, allowing knowledge to cross territorial and disciplinary barriers. As such, GNLEs seem to contribute to instructors' professional development. For instance, Case 4 reveals how professors learned collaboratively to develop virtual tools, elaborate corrections grids, and support students' transnational learning. Similarly, instructors in Case 5 learned how to efficiently use asynchronous meetings, to promote experiential learning, and to set aside their political agenda. Using Arreola, Theall and Aleamoni's (2009) Teaching MetaProfession Matrix, it could be assumed that GNLEs increase instructors' content expertise, instructional design, learning theory and information technology.

**Structure: Comments on power imbalances**

The seven cases reveal variability in collaboration intensity. Two cases belong to the amalgamation type, three to the coordination type, and two to the cooperation type. Yet it also appears important to understand how power balance in GNLEs is affected by technological, linguistic, economic, and ideological factors. First, all GNLEs use technologies such as videoconferences, blogs, and emails. However, these technologies are not value-neutral. Brown (2005) considers virtual educative spaces to be eduscapes that reflect the power relations in the political economy of education, thereby serving the ideology of neo-liberal globalization. Virtual tools would create a culture of dependency that would limit the scope of instructors’ professional expertise. Students who use them would also assimilate symbols that convey notions of knowledge commodification and standardization. This becomes problematic when a Western technology interferes with local cultures and languages (see Cases 2 and 5).

Second, language is another factor that can shift power relations in a GNLE. In all seven cases, interactions mostly took place in English, even though six of the seven cases included non-native English speakers. Language seemed to represent a particular issue especially in Cases 5 and 7. According to Melton (2008), the expansion of English can be considered a form of linguistic imperialism that is detrimental to non-native speakers. In fact, non-native speakers’ proficiency in English is always compared to native speakers who usually become more passive in the GNLE. Also, non-native speakers are not
recognized as multi-competent language users. In the future, research on GNLEs in other language settings could reveal a different set of dynamics.

Third, economic factors seemed to only alter the power balance in two cases (2 and 5) because most of the GNLEs were established within a developed country. It may be due to practical reasons, but if GNLEs are assumed to promote mutual understanding and peace among nations, they should increasingly include developing countries. In fact, transnational partnerships between faculty members, such as GNLEs, could lead to capacity building (Beneitone et al., 2003) and a deeper intercultural sensitivity in students. Bégin-Caouette (2012) has suggested that collaborations between individual faculty members brings small but sustainable changes in developing countries because these collaborations are free from donors’ prerogatives and market pressures. Finally, GNLEs, as eduscapes, are intertwined with different ideoscapes. Some GNLEs (Cases 1, 2, 3, and 5) carry ideas of “dialogue among civilizations” (Hayhoe & Pan, 2001) and cosmopolitanism (Held, 2010) in that their primary purpose is to teach students how to interact with different cultures and to be able to deconstruct “otherness.” On the other hand, Cases 4, 6, and 7 seem more closely connected to a neoliberal ideology of supporting the expansion of multinational corporations, the increased freedom of the market, and the acquisition of skills for the global economy. In these GNLEs, students learned practical skills, but their intercultural learning was more limited. One GNLE (Case 4) consisted of a mix of neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism, teaching practical and intercultural skills to students.

**Outcomes and structure: A tentative model**

Figure 1 represents a tentative model that attempts to portray the relationships between the structure and the outcomes of GNLEs. In this model, the vertical axis represents the level of power balance, taking into account technological, linguistic, economic, and ideological factors. The horizontal axis represents the three stages of collaboration intensity: cooperation, coordination, and amalgamation. When the two axes intersect, cooperation is superficial and participants in one location have significant influence over other participants as well as the activity itself. For instance, Case 6 reveals a project in which participants in each location have few interactions, and American participants dominate the setting in that they produce the knowledge that will be adapted by their counterparts. On the other hand, the upper-right corner represents a GNLE in which participants are fairly equal and in which instructors operate under a sustainable institutional agreement. Case 1 is close to that description in that participants work within the Wallenberg Global Learning Network and Stanford Center for Innovations, and are equal in terms of technological access and open to each participant's contribution.

Despite its unfinished nature, the model suggests that a more intense and mutual collaboration between participants promotes greater achievements in terms of intercultural sensitivity. Almost all GNLEs seem to be associated with higher student intercultural sensitivity, but when students spend more time with their international peers and work on more meaningful tasks, the outcomes appear greater. Similarly, a more equal relationship—in terms of language and technology—is related to more authentic intercultural communication and deeper intercultural sensitivity. However, this assessment is based on secondary sources and relies heavily on one source. In the future,
the use of a more formal evaluation tool, such as the Intercultural Development Index (Hammer, 2011), could help to prove the relationship between structure and intercultural learning.

**Figure 1.** The relationship between structure and intercultural sensitivity: A tentative model

![Diagram showing the relationship between structure and intercultural sensitivity]

**Conclusion**

The objective of this study was to assess the impact of GNLEs on students' intercultural sensitivity and learning outcomes as well as on instructors' professional development. A qualitative analysis based on seven cases described in the literature suggests that GNLEs are conducive to the above mentioned outcomes, but that their impact may vary according to the level of integration and mutuality between participants. Indeed, GNLEs in which most of the activities and the learning process take place transnationally, and in which participants are more equal in terms of technology, language, and socio-economic conditions, appear to be associated with greater student intercultural sensitivity.

GNLEs constitute a fascinating alternative to the current globalization “master-discourse.” Building on opportunities presented by globalization, GLNEs connect instructors, students, and professionals from all over the world in a safe environment where they can share their experiences, learn from other students who possess diverse expertise, and develop an understanding of other cultures in addition to their own. GNLEs could replace traditional internationalization (e.g., study abroad programs) in that they can be directly integrated within the classroom and contribute to the core mission of educational institutions: education. If GNLEs respect each stakeholder, the sharing of pedagogical and human resources could result in improved quality worldwide. Indeed, institutions that do not have the means to buy particular equipment, hire a teacher with a specific expertise, or organize international projects abroad, could use GNLEs to leverage
their partner's strengths. However, while GNLEs appear to be valuable global tools for instruction and socialization, adapted to the context of the 21st century, their inherent power imbalances and ideologies require that we proceed with caution and continue to investigate the relationship between structure and impacts.

References


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