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HONORING DIVERSITY IN AN ONLINE CLASSROOM: APPROACHES USED BY INSTRUCTORS ENGAGING THROUGH AN LMS

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This is an inquiry into how online instructors embrace the diversity of their student body while facing the inherent differences between a traditional face-to-face class and one that is taught online. Current research suggests that diversity in a traditional classroom is an asset if the instructor is sensitive to students' backgrounds. This paper examines if such philosophies in traditional classrooms translate well into a distance education environment, where the student body may be even more diverse than a face-to-face class, but possibly unrecognizable because of the lack of physical cues. Research on the topic of multiculturalism in an online classroom is limited; therefore, this paper helps to highlight the need of such conversation in the study of education. Multicultural pedagogy is usually acknowledged as an asset in a traditional classroom, but can the same techniques and ideas be transferred to online learning, and, if so, how? In this qualitative study, I conducted interviews with five instructors who teach both online and face-to-face classes to gain instructors' perspectives on the topic online instruction, and specifically in the areas of support for both the instructors and students, community, and, curriculum.

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Introduction

It was a warm summer afternoon in the Southeastern United States. Because Rico accepted my invitation to be interviewed, he and I were basking in the glow of florescent lights in his nicely chilled office when I asked, “Do you ask students to talk about their backgrounds in your online classes?” While playing with his bottle of diet soda Rico responded,

> I do in the in first week when we do the introductions. I put a pretty lengthy introduction for myself, I give them probably too many details they don’t care about, but I ask them to model that as well. I let them know that that’s a blueprint that you can use in creating your own [introduction], and unfortunately I'll still have people who say, “My name is so and so and I'm from [city name] and I'm happy to be in the course,” which is not helpful at all. Nothing else, nothing I couldn’t see on the roster essentially, but some of them get into it. I ask them to talk, you know, whatever they're comfortable with.
>
> I also ask them to post pictures of themselves but I've amended that in the past few years to say, “pictures of yourself or something that you feel represents you,” because I had a big stink happen a few years ago where I took points off for students who didn’t add a picture, and they went to one of the vice presidents. It got back to him that I was doing that, and it came down from on high that I was not allowed to take points off or even request pictures. I said I didn’t take points off because they didn’t necessarily post the picture I liked: I took points off

> because they weren't following the instructions for that week and if they had a problem they should've emailed me rather than not do the assignment as asked, as requested. The explanation [from administration] was very strange: we aren't allowed to ask for pictures because what if someone didn't want to be seen, was in witness relocation, or something like being afraid that somebody would stalk the other person. I said, "Well, we have the same potential problems in face-to-face classes, but if someone came to class with a bag over their head, I think I'd be in my right to ask them to take it off and you're saying that basically they should all come with bags over their heads, and I'm not allowed to take it off. I'm expecting them to become a community of learners together when they know nothing about each other. Maybe we should all use aliases.
>
> At that point I knew better and I should shut up, so now I ask them to do whatever they're comfortable with. But again, some of them just want to do the minimum work, and I think that doesn't encourage otherwise. That doesn't raise the bar in my mind, so I get very few pictures at all anymore, and I don't like that.

Rico's response highlights many of the challenges of teaching online in higher education. Rico describes how the limits placed on him from the administration make it impossible, in his mind, to build a community in his classroom. He believes that understanding the backgrounds of one's peers is essential to creating the kind of community he feels exists in his face-to-face classrooms. Rico's frustration with community building in an online environment is not likely one that will lessen in the foreseeable future as colleges and universities continue to rely more heavily on online

learning. Rico's concerns raise many valid points about the future of online instruction. How does an online instructor go about building a community when there are inherent issues challenging certain aspects of sharing? Furthermore, should an instructor attempt to create a sense of community in an online class in much the same way they would approach the building of a community in a traditional classroom? This would, in essence, become a traditional course copied directly into a learning management system. Or should it be approached differently? What, then, do instructors do about student support, community, and curriculum? In this paper, I examine instructor perceptions of diversity in an online class with the goal of better understanding the complexities of an online course for students of diverse backgrounds.

With the continual increase in online courses being offered, challenges such as those highlighted in Rico's statements are likely to be experienced by many other instructors. The United States Census Bureau (2014) calculated that almost 75% of Americans have internet access at home, while the International Telecommunication Union (2014) released figures indicating that by the end of 2014 approximately 3 billion people will be using the internet worldwide. These numbers allow for the inclusion of a very diverse population in online education. Individuals are no longer bound by their physical space and have the freedom to learn from and with a seemingly endless group of diverse individuals.

According to Allen & Seaman (2013), most universities utilize online learning management systems (LMS) to enhance, supplement, or deliver their classes. Some of the most common LMSs that are used today are Blackboard, Desire to Learn, Canvas, and Schoology. These systems allow instructors to facilitate an entire class online.

LMSs allow instructors to upload materials and documents, link to other websites and videos, and create and grade assignments. Instructors can also manage interactive activities such as, blogs, journals, wikis, discussion boards, and video conferencing tools. In the past, if an instructor wanted to do such tasks online, it would require an understanding of coding, essentially putting them in the position of developing their own webpage. With recent developments of the LMS, however, instructors no longer need to know how to code in order to have a functioning course site. The ease of use for the instructor has opened up the possibilities for teaching online. As Hustad & Arntzen (2013) found in their study, many instructors find learning management systems useful as a repository for their classes, an easy way to contact their students, an effective method to reuse content from previous semesters, and potentially a useful format for class discussion.

The convenience of LMS based classes has allowed more students to enroll in programs without requiring them to step foot on a physical campus. The success of the LMS has also allowed the creation and growth of massive open online courses (MOOCs). MOOCs are online classes, often using an LMS, to deliver cheaper learning opportunities for a larger variety of students who are not taking the class for university credit. Allen & Seaman (2013) conducted a ten-year survey of students taking online courses in the United States, and, according to their findings in 2003 about 11% of students engaged in classes online while the numbers increased to 32% in 2011. With the growth of online education and the dependence on learning management systems in schools, there is little doubt that the number of people attending such environments will continue to increase to the point in which it may be difficult for educators to avoid teaching in such classes.

The growth in online education inevitably opens the doors of an otherwise inaccessible educational opportunity to a larger number of diverse students, thereby altering the traditional classroom makeup. Students, traditionally limited to regional opportunities, now have the option to take courses in different states or countries. Chapman, Cummings, & Postiglione (2010) contend that there are growing numbers of students taking classes online, particularly in Asia, because of the importance of education in those cultures and the rise of worldwide online class availability. In current online courses, unlike their traditional face-to-face counterparts, we cannot assume that all persons participating live in similar physical communities. Moreover, the difference of community goes beyond geography. With access no longer being limited by physical presence, students from different communities may bring with them different racial, religious, socioeconomic, language, age, and gender backgrounds. Nieto & Bode (2012) argue that diversity and multicultural education in a class helps to make more rounded students by including other voices in curriculum, such as people from minority backgrounds, females, LGBT populations, or other groups that may sometimes be silenced.

Online students potentially come from different backgrounds that may or may not reflect the physical community the instructor is teaching and living in. These differences possibly pose more challenges for instructors than expected. Carger (1996), for example, found that some teachers, even in a traditional classroom, struggle to include students from non-English speaking backgrounds. She argues that acceptance of diverse approaches to learning, implementation, and innovative evaluation methods to schooling, is crucial, but, unfortunately, not always respected. People from different cultural

backgrounds may have differing perspectives or expectations of what is involved in a class environment. Acknowledging and including these differences into an online context may make those challenges seem even more daunting due to the inherent lack of physical and verbal cues.

Much research exists that encourages educators to recognize and consider the implications of a diverse classroom, with some noteworthy examples as Banks, Ladson-Billings, Nieto, Carger, and Gay. Banks (1993) argues that multicultural education should be in all classes throughout the school, not just on specific days, in language class, or in the social studies department. He goes on to assert that saturation helps not only to empower students through common interaction and association with differing cultures, as well as an appreciation and understanding of one's own background. Ladson-Billings (1995) states that teachers need to understand and use culturally relevant pedagogy in their classroom to better reach at risk students. Nieto (2010) describes the role of the teacher is to act as a cultural accommodator and mediator to promote student learning. Carger (1996) found that students tended to struggle academically as well as socially when forced to fit into a certain cultural mold, instead of having their strengths embraced by their teachers. Gay (1993) asserts that common teacher preparation regarding diversity does not help with real life situations. Teachers play a central role in resolving the plight of culturally different students and often times, these teachers lack the cultural awareness to deal with these issues effectively.

A large body of literature acknowledges the importance of multicultural education in a traditional classroom, but there is a lack of real world perspective addressing ways in which a teacher might acknowledge student diversity in an online setting. How does a

teacher of an online course build a class community while eliciting and developing materials for students of diverse backgrounds? Eisner (2001) argues that schools should encourage critical thinking with a diverse curriculum rather than conducting assessments based on traditional testing, but how does an online instructor do that? This question is especially important to consider when most accessible forms of assessment in an online class are tests, often times multiple choice, and written papers. Best multicultural practices dictate that instructors and students learn each other's culture and adjust to each other through interaction and sharing, creating an environment of mutual learning, but how does one translate face-to-face pedagogy to an online course directly? How does an instructor use creative assessments that embrace students of different backgrounds without having to spend large amounts of time teaching technologies? And most importantly, how does an online teacher encourage their students to collaborate in building a class culture and to share with their peers when there appears to be inherent blocks such as anonymity?

Further, anonymity in an online course may be a difficult barrier to overcome or a liberating factor because cultural expectations and norms are no longer something to expect based on one's appearance. According to Lai & Ball (2004), online course representation of one's culture is only shown through explicit sharing (i.e. "At mass on Sunday"), by their name, or by a grammar structure associated with a particular group. Although it may be more difficult to navigate the unknown differences online, some students may find it more liberating to be in an ambiguous course because they are able to break the mold of their cultural constraints. Thompson & Ku (2005) found that Chinese graduate students sometimes felt more able to share in an online class because it

was ambiguous; therefore, they could break the Chinese norms of conformity, which would appear to support the usefulness of online courses and the ability of students to engage without a physical presence. With the realization of difference and the fact that being online offers a sense of ambiguity, it is clear that an online teacher must identify ways of bridging the gap between face-to-face multicultural pedagogy and a learning environment that can at times be vague and difficult to traverse due to the lack of student sharing. The issue is underlined by the fact that an instructor cannot simply ask their students to describe in detail their cultural, socioeconomic status, language, age, and gender backgrounds. This problem puts the instructor in a cultural relevance limbo because according to pedagogical norms if an instructor is to better assist student learning they should understand their student's backgrounds, but in an environment of decided expressed sharing an instructor cannot fully understand their students unless the students purposely share all of the important aspects that would help their learning.

Literature Review

Gloria Ladson-Billings contributed greatly to the concept of embracing diversity when she brought forward the idea of culturally relevant pedagogy. According to Ladson-Billings (1995), culturally relevant teaching has three parts: conception of self and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge. The type of teacher who demonstrates culturally relevant conceptions of self and others believes that all students are able to achieve mastery of the curriculum material and that the teachers are a part of the community fabric. Moreover, because teachers are intertwined with the students, they should give back to that community. A culturally relevant teacher aware of social

relations maintains fluid relationships and encourages students to collaboratively be responsible for one another. The conceptions of knowledge for a culturally relevant teacher are different than others. To this type of teacher, knowledge is not static, and it must be scaffolded and incorporated in multiple forms for all students to learn.

Ladson-Billings posits that there is no one-size fit all approach. Although Ladson-Billings focused on the traditional classroom within a face-to-face context, many of her assertions can easily be applied to online learning environments. Ladson-Billings argues that tapping into the student's culture and getting the group to work collaboratively in order to build all student understanding. This is easily applicable for all environments. If a class is online, how does one measure or identify what is the culture of the course? Simply put, if the teacher and students do not see each other in person, how can they navigate such issues as high context versus low context environments or how does a student from a different cultural background even understand what the teacher expects of the class?

These questions stem from the concept of "frames" (Agar, 2002). Michael Agar (2002) in his book *"Language Shock: Understanding the Culture of Conversation,"* discussed issues associated with trying to navigate a different language culture. Culture is hard to fully understand if one is not raised in it. Because it may be difficult for someone to grasp another culture completely, people often find themselves trying to understand a new environment based on what they know in their native culture. This situation of trying to better understand the unknown by applying one's own cultural norms to a situation is what Agar termed as "framing." As Agar (2002) explains, "Frames are holistic—they tie different things together and show their interrelationships. They are

comparative in two ways: They're put together based on a comparison of what we know about [cultural situations] and what others know, and they are based on comparisons of different [situations] to find out what one can usually expect." (p.132). This concept of framing can be applied to any cultural situation ranging from a business transaction between differing peoples to an online class. For example, if a Chinese student joins an online class at a North American four-year university they would need to depend on frames that they already have associated with an education in general. Coming from a high context Chinese culture, as well as a culture where tests are more important than discourse, this student having never taken an online course in North America might try to fit the course into their frame of education by not voicing their thoughts as much as the other students and focusing more on passing tests.

Because online courses are easily accessible by people of varying backgrounds, potentially providing more equity for students because of the ease of access, it is conceivable that instructors will encounter students who are using different educational frames compared to their own stemming from ones' traditional background when engaging in a class online. This situation of instructor and the students holding different educational frames might find some common ground in how an online course curriculum is developed.

In the following sections of the literature review, I will discuss current research in dealing with multicultural diversity and findings that address diversity in an online environment. These themes, curriculum development, student access, and student engagement, are important to online learning because they vary from their traditional face-to-face counterpart.

Curriculum Development

When I began studying this topic, I noticed a gap in research explicitly addressing online curriculum focused on including diversity in design. Hutchinson (2007) suggests that group work inside of an LMS helps students to better understand other's perspectives, as well as provides opportunities for the individual to discuss topics from their own experiences. By allowing group work students are provided the chance to work with curriculum and share their perspectives, therefore helping to bring to light what Jager, Subramaniam, Jones, and Bertot (2011) discuss, that diversity is not only race, but in fact an array of differences that need to be included and embraced in online course work. Because research of online diversity curriculum is limited, it is useful to look at what is discussed in a traditional face-to-face class setting.

Elliot Eisner's pedagogy concerning curriculum works well with multicultural education. Eisner (2001) argues that, in order for schools to be successful, they need to move away from the core of traditional "test" based assessments and begin moving toward a focus on critical thinking activities. This shift to a more diverse learning curriculum is will be providing the diversity needed for students to demonstrate mastery of content. In another critique on tests in schools, Eisner (2003) highlighted the fact that the United States curriculum discourse has roots originating from Greece and Rome, therefore following a tradition of putting a premium on the use of words in education.

Eisner's mentioning of a premium on words in education is in agreement with the concerns of multicultural education. Students from different backgrounds may not understand such an importance of written expression in a Western discourse style as found in the United States schools. As Scollon, Scollon, & Jones (2012) point out that

Western discourse, or utilitarian discourse, is steeped heavily in the concept of supporting one's own arguments by using direct quotes of others for support, while Eastern discourse is based on the audience already having a shared knowing of previous works, and, therefore, the reader is expected to actively remember where the reference is coming from without attributing the quote to the original author. The written importance, found in Western discourse, may exacerbate the students learning deficit even more because instructors may find it easy to fill an online class with blocks of text and stress expression through writing. Because online classes appear to need to be different than their traditional counterparts and the student base may be quite varied in the fact that they may not understand Western discourse, teachers are asked to consider the differences.

The idea of a traditional U.S. class as text centric further supports what Gonzalez's (2009) assertions that face-to-face methods do not always lead to successful eLearning. Simply put, one cannot take a successful face-to-face class and easily transition it to an online course and make it look and feel the same. Eyal (2012) expanded the idea further by arguing that digital assessments have different levels of instructor literacy, essentially the more the instructor is comfortable with an LMS the more they will use varied assessments besides multiple choice tests. Using a variety of assessments can be useful when engaging people of different educational and cultural backgrounds.

Lanham & Zhou (2003) demonstrates that cultures have different styles of learning and expectations of a classroom. Because of these differences, as Lanham & Zhou (2003) argue, blended learning virtual classrooms are imperative. Blended learning consists of presenting the same information in multiple formats such as

including text, video, audio, and more. This may be very useful to a population of students who are not used Western discourse, which is focused on reading for knowledge and expressing one's arguments through written text.

Elsegood & Papadopoulos (2010) discuss how there is an expansion in cultural recognition professional development courses intended to increase awareness of differences for instructors who interact with a variety of students. Awareness brought about by these cultural aims to get instructors to change or evaluate their perspectives when engaging with students of different backgrounds, but they generally focus on face-to-face interactions.

Much like what Agar said about frames, as mentioned earlier, Liu, et al (2010) found that instructors and students come into a class with different expectations based on their experiences. If instructors are aware of the possible different expectations by their student body, they can theoretically design courses to remove potential cultural barriers and, by doing so recognize that having large blocks of text to read online will not necessarily be useful.

If instructors in an online course remove potential barriers before students come across them, the students will feel more engaged in the class and therefore be able to focus on interaction that is required by the instructor. Student interaction is an important aspect of online learning that is often cited in related research. Durrington, Berryhill, & Swafford (2006) note that students have more success if they felt like they are invested in the class through engaging interactions or conversations with their peers and the instructor. This can lead one to believe that if a course is filled with reading assignments and written assignments with no other interaction, the students would be dissatisfied and

alone, because of this possibility there is a need to prevent possible stumbling blocks in the online curriculum stems from the fact that many students from diverse backgrounds have more access to online classes.

By examining how a class is designed, one can see the importance of stressing different methods of presenting information to students and the need to understand that all students in an online class do not automatically understand traditional Western discourse. This is important because student access to online classes is growing, and when designing online courses, instructors need to understand that the traditional format is not necessarily the best method to follow for successful online learning. With this understanding, instructors employing methods of reading large bodies of text should not be the only method of course delivery online. Students need to have more interaction with multimedia presentations, videos, and other such materials, as well as having instructors who understand the differences of their student body and how these students may have different expectations of course outcomes.

Student Access

Because students enroll in an online course, it would be easy for one to assume that all of the students have essentially the same technology understanding and socioeconomic backgrounds (SES), but that is not likely to be true. Howard, Busch, & Sheets (2010) in an article covering the digital divide in the U.S. and Canada, discuss how traditionally rural areas, as well as senior citizens, people with lower socioeconomic status, and non-native English speakers have less access to internet. Along with those groups mentioned, the U.S. also has the added complexity that individuals of low SES and Spanish-speaking backgrounds living in large urban areas may not have access to the

internet. These findings are underscored by the fact that online classes are open to anyone who signs up. Therefore, it is quite possible for someone from one of the backgrounds listed above to sign up for online classes while not having the same access as their classmates. Further, the United States Census Bureau (2014) found that individuals of Asian and White backgrounds over 25 years of age have a home internet access percentage in the 80% range while individuals of Black and Hispanic[1] backgrounds have access in the 60% range. The disparity between the racial groups points to that fact that a large percentage of people from minority backgrounds taking online classes may very well be dependent on internet from varying sources other than a home computer such as a smart phone, coffee shop, or library.

Even as internet access at home varies by large percentages, the smart phone numbers are not as far apart. The United States Census Bureau (2014) found that Asians have about 53% access while Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics are around 45%. These numbers are surprisingly high when considering the fact that smartphones are a relatively new technology. Because there has been such a growth in smartphone usage, it may be plausible for students who do not have internet at home to depend on their smartphone for class.

Because Hispanics and Blacks have less internet access at home, that they may access online classes through computers outside of their home in such places as libraries, work, or school. This problem is in line with what Gorski & Clark (2001) highlight in their article when they argue that Asians and Whites have much more computer access

[1] Hispanic background is taken from the terminology used by the U.S. Census Bureau and is not a reflection on whether a person was born in America or not, it only designates what people identified themselves as during the survey.

than Blacks and Latinos. This apparent lack of internet access may suggest that this is the underlying reason why students do not sign up for online classes, but that is not necessarily true. Warschauer (1998) and Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt (2006) suggest that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds still sign up for online courses, and in fact it was suggested that instructors should be more proactive in their understanding that not all students in online classes come from the same frame of reference. McGee-Banks & Banks (1995) argue for teachers to use equity pedagogy that does not teach students from minority groups to strive to be the same as the majority society, but rather engage the said student at their level. This could potentially entail the instructor having multiple assessment types that are not dependent upon one specific technology mastery or availability. The instructor also needs to be able to guide the students to help and support in order to aid them in using a new foreign tool. As Warschauer et al. (2004) found, students in low SES schools have more access to computers in the classroom and are taught how to use certain functions inside of academic computer programs, such as Microsoft PowerPoint, but they are not taught higher-level concepts such as how to better research and develop ideas.

A couple of questions that could be drawn from the previous information are: could this idea of equity pedagogy be transferable to online education, and if instructors develop courses to reach the student with the lowest required technology, should not it be possible for successful class completion by all of the students even when embracing such techniques as blended learning? These questions are needed because they focus on how to engage students online, especially those of differing backgrounds. As I stated earlier, students come from different backgrounds, possibly ones with limited online access;

therefore, how are instructors supposed to encourage engagement if their students have limited means?

Student Engagement

Student engagement is an issue for an instructor in both face-to-face classes, as well as their online counterparts. Dennen (2011) found that online instructors may have difficulties due to how they position themselves within the class through modeling of language and discussion; if an instructor positions themselves as a peer the students feel dissonance because the teacher is not viewed as the authority figure, but if they instructor is very authoritative the students become more dependent on the teacher's perspectives causing discussion be stifled.

Added to the complexity is the possible issue with trying to get student engagement even with cultural differences between students and instructors. Students coming from a different background from their instructors may have a different opinion of what is expected in the classroom. Furthermore, students may have a higher chance of failure if their instructor does not understand challenges their students may encounter in their academic work. In a study on pre-service teachers, Ladson-Billings (1991) found that some teachers have difficulties relating with their students because they have little interaction with the student's cultural background. Much like Ladson-Billings, Nieto & Bode (2012) argued, that teachers should embrace multiculturalism because it enhances the classroom. But as Germain-Rutherford & Kerr (2008) explained, the lack of students and teachers understanding each other's culture causes issues in terms of class expectations, especially where there is a difference of high context versus low context cultures. The differences between high and low context cultures according to Morse

(2003), for example, could include instances where high-context learners and low-context learners have different expectations. High-context learners may expect to be reproducers of material, content based on knowledge, examination based assessments, low contact time in groups, and formal teacher/student relationships; low-context students expect active learning and exploration, emphasis on "deep" meaning, a variety of assessments, high group contact time, and informal student/teacher relationships.

The idea of different cultures between students and instructors can be highlighted further by Hofstede's example of cultural differences. Hofstede (1998) explained that every culture has different levels of power distance, individualism, masculine/feminine societies, and uncertainty avoidance.

According to Hofstede (1998) power distance is the how much the members of a group accept and expect power to be distributed unequally; individualism is the degree to how much individuals in a group are expected to have autonomy, this is on the opposite spectrum of collectivism; masculinity and femininity refer to the power levels as demonstrated by the roles of men and women and the expectations of how these roles are expressed; uncertainty avoidance deals with how society feels towards ambiguity and unstructured situations.

Table 1, located in Appendix A, is modified from Hofstede's (1998) table as seen on page twelve in *Think Locally, Act Globally: Cultural Constraints in Personal Management*. This table demonstrates how two cultures may differ on the scale of power distance. Hofstede's scale helps to highlight how students and instructors may be using a different frame of reference when entering a class. An instructor from the U.S., for example, could be described as one who engages their students through open dialogue

that shares the control of the class (small power distances), encourages students to openly express their thoughts (individualist society), allows different ideas on course concepts (weak uncertainty avoidance), and focuses on the individual student's grades more than the course culture (masculine society). This may be an issue for students coming from an East Asian background who may expect the instructor to be the dominate and central authority on everything in the class (large power distance), who rarely shares thoughts that goes outside of the class cultural norm (collectivist society), struggles to take credit for work well done (feminine society), and who would usually want to avoid interrupting or disagreeing with the professor (strong uncertainty avoidance).

Seeing how cultures may be different in their views might be useful if it is understood how people may come into a class with different expectations. Lee (2011) highlighted the need for instructors to understand the culture of their students in a research study across South Korea. In this study it was found that many international students struggle in Korea because the university instructors expects all students to act and study the same way as the Koreans. This may stem from the fact that students from different backgrounds come with varying ideas on what is considered proper discourse in an academic environment.

Even with cultural differences causing course expectations to vary, there are few general desired outcomes from all forms of students. Mupinga & Carole-Yaw (2006) found that the top three expectations of online students are communication with professor, instructor feedback, and challenging online course. Coldwell et al. (2008), Bos & Shami (2006), and Thompson & Ku (2005) all agree with the idea that students want explicit communication from their online instructors, as well as a sense of being a part of

a community. The issue then becomes one of the instructors tying to know and understand their online student culture. Lai & Ball (2004) mention that it may be difficult knowing the student body online because there is no way to know the culture of others unless it is openly shared. Even if the instructor understands the culture of their online students, there may still be an issue of cultural frames getting in the way. Bently, Tinney, & Chia (2005) found that some students from a different cultural background may not engage in an online course as expected because they may not understand the material, discourse style, context, and ultimately the instructors frame of reference.

With this potential dissonance for online instructors, as well as students, it would be useful to investigate the feelings and understanding of instructors who teach and develop online courses. Ultimately the goal of this research is to bring forward conversation on multicultural pedagogy in an online environment, as highlighted in the following purpose statement.

Rationale for Study

With schools implementing more online classes, the understanding of online instruction's similarities and differences with traditional face-to-face classes need to be addressed. There is much research on how multicultural pedagogy is useful in a classroom, but there is little information about how it could be used in the online environment. This is an examination of whether teachers who teach both online and face-to-face classes structure their courses differently and how, if at all, they address the important concept of honoring diversity in a face-to-face class and adapt it for an online environment?

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the ways in which online instructors structure their courses to accommodate diversity. The goal of this research is to better understand the complexities of implementing an online course for students of diverse backgrounds, as well as bring awareness of the potential positive and negative side effects involved with online pedagogy. Because of the growth in online education without an end in sight, I view it as an appropriate discussion to address in the field of education.

Research Questions

As previously mentioned, there has been much research conducted on the topic of multicultural education in the traditional classroom, but relatively little emphasis on online classes. This gap in the literature suggests a need for this research guided by the following research questions: what aspects of face-to-face multicultural pedagogy are used in an online class; what opportunities do students have to talk about their backgrounds; what degree of personal interaction should be developed between the instructor and students, as well as the students and students; how do instructors handle intentional or unintentional plagiarism, (A question that was brought forward as the interviewees alluded to this on their own volition.), and finally how should the issue of different learning styles from culturally diverse backgrounds be addressed?

School Setting

The choice of a community college is based on the diversity of the student body. Unlike most four-year universities, community colleges offer a chance to interact with students from a variety of backgrounds ranging from high school students to senior citizens, students who are native English speakers and students who are not, as well as students of different races, and differing socioeconomic backgrounds. For the sake of confidentiality, the college was given the pseudonym of South River Community College. The school itself is located between a metropolitan city and a military base with two separate campuses. The school offers traditional courses with part-time and full-time enrollments, as well as duel enrollment courses in which students at local schools are able to take college courses while studying in high school. For the purpose of this study, I focused on instructors who taught traditional college classes only open to high school graduates. According to the Office of Institutional Effectiveness Fact Book (2014), the student enrollment at the college is around 14,000 with 36% of the student population of minority background and 64% white. The college has begun an initiative to have an offering of degree programs completely online. The completely online degrees are still new, so the online enrollments may not reflect those changes. Currently, approximately 25% of the student population is enrolled in online or hybrid (combination of online and face-to-face instruction) classes.

Design Approach

Blackboard is the learning management system used by the school and the instructors featured in this research. Since Blackboard is used in academic teaching, a

collective case study, as described by Merriam (2009), was determined to be the best approach to studying teacher perceptions. All of the instructors interviewed volunteered to teach courses online. The instructors were cognizant of support available to them provided by the Department of Instructional Technology, as well as training opportunities within the college. Whether the instructors chose to partake in the learning events was up to them. Each instructor already had a working knowledge of Blackboard and how to build a class in a LMS system; therefore, learning new technology was not required of them. Because all of the instructors understood the process of delivering course materials in an online environment, it can be learned from them the extent of how they address diversity and their thought processes involved when building a class.

A reputational case sampling was used for this research. The interviewer had access to all of instructor emails at the college, so as a method to get a smaller sample, random instructors, through random sampling, were informally asked who they considered to be successful online teachers and through these references by their peers, the interviewees were asked to participate. Each instructor comes from a different teaching department. The subjects that the instructors teach are English, History, Religion, Funeral Services, and Criminal Justice. Three women and two men were interviewed, with at least one of them being from a minority background. One interviewee is an associate dean, two are full time faculty, and the other two are adjuncts.

Data Collection

The principal method of data collection was interview. I contacted each instructor through email to ask if they were interested in partaking in this study. Once the

prospective interviewees responded with interest, I scheduled a time to meet for about one hour in each of the instructor's personal offices. When the instructors agreed to an interview, they were emailed a letter of consent form for their review. Upon the time of the interview, I verbally discussed the consent form with the instructors and asked them to sign. The interview was audio recorded so the participants and I could focus more on the conversation and personal interaction. Because the interviews were semi-structured interview protocol, each participant was informed that participation would last about an hour, but if the instructor wanted to talk past that time it was welcome.

Because I was utilizing a semi-structured interview protocol, I had a list of questions when interviewing, but not each sub question was asked; I used my discretion to decide if the follow up questions were already answered or appropriate. The list of questions used can be seen in Appendix B. I noted that when the instructors were discussing student support and learning styles they often brought up citations and plagiarism. Because of this commonality, I felt that it was a theme to also include in the findings. During the interview and through the process of writing this paper, I have used a password-protected computer to record audio for transcribing later.

Data Analysis

I conducted interviews with the five instructors as the principle source of information about online teaching experiences. I audio recorded each interview and had the interviews transcribed through a transcription service with a confidentiality form. After the interviews were transcribed, I read through each one looking for themes. When I began I had a broad group of themes, therefore I used MAXQDA11, a qualitative data

analysis computer program, to help me keep track of themes I found by rereading through each transcription and flagging specific sections or quotes as belonging to varying overall themes. In some situations, certain flagged sections were coded as belonging to more than one theme. Once I finished placing information into specific themes, I used the computer program to print off each coded theme into individual spread sheets for me to recode by hand for accuracy. When I finished my recoding, I narrowed down each theme further in order to have more specific results.

Because accuracy is important in any research, I engaged in three forms of data validation to ensure that the interviewees were not misrepresented. The first method used was triangulation, described by Merriam (2009) as taking what someone shared in an interview and confirming what I thought I heard on site and in relevant documents related to the phenomenon of interest. The second way I checked for accuracy of representation was through member checking. Creswell (2013) explains that member checking as taking themes and descriptions to the participants to determine accuracy. If any questions arose while reading through the raw data, I would reach out to the specific participant to double check that I understood what they were trying to describe so not to falsify their statements. The final method of data validation was to use an external auditor. Creswell (2003) describes an external auditor as a person who is new to the project and can provide assessment throughout the process. Throughout the crafting of this paper, I have worked closely with my graduate advisor, who has no investment in this thesis, so she could serve as an impartial voice of reason.

When it came time to code my research, I read through the interview texts the code themes within the interviews to better develop an understanding of the responses.

Creswell (2014) explains, “Describing and developing themes from the data consists of answering the major research questions.” I followed a model by Creswell (2002) on how to code data by following the steps of reading the transcriptions as a whole, picking and coding one document at a time, making a list of code words and cluster similar codes, and reducing the codes down to about 5 to 7 themes. Once the themes were decided, I followed what Richards & Morse (2014) described topic coding as, “creating a category or recognizing one from earlier, reflecting on where it belongs among your growing ideas, and reflecting on the data you are referring to and how they fit with the other data coded.”

I followed the processes suggested by Creswell (2002) and Morse & Richards (2002) to code and the interview themes. While reading through each interview I identified a group of themes that appeared to be constant. The original categories that first stood out were as follows:

- Assessments
- Citing sources
- Class culture
- Communication
- Curriculum
- Difficulties
- Discussion boards
- Group work
- Instructor support
- Learning styles

- Relationship with students
- Resources
- Student backgrounds
- Student support

Once the categories were separated and grouped into themes, I began to read the combined responses of the interviewees as theme instead of reading them by interview. Rereading through the themes allowed me to develop four main themes with eight sub themes. The main themes discussed in this paper are: 1) instructor support and development, 2) instructor guidance, instructor availability, and citing sources, 3) community, and 4) curriculum. The rationale behind guidance, availability, and citing sources stems from the overall conversations by the instructors discussing how they coach and support their students. 'Community' was listed as a theme because all of the instructors discussed the sense of community their classes either did or did not have. 'Curriculum' was identified as a main topic because each instructor referred to varying assessments and teaching styles as being productive for online environments or not.

Researcher Positioning

I am employed by the Instructional Technology Department at the college. A part of my job is to manage, run, and train on the institution's LMS. Because of my role, I constantly come into contact and work one-on-one with faculty from every department including those interviewed in this paper. All five instructors interviewed currently use Blackboard in their face-to-face and online classes at the school. As a result, I already have an established working relationship with the interviewees. In addition to me having

access to instructors who teach online, I have a interest in the topic of how multicultural education is addressed in online classes.

Complexities of Building Research Relationships

Because I am employed at the school in which I conducted my research, I had easier access to my participants than if I was not a colleague. This access to the participants has both advantages and disadvantages.

Among the advantages of my work at the school are the ease with which I was able to schedule interview times with my participants – in some cases, I was able to simply stop by the participant's office at a time when we were both available. It has also been quite helpful being a part of the school environment because there was no need for me to develop relationships out of nothing. Each participant had already worked with me in the past, so there was the built in trust and respect that did not require time to develop.

The disadvantages of interviewing my colleagues are associated with nuances of sharing potentially sensitive professional information. One might assume that the existing relationships would be more supportive in the participant's explicitness, and to some extent is has been, but there was also the possibility that my interviewees were reluctant to divulge as much information as one might expect to a stranger because I personally know individuals that may be referenced in an unpleasant light. For this reason, it is possible that participants did not share potentially interesting information with min in their interviews.

Finally, despite a conscious attempt to remain neutral and honest in the presentation of statements made by the interviewees, it is also possible that my

interpretations of the interview content may reflect my professional desire to present my interviewees – my colleagues – in positive light so as not to embarrass or shame those who participated.

Introduction to Participants

Each instructor interviewed will be referenced and quoted often throughout the findings section of this paper. I will begin by providing a brief introduction to each participant, explaining their educational background and course goals, prior to more in-depth descriptions of interviews and conversations with each individual.

I interviewed three women and two men, with four of the interviewees identified as being white and the one instructor belonging to a minority group. All instructors would be considered middle-class, with each one of them owning at least one advanced degree in their field of study. I have listed the following instructor introductions according to the alphabetical order of their pseudonyms given.

Beth is an assistant professor of history that has been teaching online for approximately 6 years, and has been with the college for over 10 years. Beth now teaches about 60% of her classes online. Beth received her degree at an eastern U.S. four-year university. Beth noted that because she was in the military she tends to run her classes with a more rigid structure and or discipline. Beth described her goal for her online students as being able to feel comfortable with learning technology, as well as leaving the class with a sense of being able to continue to learn history with technology they have at home. Beth felt that the main issue of her students not achieving her goals is the fact that 30-40% of her online students drop her course. Beth attributes this high

percentage of students dropping her course to a lack of preparation on her student's part either mentally or technologically.

John is an associate professor in criminal justice. Currently John teaches about five classes a semester with about 40% of his classes being online. John obtained two Masters degrees; one degree was in instructional technology taken online through a distance education program in a midwestern U.S. college, and the second degree is in criminal justice obtained at a large eastern university mostly in a face-to-face environment. Before moving into education, John had been a police officer for many years. John described his goals for his students to be prepared for real world situations. John informed me that he records attendance online through discussion boards, and that he has a strict mandatory attendance policy for both his face-to-face and online classes because no criminal justice jobs allow employees to come to work late. When I asked John what challenges he encounters when trying to meet his goals, he mentioned that students learn in different ways and that both he and the students struggle with creating varying assessments to meet the student's needs.

Kelly has been teaching as full time faculty at the South River for about 2 years as one of the youngest full time faculty in her department. Currently Kelly is an English instructor with past experiences working in English as a second language. She received her Masters in a smaller southeastern U.S. college within a face-to-face environment. Kelly is currently enrolled in an online Doctorate program in English at a southeastern U.S. college. At the time of the interview, 20% of Kelly's classes per semester are taught online. Kelly pointed out that her main goal for her students is to be able to write at the college level with clear central points and a thesis. When discussing what factors that

may hinder her students from succeeding in reaching her goals, Kelly mentioned that the personal circumstances of her students were their principal struggle. Kelly referenced family illnesses, divorce, children, employers not caring about a school schedule, and other such issues as contributing factors.

Leona is currently an associate dean and department chair for funeral services. Leona is one of the few high-level faculty members who belongs to a minority racial background. Because of her position, Leona is required to teach three classes a semester, with 66% of her classes being online. While juggling her work requirements and teaching, Leona is also enrolled in an online Doctorial program at a southeastern U.S. college. When describing her goals at the start of every semester, Leona stated that she wants the students to understand the importance of reading materials and acclimating themselves to online classes, with the ultimate goal for her students to be 100% prepared to sit for the national board exam. Leona mentioned that the most difficult challenge to overcome is the student's poor study habits.

Rico currently teaches about 40% of his classes in an online environment as an associate professor of religion. Rico received his Masters and Doctorial degrees at two different large four-year universities in the southeastern United States with most of his classes involving a face-to-face environment. When I asked Rico about his goals for each class, he stated that he wants his students to be better critical thinkers, and as Rico explained it, to avoid "kneejerk reactions" based on what the students were taught in a church, masque, or synagogue, for example. Rico explained that the students who struggle in achieving his goals tend to have difficulties working with academic discussions and have a tendency to fall back on the idea that since they went to church all

their lives they know all the material. This attitude by some of Rico's students causes them to not read the assigned materials or to not look at the assigned readings academically.

Findings

As mentioned previously, the main themes discussed in this paper are instructor support and development, instructor guidance, instructor availability, and citing sources, community, and curriculum. The following findings will be organized as such. The instructor support and development expresses how the instructors felt they were supported. Instructor guidance, instructor availability, and citing sources focuses on how the instructor makes themselves open to help and support their students. Community is focused on how the instructors perceive their online community to be, and how they maintain it. And finally the curriculum touches on how the instructors feel about and develop their online classes.

Instructor Support & Development

> South River, I can honestly say and I'm not just blowing smoke, but at South River, my English Department, I love my department. I can literally go to anyone and say, "hey, I need help with this" and it's like, "oh yeah, well let me" ... and if they don't know something, they'll take me to someone who does. And that's not just even my department; that's even across departments. We are really lucky because we have an incredibly friendly staff and faculty that everyone's cool with sharing everything and I really feel like I can turn anywhere, you know. And

> thank God because I need a lot of help all the time, you know? Cuz there's just stuff that I just don't know or I wanna know how to do better.

This statement by Kelly echoed what all of the other instructors mentioned in their interviews. At South River College, each department has its own support structure for their faculty, and it is not uncommon for cross department cooperation. The support mentioned by Kelly is also accentuated by the fact that the school has a department of Instructional Technology that focuses on online course content support through Blackboard, as well as developing course design based in sound pedagogy. Each instructor interviewed mentioned the department that helps build online courses and the support they received by peers within their department, but they all talked about the lack of time to really grow with the support.

Rico and Beth, when discussing their own department support and peer evaluations, also brought up the feeling of support expressed by Kelly. One notable difference was when Rico and Beth both mentioned how they would like their department to set up a chance for the faculty to observe each other's classes and offer suggestions for improvement. Rico brought up that in the past he tried to get the process started, but interestingly enough, both Rico and Beth referenced the lack of time on the part of every party involved. Although Kelly did not mention peer observations, she did express the struggle to balance time in her statement:

> We have a lot of meetings; a lot of department meetings and everybody is very vocal, which is cool. So there's no shortage of resources, there's more just you know, a shortage of time in terms of you being able to really investigate the

> resources and pull out the tools and techniques that you really wanna incorporate more cuz you're just busy. You're just busy as all get out, you know, in a community college atmosphere [if you did have time] you would just soar.

The sentiments expressed by Kelly, Rico, and Beth bring to life the importance of support from other instructors. Ladson-Billings (1995) also mentioned that it is useful for instructors to be supported by having other's critique their classes and collaboratively discuss how to improve, so they are presented the opportunity to rethink their classes, as well as having resources to depend on when developing a course. Even though each instructor talked about access to reach out for support within their departments, unfortunately for the instructors, I got a sense that the opportunity to peer evaluate and collaborate was absent due to the lack of free time on the part of everyone in their departments.

Section 1 analysis

During the interviews I wanted to know if the instructors felt that they were receiving the proper support in order to achieve success in their online classes. When asked, the instructors referred to the lack of time, rather than the lack of support, as a roadblock to course improvement as an important consideration when trying to incorporate multicultural pedagogy into a classroom, online or traditional. Instructors mentioned that there are support systems in place to aid them, and even though they expressed a desire to access such support, there was an overwhelming sense of the lack of time. Kelly explained that if she asked for assistance from anyone in her department no one would refuse her. In fact, Kelly went so far as to state that if there was more time for

instructors to focus on development "in a community college atmosphere you would just soar." Kelly's statement demonstrates that instructors do desire to be more engaging in their classes and if they were allowed more time they would be able to better fulfill what Mupinga & Carole-Yaw (2006) suggest when they discuss student expectations of communication, feedback, and challenges in an online course.

Instructors described time as a barrier to better course development when receiving support from their department and the department of instructional technology, but that was not the only mention of time causing issues for the instructors. Both Beth and Rico discussed that they desired to start a peer review partnership with other faculty in order to gain new perspectives, but the inflexible schedules of parties involved caused the beginning of such a cooperation to unravel. After interviewing the instructors I could not help but think the faculty may be better served if they did have an opportunity to see other instructor's courses and witness different methods for delivering assessments and learning materials.

While interviewing the instructors I sensed that they felt overwhelmed because they all had a desire to be well equipped for online classes, but they could not reach a position where they considered themselves prepared. It can be argued that faculty should make time to get support to better design their classes, that is part of their job, but what should be done and practicality do not always equate to the same thing. Perhaps there needs to be designed development hours for the faculty to gain a better grasp of class design. Since my conversations with the instructors pointed out an interest to offer and receive support for other instructors; this could possibly be a good start to build needed development.

Since the instructors acknowledged the willingness of their peers to help when they need it, I thought it would be best to discuss their ability to aid students who need assistance because students also need support. The next section will discuss how the instructors make themselves available to their students.

Instructor guidance, instructor availability, and citing sources

While talking with the instructors, the theme of them supporting students became apparent. Within the area of support, there were three topics that were repeatedly discussed by the instructors: instructor guidance, instructor availability, and citing sources.

"I can't give those pep talks"

When talking about student support and different learning styles, the instructors brought up how they try to guide or influence their students in positive way, whether online or in a face-to-face class. As one might suspect, each instructor's view of what is considered guidance varied. Of the instructors interviewed, three of them expressed a different type of guidance. Leona told me that she viewed her work as a ministry among the students of certain backgrounds, and, through her assistance, the students can overcome difficulties learning. Kelly described how she worked almost in a partnership with the students to overcome any issues they may have. Rico believed that his job was not to coddle the students but rather teach to them through tough love. Each instructor took a different stance on how they help their students, so I felt it useful to highlight how each instructor described their support. Leona described her method of assisting students as

> A lot of people are uncomfortable, I think, talking about socioeconomic and racial differences, even in education. But for me, personally, that's a part of my ministry in education, [which] is to cater to everyone, but especially there are two populations that are very near and dear to me, women and my own people. You know, so when I advise women who want to come into the program or they just stop by for general advising, I do way more than the Department of Education would wanna know. But, again, it's about access you know; these women come in, and they have these high hopes and these big dreams. They've got a two-year old and a five-year old. So I'll, I say, "Okay, what's your support system? You know what is your plan? Let's talk about a plan. The other is doable. Let's talk about a plan."

Leona expressed creating a plan to make sure that the students succeed in her class and school in general. Leona explicitly mentioned that she has a soft spot for mothers and students of the same racial background as her own. This sort of support was seen as very important to Leona because she appeared aware of the fact that the two groups she cares for, mothers and the minority group she belongs to, are particularly vulnerable to the risk of not having support systems in place. This underscores the need of student understanding as described by Ladson-Billings (1995). Leona's strategy was similar to Kelly's in that they both reach out and work with their students. Kelly described what she would do if she had students from different backgrounds who did not understand the course work or the topic discussed. When I asked Kelly about possibly providing different assessments for students of diverse backgrounds she stated

> I wouldn't give them different assessments, but what I would do is I would absolutely talk to each of those students individually. I would explain to them you know, I would bring them either into my office, I would request that we set up an appointment, or I would call them, you know, for example in online [classes] because I do think a lot more can be you know, handled, especially in that kind of area, the touchier areas when your are having a, a voice that you're dealing with. Or if it's like, you know, if you have to do email sure, instant message, but you really have to be careful with your wording. I would take each of those students aside individually, and I would really make it a point to listen to them and hear out their side of the equation; and what I would do is I would try to get them more in line with whatever point it is they may be missing.

Kelly's comments demonstrated her wiliness to meet the students where they are and try to help them improve on their abilities. When discussing how she would help the students do better in class, Kelly did make an effort to explain that she would not infringe on the student's personal beliefs. Kelly continued,

> But I'm talking about more of a writing style or reading style than I am necessarily someone's belief. I wouldn't challenge somebody's beliefs, you know; I would be like okay, I see how you feel this way on that, that's fine. But it would be more of, so this is what I'm looking for in this assignment, and this is why I'm looking for this in this assignment. This is my rationale and here how I think you can achieve it in your way. Cuz I do think there is a lot of validity in making sure writers and students are aware that they do have a voice. Academic, you know, academia and writing sure it has its

> own rules and conventions, but they can still keep that voice in those conventions, but you have to show them how to do it, or you have to walk them through how to do it.

Kelly's interest in making sure that her students understood the course work and what is expected of them in order to succeed in the class was similar to what Rico would do when his students came to him for support. Although Kelly and Rico both address the issue of confusion, Rico chooses a more strict approach that he attributes to what he learned in a large four-year college in the Southeastern United States. These differences of how to address such students may stem from the fact that Kelly has a background in English as a second language (ESL), and she came from a smaller college background, while Rico's experience comes from a background of attending large four-year universities for his whole academic career. Even though Kelly and Rico had different backgrounds, Rico did talk about how he reaches out to his students. Rico first described his rationale on how he supports his students:

> Some students get too ingrained in the, kind of, academic lifestyle: "Well, someone's got to help me." I am helping you, you know, but at some point you're going to have to fly solo, and I'm here to help that process happen. I am a tough teacher but when you get a job, your bosses aren't going to be giving you every hand up every time you need one and your coworkers aren't going to do it. They're going to not work with you because you can't do this yourself, or you're going to fail at your job. You might land the dream job in the interview, and you don't have the chops to do the work. I'm doing you a favor.

After Rico explained his philosophy on why he appears stricter compared to his colleagues, he explain how he assists any student who approaches him for help,

> If you can't keep up, you can't keep up. Come see me; I'll help you, but help doesn't mean I'll give you an extra credit assignment or here are some free points to make you feel better. Help is usually in the form of a pep talk, which for me feels like you're being yelled at most of the time, so my wife says. Um, they'll come in and I'll say, "Yeah, you're not doing well. What are you not doing? What are you doing? What are you doing here? What are you not doing here?" You know, and it's not, "Oh, you're a smart person. I think you're very, very handsome and you'll do great." I can't give those pep talks. That's not me and so I'm much more direct. I think a lot of them appreciate it or they'll say, "I really want an A," and I'll say, "You're not getting an A in this class because points wise it is not possible. I'm going to tell you that upfront because I don't want you thinking you're going to get an A but you can get a B or you can get a C; lets figure out realistically where you're at. I'm not trying to be mean, I'm just trying to be realistic because I don't want to lie to you or anything like that.

Even though Rico may come across as being callous, he sees his goals as focused on students succeeding in their studies. This is underscored by examples provided by Rico later on in their conversation. Rico explained that if a student is struggling due to poor study habits he is more than willing to support the student in improving. As Rico mentioned,

> Come into the office and talk with me, show me your notes and I can look at your notes, and let you know if I have any suggestions. Are they good notes, are they weak notes, do you need to get better at this? Come in and show me your flash cards for studying techniques, and we'll go over your studying techniques and we'll see if we can improve that. Bring your textbook in; show me that you've been highlighting and doing active reading. Any supplemental notes or anything, show me this stuff. And none of that has anything to do with Religion itself, but I'll help, and I always tell them, "I really want you to know this, come in office hours, I'll give you extra credit for it but you have to have it corrected when you're coming in, you have to show me that you're putting in some effort.

Considering what each instructor said on the topic of supporting their students, it is noticeable that they each have an opinion of what is considered assistance. Even though each instructor had a varied expectation of support, all of the instructors were more than willing to help struggling students. I did find it interesting that in each conversation with Leona, Kelly, and Rico, they all expressed the idea of students physically coming to them for help. I found it curious that online instructors were more than willing to aid their students, but there was an indirect expectation that students would physically come to their offices for assistance.

Because each instructor interviewed discussed how they would support their students, it was important to ask about their accessibility to support the students and then compare the instructor's openness to help and compare that to the school required office

hours. The next section highlights the availability of instructors to support their students when the need arises.

"I'll come down there; it's no big deal"

Each instructor at South River is required to have two office hours per week for every class they teach. During the office hours the instructors are supposed to be available to support the students. All of the instructors interviewed were willing to or are already doing more than is expected of them. Each instructor mentioned that they check their emails, and they tend to keep to a rule on turnaround time for responses. For example, Leona has a policy to answer emails within 24 hours. This was not abnormal for the other instructors. Both Beth and John make themselves more available than that, even if the students choose to not take advantage of the opportunity. Since Beth and John make extra effort to be there when students need help, I thought it would be beneficial to feature how both of them described their readiness to be there for the students. Beth explained that she schedules five hours a week where she is open to phone calls from her students. As Beth stated,

> I've started to forward all of my calls from the office to home. I'll post, you know, five hours of phone office hours, and their [the students] calls go directly to me, and that's allowed me to get some kind of voice, but very few students really take advantage. Who wants to call unless you're desperate? They've reported it's very helpful, and I feel that our online communication improves after we speak by phone.

Much like Beth, John discussed how he makes his schedule more open to support

his students. When discussing availability, John referred to his past experiences and compared it to what he currently does. Previously when John was teaching online courses at a midwestern university, he was required to log onto an instant messaging service once a week and give out his phone number for student support. As John described his previous experience,

> We had to have online office hours there [at the previous university], so every, whatever it was, Wednesday night, I actually had to log on to a chat and sit and watch a chat room window for two hours. Now I taught there three years, nobody ever came on.

Because of his bad experience at the previous college, John made a choice to be more strict with his hours than as was previously required. John continued,

> I mean, if I'm here, there's some students that come in see me every week. They just come in and shoot the breeze, and there's some that probably should come and see me. You know, that's the way it is. And the online ones I had trouble with because I'm not calling them from home. And I'm not calling them from my cellphone, because of caller ID. Um, they get me here [at the school] or they get an email. Or they can come in and see me, you know, during office hours, and I don't live that far away. I've told them before: If you want to meet me there [at the school outside of office hours], I'll come down there, it's no big deal.

John and Beth's example of making themselves available for the students shows a commitment to be there for their learners. Even though many students do not take advantage of the instructor's availability, it does fit into what Durrington, Berryhill, &

Swafford (2006) note on needing to help students feel supported and interacting with a live person to encourage student investment in the course, therefore potentially helping to increase student achievement.

Each instructor brought up the topic improper source citing by students when they discussed student support, because the instructors brought to my attention, it became apparent that plagiarism should be a theme on its own. The next section covers citing sources and how instructors work with their students when they struggle.

"You will have the hammer brought down on you"

Plagiarism is an issue that each instructor discussed during his or her interview. After reviewing the conversations, it was noticed that the instructors fell within similar mindsets when approaching the topic. Because the school has a zero tolerance policy towards plagiarism all of the instructors were cognizant of the harsh actions if the student is charged with plagiarism. In their own way each instructor mentioned that they are willing to help guide and cultivate the students to a better understanding of how to cite sources correctly. How each instructor went about correcting the students ranged from a broad email addressed to the class to a direct one on one confrontation with the student, but, in every case, the instructors all had a policy to work with the student the first time and then turn the student in if they overtly broke the rules again.

Although mentioning that they work with the students when issues of plagiarism appear in class, Rico and Leona both had a stronger stance on plagiarism compared to the other instructors. This less tolerant feeling by Rico and Leona may stem from the fact that they teach higher-level courses at South River; therefore, the students should have

already taken English composition courses and know the rules of plagiarism. Rico expressed his thoughts by saying, "I have very little patience for it. Or as Leona expressed it, "Once you're told you've gotta get it in your head. How many times are you gonna say 'I don't understand?'" The other three instructors also have a definite line that the students are not allowed to cross, but they elaborated more on how they work with the students after their first offense. While discussing online assessments, Beth referred to her discussion boards in her history classes. As Beth explained,

> I would write to them [the students] and copy and paste what they wrote into their email and then I'd delete it so that other students couldn't be corrupted by that, you know, and I wouldn't mention that in public, in front of other students. I've had them do that, and generally, if it's done with a private email students are apologetic and you see improvement.

John also explained what he did in his discussion board posts and his assignments. John's response to students improperly citing was similar to Beth. John explained how he works with citing issues in the his class when he said,

> Um, yeah, they don't know how to cite sources. The writing center here [on campus] is excellent. I recommend it, of course if they're taking classes online, maybe because they can't get to campus, so that's an issue. Every online class in the course materials I have a link to the *Purdue Owl* site that talks about plagiarism and how to use APA. So, it's the best site I've ever seen. So I use them for my APA, and I use them for plagiarism. I don't require them to read it. But it's there. If I know they're copying word for word because that's easy to find, the first time I'll just take off for it. The first one I would send them an email and tell

> them, ‘Look, that's plagiarism. You can't do that, here's why. If you don't understand, you know, call me during my office hours or go to the writing center. But if you do it again, I'm going to turn you in.’ I think a lot of times they're not doing it on purpose.

John’s example shows how he does not condone plagiarism, but he is willing to guide the students to sources of information so that they can learn from their mistakes. This way of thinking is much inline with Kelly’s. Out of all of the interviewees, Kelly seemed to be the most expressive, probably due to her being an English instructor. Being an English instructor puts added pressure on Kelly because her students will generally move on to courses taught by instructors such as Rico and Leona, and if they do not understand proper citations at that time, they will have difficulties. Because citations are important in her classes, Kelly had a lot to say on the topic of plagiarism. The following is how Kelly described her views on citing sources:

> That's a big, big issue, and, first off, I try put the fear God into them. On the first day, I'm like, ‘do not plagiarize, do not plagiarize, do not plagiarize,’ I tell them and it's a part of the syllabus as well, you know. So I try and scare the hell out of them on the first day.
>
> But then I also make it clear after I do that speech I'm like you should not be afraid to approach me with did I do this correctly, did I cite this source correctly, is this too close to the original wording; like do not be afraid to ask me. Don't be afraid to ask any of the librarians. Don't be afraid to go to the writing center. I'm

like don't hesitate to email me, to post something somewhere; I am more than happy to go through and show you that cuz I would rather you come to me, you know, than make a grievous error.

Now sometimes though I will, you know, South River College has a very, very strict plagiarism zero tolerance policy. And sometimes, you will have a student submit something that like oh my gosh! You're just like c'mon dude. You know? You're like, do you really think I'm that dumb?

So I pull them aside and um, you know, I talk to them and I'm like, what is this? And usually they won't say anything, or they'll be panicked or like duh-duh-duh; I'm like okay, so you have one shot to rewrite this, um, I swear if you make any mistakes in terms of taking somebody's work, not citing correctly, all that stuff, you will have the hammer brought down on you.

So, it's more of getting down to ... and I really luckily have only had like one or two serious cases then the other times it's been more just you know, errors, just small errors that I'm like what's this and they're like oh my gosh and they'll go back in and put it in there. And, and that's easy. That's easy to fix. That's an innocent mistake. But I do make them aware also that, you know, I'm not trying to scare them, but I also am very helpful, I feel like I'm very helpful with citing and plagiarizing and making sure they have multiple chances to correct what they need to correct.

Each instructor's insight into how they handle plagiarism is interesting because does share aspects of multicultural pedagogy. Although none of the interviewees

referenced such pedagogy, some made sure to point out that not all students understand the importance or concept of plagiarism, and they need to be taught. As Germain-Rutherford & Kerr (2008) explained, explicit instructions are important because people from different backgrounds do not always come with the same frame of reference in a classroom, especially when citing sources. The understanding that not all student backgrounds have the same knowledge of proper Western style source citing fits into what Nieto (2010) implied when she said the role of the teacher is as a cultural accommodator and mediator. The instructors who were interviewed knew that their students did not all have the understanding of proper citations, but they did not cite multiculturalism. Because of this, one may question if these thoughts come to the instructors because they are at a community college with a diverse student body, and they have an understanding of the differences of their student population.

Although each instructor talked about having the student come meet them, the ideas expressed by Leona, Kelly, and Rico all highlight the importance of student support in multicultural pedagogy, especially in an online environment. The willingness by the instructors to meet their students and provide feedback aligns with 2 of the 3 things that Mupinga & Carole-Yaw (2006) found in their study, which are communication with professor and instructor feedback, and builds on the idea students need to not only feel a part of the community but also that the instructor is there to support them.

Section 2 analysis

The willingness of the instructors to help their students to gain a better understanding of how to succeed in school and life is in line with multicultural ideals. For example, Leona understood that socioeconomic and racial issues might be difficult barriers for

students to overcome, so she encouraged students to meet her and make a plan to follow to ensure success in school. Rico tried to prepare his students to be self-sufficient because students cannot always be dependent on other people's assistance outside of school. But instead of the instructors treating the students as all having to fit a specific academic mold, each instructor pointed out that they attempted to help their students to understand how to navigate their courses and the materials covered, such as Kelly showing students how to write academically. Although the instructors expressed a willingness to help, they did not view their assistance as being related to pedagogy of supporting differences, but rather the instructors focused on helping students succeed. This suggested to me that the instructors were committed to achieving the bigger picture of student success in ways that are similar to multicultural pedagogy, without having the explicit background knowledge. Perhaps if such information were presented to instructors in a multicultural frame they would be better able to draw from it to inform their work with students.

The underlying reason I encouraged the instructors to talk about their availability was to gain a better understanding of the how much access students had to instructor support because it could be assumed that students may not be succeeding or are struggling due to the lack of support by the instructors. This, however, was not substantiated. Beth discussed having her office phone forwarded to her home phone and John explained that he was willing to make a special trip to campus if the students needed to meet him. Student struggles did not appear to be directly related to the inaccessibility of their instructors but rather they appear to be caused by other unrelated situations.

The point that the interviewees made themselves more available than required by the school to assist students is important to note because that type of support leads to the ability to help students of all backgrounds. Not only does the willingness to meet students help individual students succeed, but it is also conducive to building relationships with students and ultimately community. If I were to critique one aspect of the support offered by the instructors, other than Beth, it would be that they generally expected the students to come meet them in person. John, Leona, Rico, and Kelly each stated that they were happy to meet their students in person but there was no mention of other support options. In fact, John identified that he once conducted online support at his previous college, and because it was not actively engaging he refuses to do so any more. Although meeting in person is a great concept, especially for building a working relationship, it does not account for students who may not be able to afford an extra visit economically due to the lack of funds to travel to the school or to take time off work to meet the instructor during normal 8am to 5pm office hours. The instructor support works well with multicultural pedagogy because they make themselves open to assist students, but the inherent expectation that the students can afford to come by the office negates such ideas.

I did not originally intend to discuss plagiarism but it became a recurrent theme that each instructor discussed; therefore, I found it difficult to ignore. The expectation of proper citations is even more important in an online class because it is increasingly easy for a student to copy and paste from internet sources. The fact that instructors take care to help students understand the importance of proper citations is noteworthy because it fits perfectly into multicultural education. Not all students come from a background that places high priority, or understanding, on what is considered proper citation in Western

academic discourse. Therefore, when Kelly calls or meets her students to explain proper citations, or when Beth points out improper citations in a method that spares some level of ignorance, and John encourages students to visit the writing center or the website *Purdue Owl,* these instructors are teaching entry level college courses while maintaining a commitment to use proper citations as a learning opportunity for the students is commendable.

Although one can argue that a college is not expected to teach such information, but rather a high school should, it is important to recognize that not all students have had the same opportunities in high school. Also, some of the students in a community college are returning to school from a long hiatus from the academic world. Therefore, many instructors are taxed with the duty to help students understand the expectations of college level writing.

Multicultural pedagogy focuses on building a community in the classroom so that students may be successful. Because community is so important, it is a natural topic to cover in this research. The next section will cover the topic of community and how the instructors interact with students, as well as how students interact with each other.

Community

When I discussed the general dialogue and interaction within the course environment the interviewees, community emerged as a common theme among the instructors. Topics that fell within the area of community were race and cultural backgrounds of students, language used in classes, and interaction amongst the students and with the instructor.

“It doesn't matter if they're white, black, blue, or green”

As mentioned, South River has a diverse student base with a variety of goals and backgrounds. Although Rico did not seem to care for the idea of the school being open to any who apply, he highlighted the diversity at the college when he commented, “Well, South River is very open door. If you don’t have the scores then we'll get a class organized to help you get to where you need the scores but everybody can come here. It doesn’t matter what problems, what issues, we'll find a way to work with you.” When looking at the lists of courses, it is apparent that Rico was not stretching the truth. There are many developmental courses, which range from developmental math to beginning writing composition, which seems to serve as a bridge for students who have skill levels lower than the expected level of a college student enrolled at South River. With these differences in the student population, all of the interviewees appeared to be knowledgeable of the variety of students they may face in their classes, even if they did not know exactly how to address it. John expressed his opinions in his statement,

> Yeah, I'll be honest with you, I don't know that I do address it. Everybody's getting the same instruction. I mean if I see somebody struggling, let's say they didn't get a good foundation for one reason or another, it doesn't matter if they're white, black, blue, green, you know. I don't know that I address it as far as the instruction goes. I mean we're all reading the same book, we're all hearing the same lectures. In the classroom it'll come up. You know, in a face-to-face class, I'd sit down with them and say, "Hey, you know, what you need? There’s a writing center over here, there's this, there's that." You know, the online people, if they're not coming to campus, they don't have all those options, so I mean I can

> send them an email and say "Hey, what do you want to do? Everything okay?" You know, it's kind of hard."

John continued to explain that even with his inability to suggest support resources for online students, he did feel better able to avoid sensitive topics in an online class because he has more control over the conversation and direction of discussion. As John continued,

> Well, let's just take the white/black issue, because I'm criminal justice so there's a lot of that, right? Um, sometimes I tiptoe in the classroom. Online it doesn't really come up. But um, in the classroom you just never ... I've got a little bit of control online I guess is what I'm saying. Staying away from those gray areas in the classroom, I don't know what anybody's going to say, so you have more to deal with.

The other instructors would agree with John's point of view that it is easy to offer suggestions for assistance in a face-to-face environment, but online options are lacking. Even with that weaker support, it was also mentioned that the ambiguity and the instructor control of the online environment helped them to better cover sensitive topics. When asked for an example of how he uses an online forum to avoid sensitive areas such as race, John gave the example of a discussion topic he gives in his online class,

> I give them a scenario, "You get a shoplifting call and it's a nice looking girl, um, she's dressed nice, you go through her purse, which you do when you arrest somebody. And she's got a credit card, $50 cash, and she stole something worth

> $5. She's a smart ass too, alright. Then I give them the other scenario so you get another kid, he's polite, but he's not dressed so nice, he doesn't live in a good part of town, and he stole $100 pair of tennis shoes. Didn't have any money on him, but he, do you treat him any differently?" You do have some discretion [as a police officer]. You can take people in, you can release them on a summons, you know. And I know it sounds like the girl's white and the guy's black. So I specifically put in there race doesn't matter. That's another topic, we're not dealing with that, don't even consider race when you're doing this, when you're answering this question. So that's how I address it online. I mean, the way the question was written, you assume pretty little white girl and a black kid with a hoodie. So I specifically put in there, "Let's not consider race in this."

As Lai & Ball (2004) argue, unless the students choose to explicitly share their backgrounds with the class, there is a sense of ambiguity. So, essentially, John's feeling of less confrontation would appear to be right. Unless there is an image, a name, or sharing by the student; no one will know what background the students have. Because of this ambiguity, John is able to strip out any potential racial issues by saying that his example is not about race but rather the situation. But John's statements did not express the opinion of all the other instructors. Kelly makes it a point to be very careful of issues that can be divisive in the classroom. Rather than saying that all students are the same online and race does not matter, Kelly recognizes that there is going to be diversity in her classroom, and she welcomes opportunities to incorporate her student's experiences into her class. Kelly explained that she is very sensitive towards sexual orientation, race, and non-native speakers. As Kelly described sexual orientation,

> I do think I really try and be aware of issues. There are three big issues that I'm very conscientious of, um, I try to be very aware of and very sensitive to sexuality because I think, thankfully, we live in an age where students who are more and more comfortable with you know, coming out with whatever their sexuality may be, but many don't, you know. And that's because of the comments that they may get, so I really try and be sensitive to sexuality.

Kelly's statement shows that she is willing to address current event issues and chooses to allow her students to be able to express their ideas in a considerate manner. Kelly sets herself up to be an advocate for her students, even in an ambiguous environment such as an online class. Kelly continued to describe the other two areas where she is very sensitive when she said,

> I really try and be sensitive to race, and I really try and be sensitive to um, you know, anything dealing with, honestly, with the English language learners, um, because I do think that English language learners depending on the part of the country you're in and I'm talking multiple parts of the country, um, you know, really can feel very isolated and I don't like that. I used to be an ELL or ESL teacher even before I started working for South River. Uh, and I try to be really sensitive to different kind of cultures coming into the classroom, and trying to frame stuff from a local state, United States perspective but also globally.

Kelly, much like John, tries to bring up conversation to get different perspectives. But unlike John, Kelly encourages her students to explain their backgrounds and

differences. Instead of saying that backgrounds are not important in the conversation, she asks students to explain more. As Kelly framed her example,

> I may get into discussions about education. It's very interesting. A lot of my ELL or ESL students will speak up, especially if they've come from another system, and I love when they do. I love when they start talking about education. I've had students from Nigeria, I've had students from Egypt, from all parts of South America, you know Honduras, Mexico, Guatemala, all over the place, and I think education and how we learn and how we perceive different ways of learning that's a really good kind of jumping off point. And we try to include as many perspectives as possible cuz I think that's the cool part of college is you get to hear all different kinds of stuff for the, for the better or worse, whatever you know may come out.

What Kelly expressed appears to agree with what Ladson-Billings argues as successful multicultural pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) asserts that a culturally relevant teacher who is aware of social relations maintains fluid relationships and encourages students to collaboratively be responsible for one another. It appears that Kelly strives for similar goals as Ladson-Billings, even if her objectives are not necessarily achieved.

When the interviewees and I talked about class culture, the topic of language usage was brought up. I asked the instructors if they changed their vocabulary online, and if they did, in which situations. The following section discusses language in the online environment.

“Here’s this Miss Jet-setter”

Each instructor expressed that they do not change their vocabulary for an online class, but they did mention paying particular attention to explaining every detail of what was expected of the students in the class. This detailed explanation stemmed from the instructors wanting the students to know exactly what was required of them for a successful grade in the class, not for fear of students not understanding the educational vocabulary or the language used by the instructor’s native background. When questioned, the instructors talked of struggling to achieve voice, as well as carefully avoiding potentially inflammatory language to different groups, particularly African-Americans, even if not on a conscientious level. This attention to what was said was more to prevent hurt feelings or misunderstandings rather than embrace different backgrounds. As Beth explained,

> I would say, um, 60 to 70% of my students are African-American, so that goes through my mind, but that’s more of a background preparation rather than a method. So if anything happens, it’s more on the subconscious level rather than the conscious level. It crosses my mind when I’m using “African-American” versus “black”, and that does cross my mind, “Is this offensive or making reference to a particular ethnic group” but more I guess I haven’t thought about that. Most of my students, a pretty good portion of my students are probably of the lower-economic classes. And I’m middle-class, but I hesitate to share with them things that I’m doing because, you know, “I’m going to the beach next week,” or I’m going to someplace, “I’m going to travel.” I’m more careful [about] that. I want to be approachable if I’m jetting off somewhere then its kind

> of hard to share international experiences sometimes. I'm careful of that it's not, "Here's this Miss Jet-setter," which is definitely not the case, but I certainly do have a lot more advantages than my students.

Because of this concern for not causing misunderstandings in the classroom, all of the instructors expressed that they found it hard to achieve their own voice. John expressed his inability to make jokes in his online classes this way,

> So there's a lot of touchy people out there. You have to be really careful what you write. In class I can make a comment, they can tell by my body language or I'm smiling, that I'm kidding. It doesn't work that way online. Sometimes you hurt some feelings online.

The lack of the ability to achieve one's voice for these instructors all differed. Beth pointed out that in her traditional classes she is able to make a connection and cajole her students when needed, but in an online class she can only hope to reach her students by written text alone, which she expressed as easily misconstrued because students are unable to hear the tone of voice.

Kelly also mentioned issues of misunderstanding, especially when considering humor. Kelly felt that in a face-to-face class she could easily backtrack if the students did not understand her, but in an online class she is unable to redirect students the moment the misunderstanding takes place. Because of her fear of jokes causing hurt feelings, Kelly makes a consciences effort to only share self-deprecating humor.

Leona also mentioned that humor was difficult to communicate as well, so she only makes simple jokes on the weather or other similar types of humor. Leona

mentioned that voice was hard to portray, and the only way she was able to have some sort of personal touch was to type the way she verbally communicates in person. I found this interesting because Leona comes from a minority group but she is also pursuing a Doctorate degree. Would Leona communicate as a minority community member or as academia would expect? That made me wonder if she did communicate as in writing as a minority community member would be expected to verbally, would that be better able to reach her minority students if she communicated as them much like what Ladson-Billings (1995) suggests, or would this form of writing as she speaks cause dissonance to the majority of students? Unfortunately, I had no way to measure this because I did not have access to collect artifacts from her classes.

When Rico discussed communicating with his students, he touched on humor as difficult as well, but what he considered to be the most difficult part about voice is anonymity. According to Rico, the separation of face-to-face time with students not only hurts his ability to express his humor and connect with his students, but it also allows the online students to say and do things that would not normally be expressed in person. As Rico stated,

> So in my in-person classes, my students are very respectful. They know there's a line. I joke around a lot. I encourage them to joke around a lot within reason. I have students online who will say things to me that my face-to-face students would never look me in the eye and say. Ridiculous offhand comments or things that are inappropriate in almost any venue and I think it's because of anonymity. I think even though I know their name, they don't have to look somebody in the

> eye and say something, and I think that's a good skill to have is learn how to not only find your voice but speak your voice.

While all of the instructors made at least a subconscious point to avoid divisive language, some of them went further by considering the views of the majority of their class that could be brought to light and examined. When asked about language in class that could be misconstrued by the students, Rico told of how he does not consider that as much as the student's worldviews. Rico described,

> I never thought about it in those terms but usually backgrounds of religion, there's a majority of people who are Christians coming through my classes, so I'm extra careful to try and spot the Christian centric viewpoint, which could be construed as bias, that I'm bias against Christians in my class if you really want to look at it cynically but, um, it's not really that. I don't think that qualifies. I'm just trying to make sure like when I'm designing the courses and I think, well, how is someone going to respond to this or that? Like even in my World Religion classes I have students every semester say, "Why do we start with the eastern religions? Why do we do Hinduism and Buddhism? I don't know anything about those. Start with Christianity because I know something about that.

What Beth and Rico both described reflects what multiculturalism addresses. Many instructors make an effort to avoid conversation or language that can be seen as abrasive to the students, but it tends to end there. It could be possible that the instructors felt the lack of voice due to how they position themselves in the class. As Dennen (2011)

argued, if the instructor appears to be expert, they may not be able to express their personality as much because they are playing the role of the authoritative figure, but if an instructor appears to be a peer of the students they may loose the image of being the facilitator. Therefore, the instructor has to balance a voice of conversation and authority. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (1991) described some teachers as having a difficult time relating with their students because they have little interaction with the student's cultural background or vise versa. Although it is positive that instructors are sensitive to language that can be misunderstood or hurtful, there is a lack of understanding that not every student will relate to terms used in the class and frame of mental reference the instructor is coming from.

When the instructors discussed how they structure their language and dialogue in their online courses, the topic of how students share was also brought up. Online courses do require interaction from instructor to student and student to student. The next section covers what students share in the interviewee's online classes.

"Only share what you're comfortable with"

When asked about interaction in their online classes, every instructor made a point to mention the discussion board. Other than the rare occasion of the students coming to the instructor's office hours or an email exchange between instructor and student, the main form of communication engagement was through these discussion boards. Each instructor uses the discussion board as an assessment tool and also as a way to encourage interaction by giving the students a chance to have their own voice. Some instructors felt that the students were more courteous towards one another when using the discussion boards. As Beth described,

> There's a great deal more interaction than in my face-to-face class, and they tend to be more open with one another. They're kinder, and particularly in discussion boards and posts. There are times when they're us against them and that comes out, it's easier to come out in the online classes, so I have to say they talk to each other more.

Although Beth talked about the discussion boards as friendlier than her face-to-face classes, the sense of anonymity can cause students to be less formal with their instructors. Leona stressed that some students may act differently towards the instructor in an online class, and not always in a positive manner. As Leona said, "I've not had an issue that I can think of with students. Now I have had some students who have, you know, sort of come out at me on Blackboard (the location of the discussion boards), or in an e-mail, but student to student, [no]."

Besides using the discussion boards as a way to assess student understanding and learning, each instructor also had some form of introduction board. The common theme that the instructors expressed was that this introduction board tended to be the main source of information on their understanding of their students. Beth described her introduction area as such,

> Usually I have some open-ended questions they can discuss, what they did this summer, but also their history background: their background with respect to technology, their aspirations for the future, academic, primarily more so than hobbies or interests, but yeah all students can read those introductions.

Even when the instructors made introduction boards mandatory, there were still issues of students choosing to share too little or too much with rest of the class. Not only do students present a potential dilemma of not knowing the appropriate level of sharing in an online class environment, but also instructors have to be careful to not provide situations in which students can claim that the instructors have some sort of bias. As John described,

> And online, you have to answer the question, you have to participate if you want to pass the class, so the people that wouldn't talk in class may give you some really good stuff because they're kind of anonymous. Even though everybody knows who wrote it there's no face. Yeah, first week there's an intro board. Now usually in the instructions I'll put something to the effect of, "Only share what you're comfortable [with]" you know. But some people will go into, "I was abused as a child," I mean, you see all kinds of stuff. Some people just say, "This is my second semester, I'm looking forward to the class." And some people write a whole page. I thought about having them upload a picture. So you can put the face to the person. But I'm afraid that that's going to cause problems, "You only said that because I am American Indian, you only said that because I'm-" and it's not worth it. It's just, "You gave her an A because she's pretty," and obviously that's not going to happen. But I just, I thought about the picture thing, and because I did it, we did it the four year school that I taught online. Everybody had to put a picture up and it didn't cause any problems. Things are a little different here.

Much like John, Kelly also felt that there is a large gap between too much sharing and not enough. Kelly described her discussion boards:

> Some students share way too much, and other students don't share enough at all. And you know, the students who share way too much, I say way too much. Typically, unless they're saying something really out there where I really have to check them and say okay, pull back, uh, I mean it's just a lot of personal information that I don't probably need to know that, but, okay. But then there are the other students that I think that they're shy or they don't know how they feel. They don't know what's appropriate, what's not appropriate, or they just aren't in the mood to share. Sometimes that happens, too. They're just like whatever, I'm here just cuz I have to be here, and that's true, too.

This instructor interaction with the students and students interacting with their peers presented problems for the interviewees. Both John and Leona mentioned that with an online class there are distractions at home that may reduce the quality of posted work in the student's discussion boards. Beth, Leona, and Kelly all discussed their desire to have online classes synchronous with everyone meeting at the same time as opposed to the current asynchronous style. The three instructors mentioned software such as *Skype* or *Blackboard Collaborate*, but all conceded that it would be nearly impossible to make the class synchronous through such computer programs because the student population has differing time availability, and the school has a policy that states online courses must be able to be taken asynchronously, besides two designated tests a semester

Rico brought up that it is hard to tell if a student is actually interested by their comments in the discussion board posts or if they are only being facetious or trying to curry the instructor's favor. Leona also hinted at that issue by expressing that she felt that online class relationships tend to feel superficial. Kelly expressed the same sentiment towards these superficial interactions:

> I feel like online is so much more of an individually driven, completed, isolated process. Whereas, in my class, in my face-to-face classes you have to work with other people: you have to be able to have a conversation with someone; you have to be in the room; you have to talk to me and interact with me. You have to conference with me, to come meet me face-to-face.

The feelings of the instructors on anonymity and interactions of the students is interesting because their thoughts shadowed what Lai & Ball (2004) suggested about the difficulties of students only sharing what they want and the potential of the lack of understanding, as well as what Thompson & Ku (2005) argue that some students actually feel more liberated by not being in a face to face environment. Even though the instructors expressed concern for the issues of online interactions, they seemed to be at a loss for ideas on how to improve it, other than trying to convert their classes to be more synchronous in nature through the use of new technologies they have yet to embrace.

Section 3 analysis

When it came to the issue of different backgrounds in online courses, the instructors expressed sentiments indicating they felt that either student race and backgrounds are not important in an online environment or they felt they maintained a

course of total inclusion. Because they were more detailed when they expressed their thoughts on student backgrounds, I chose to use both John and Kelly as examples to highlight the differences.

John believed that one's background did not matter online, and the fact that online courses gave a strong sense of anonymity only served to reinforce John's thinking even further. Because the subject matter of John's course was flexible enough to focus on specific themes, he felt it better to pull out race when talking about sensitive matters. Therefore, John kept to the old ideals that we are all the same internally when he said, "it doesn't matter if they're white, black, blue or green." Although this method of dealing with people of differing backgrounds does help avoid complicated conversations, it can potentially be a source of dissonance for students because their personal situation or experiences are not addressed or recognized.

Kelly differed from John in that she expressed a sense of total inclusion and safety when she described her online courses. Rather than arguing that everyone is the same online, Kelly made an effort to "include as many perspectives as possible (personal communication, August 13, 2014)" when encouraging students to express their beliefs and backgrounds, especially when including students with international experience. Perhaps Kelly maintained a stronger sense of openness because her subject matter, English composition, lends itself to more expression as opposed to some of the other instructors' courses such as funeral services or criminal justice.

Even though one may argue that Kelly's classes are better equipped to discuss student backgrounds, it is important to note that Kelly is closer to following the ideals of

multicultural pedagogy. By allowing her students to discuss difficult subjects, Kelly opens her course to create of a sense of community. This suggests that online instructors still need to address student backgrounds and embrace them just like their face-to-face counterparts, even if online classes cannot be mirror images of traditional ones.

Another aspect of community discussed by the instructors was the issue of voice and language in the classroom. I was curious to see if instructors changed the way they communicated to be better understood by people of all backgrounds in a situation where the normal social cues, such as facial expressions, are lacking.

The instructors all expressed the issue of not being able to use the language that they would normally use in a traditional classroom. Although each instructor had their own way of addressing this struggle, they were cognizant that they need to be more careful online. The issue that appeared the most to affect the instructors was that they could not joke around with their students online like they could in a face-to-face environment. Kelly discussed how she could read the course situation when her jokes are misunderstood in a traditional classroom, but it is more difficult to retract a statement online. Often times instructors would remove humor altogether or reduce it to a simple joke on the weather, just as Leona confided to do. This inability to achieve one's own voice by the instructors took away from the sense of community online. How can the instructor appear an approachable person if they do not express humor like most other people? Because community is an important aspect in multiculturalism it is necessary to recognize that the inability to produce voice by the instructors is a detriment. Perhaps if the instructors were able to use different tools other than written word, such as audio

boards or video posts, to express their voice, they would be able to show there personality more, as well as adopting a more blended learning approach.

Even though the instructors struggled with achieving voice, they all appeared to recognize the importance of language other than humor. Beth acknowledged that she is considered middle class so she makes an effort to avoid statements or conversations that could make her appear as being better off than her students of differing socioeconomic means. Rico also commented on the fact that he tries to encourage students to recognize their centric views and to be open to new ideas. Both Beth and Rico's examples highlight what multicultural pedagogy expresses because they recognize the need to understand their students' backgrounds. This fact points to the importance of online instructors needing to be able to address possible situations by activity planning and considering conversational outcomes with limited voice.

Student engagement and interaction is important in allowing diversity into the classroom, Ladson-Billings (1995) and Nieto (2010). Since engagement is a method of incorporating multicultural pedagogy in a traditional classroom, I felt it necessary discuss the topic with the online instructors. Therefore, I encouraged the instructors to discuss how they approach the topic in their classes. Each instructor pointed to discussion boards as the key to obtaining such goals.

Because there is generally no face-to-face interaction with the students, all of the instructors use discussion boards inside of Blackboard as the main form of class conversation. This use of the discussion board potentially helps in community building, but that depends on how much the students choose to share and how engaging they

choose to be. All of the instructors described the situation similar to the way John explained it, as students deciding to share too much information such as past traumatic experiences or too little information such as furnishing only a name and township they live in, therefore causing dissonance for the instructors themselves. This sporadic void of full engagement has led some of the instructors with the desire to use other tools to create a sort of traditional lecture type class online.

Although none of the interviewed instructors have embraced such techniques, either due to lack of time or school rules, Beth, Leona, and Kelly all mention a desire to recreate a synchronous environment to promote engagement. This desire surprised me because one would assume the whole appeal to online learning is the simple fact of not being required to attend class at specific times. Because the instructors embraced such ideas, I got the sense that there is a need on the part of the school and its departments to teach the instructors better methods to promote student involvement.

Like traditional in-person classes, student involvement is just as necessary online, perhaps more so, due to the fact of no other engagement otherwise. If instructors are to fully use multicultural pedagogy in an online environment, they need to find a way to encourage student expression and interaction. It is appears to be understood by the instructors that community is essential for both an online and face-to-face class, but do the two type of classes need to look the same, or more simply, do the two versions of community need to mirror one another? Is it possible to build a sort of online community without using the normal methods of creating a community in person?

When the instructors and I finished discussing how they interacted with their students and how the students communicated with each other, it felt like a natural progression to talk about how the interviewee's curriculum fits into an online environment. The following section covers the topic of curriculum and how each instructor feels their course works online.

Curriculum

Because classes online have to cover the same content as their face-to-face counterparts, the conversation on how the course curriculum works with an online environment was a topic that each instructor touched on. Out of the instructors interviewed, Beth explicitly stated that she felt that online courses worked well for what she taught. Beth viewed her curriculum this way,

> All I teach is history, but I think it lends itself very well online instruction almost moreso today than in the classroom …because you can direct students to so much more information than you can in the classroom, where you can't assume that everybody has wifi or I can't assume that everybody has a computer and iPad [at home]. More and more they do, but online there's a basic assumption, whether they have it or not, there's an assumption that they have as much access as you do to material.

Beth felt that history courses lent themselves well to online environments, but she was also very aware that not all of her students had the level of internet access, which hampers her potential embrace of online sources. Even though Beth believed her classes worked well online, the other instructors found certain parts of their material difficult to convey the same information outside of a live classroom, therefore leaving them with a

less than enthusiastic attitude towards their curriculum working online, believing some parts of their classes work while others do not. When I asked if his curriculum worked well online Rico answered,

> Yes and no. Actually I've had a lot of these conversations this summer with family and friends about teaching online, and I don't know if it's because I'm doing the Quality Matters (a company focused on successful online delivery) course so I'm thinking about it more but it just kind of comes up and people say, "Oh, is it the same?" and I'll say, "Absolutely not." The courses are different; the formats are different, but my content seems to get shortened for my online courses. I like to do plateaus. When I'm in person I want them to get to a certain place by the end of a unit, and so it usually takes a several gradual steps to get there. Online I can't get that far because some of the students will get there, other students, you know, when one student is on the seventh and final step, another one's just getting to number three because it's asynchronous.

John further explained what Rico discussed when he talked about how certain courses seemed to fit better than others in an online format. John described the differences:

> It depends on the course. The constitutional law [class] I would rather teach online because I can put up a controversial topic every week. And online, you have to answer the question, you have to participate if you want to pass the class, so the people that wouldn't talk in [a face-to-face] class may give you some really good stuff because they're kind of anonymous. Even though everybody knows who wrote it, there's no face. There are some classes that are just more of study

> and memorize stuff. They don't really lend themselves well to online, because everybody's going to give the same answer that way. You know, "What are the five things that," whatever, it's the same answer for everybody, that's boring. I'm running into that now because I have to convert everything to online, and some of them just don't work.

What John explained was also a topic discussed by Leona. Because Leona teaches funeral services, she found it nearly impossible to teach certain concepts without hands on learning in the lab with tools needed for the profession. This brings to mind the question, are certain courses better suited for online or face-to-face? If an instructor finds it difficult to convert a traditional class into an online environment, would it be possible that certain classes would have even more difficulty incorporating multicultural pedagogy?

After talking to the instructors, I got the sense that they felt that it could possible to fully embrace what Eisner (2001) argued for when he said that U.S. education should move away from being a test centric environment. Eisner's argument is underscored by Eyal (2012) who states that online instructors need to move to higher-level assessments. But if instructors are going to make that change it may be that instructors would need extra support. Because the instructors discussed some aspects of transitioning certain face-to-face classes into the online environment, I wanted to see how they felt about changing assessments as well. Did the instructors change their assessments from a test and paper assessments to a different method, and if they did, what sort of difficulties did they face? The next section covers student assessments.

“You could do an interpretive dance of the Gospel of Mark”

As with any type of class, the instructors always need to find some way to assess and measure student learning. Each person interviewed brought up struggles with figuring out how to assess students besides tests, papers, and discussion board posts. Some of the interviewees seemed to really struggle if this difficulty appeared to stem from not knowing a better way to provide assessment opportunities, especially for students with different learning styles. Beth, Rico, and Leona all mentioned that when they studied they learned through tests and papers, so they did not feel comfortable or even know how to try new things. As Rico described it,

> None of my classes do I say that you could take the test or you could do a presentation or you could do an interpretive dance of the Gospel of Mark. I don’t offer that. I'll say there might be a class where you have to do all three but then we hit the same problem; what if somebody doesn’t know how to dance? Well, then you're no going to do well on that, you know, and sometimes, a teacher has to say that to a student, “You're not going to do well on this,” you know the powers that be would go crazy if they knew I said that to students but it’s like, “Well, you know what, you have to work on that. If you don’t know how to dance, you know now that’s an assignment. Go practice. Go find somebody who knows how to dance. Come to office hours, and I'll dance with you but you're going to have to do that assignment.

Rico continued to explain his rationale for not being flexible with student assessments. Rico’s sternness appeared to come from his tough love attitude that he previously expressed when talking about student support. As Rico continued,

> I have students who say, “Well, I don’t want to do an oral presentation because I hate talking in public.” Well, guess what, you're going to learn, you know. It’s a requirement by the college. There's a whole list of like these six requirements: oral communication, written communication. So, yeah, I think it’s important to vary it, don’t get me wrong. I'm not going to say most of many exams are paper-based exams. Most of them include multiple choice and matching and essay. That’s bread and butter for most of my courses that’s why I said I'm trying to incorporate, uh, alternative assessment, so it’s not always that but that’s still going to end up, you know, even with these, you know, Create Your Own Religion Project, that’s only 10%. Exams are 10% each and there are four of those. So it still outweighs that. I think I'm getting better with that, and I think there's a part of me that thinks I shouldn’t have to get better with this, you know, this is maybe old-school and too hardline with that, but, honestly, I think sometimes that this may not be your best learning style, but you're going to have to work at it then. Luckily, I think I've reflected on this and my education in Religion: there are no equations; you learn it by reading. Doing a lot of reading, writing a lot of papers doing a lot of discussion and so that’s what my classes involve: reading, writing, discussion, you know.

When I asked Kelly about using differing assessments, especially for students who may struggle due to their backgrounds, she liked the idea of different assessments. But as Kelly thought about the idea she seemed to feel constrained by her curriculum, which is focused on writing papers and has a set of standards that is established by the school. As Kelly described it,

> At the end I tell my students these are the objectives that South River gave me, and we're gonna make sure we meet them, you know. So if they say do a presentation using PowerPoint well we're gonna do a presentation, not necessarily using PowerPoint but something, some kind of presentation. So that you know, we'll make sure we meet the objectives, but I don't think there's any harm in them choosing what kind of activity they wanna do to evaluate their score and for me.

Out of all of the instructors John was the only one who mentioned that he offered different assessment options for students who may do poorly on certain forms of assessments. John pointed out that he struggles at times because he learned through taking tests and writing papers, so he does not always know a better way to assess his students, but he does offer the choice between a test or an essay. When describing how he gave different assessments John said,

> It doesn't matter what you do, if you do just tests you'll have people saying "I don't test well." If you write just a paper, "I don't write well," so I've actually given the choice: you can write a paper or you can do a presentation. Because, I mean, it accomplishes the same goal, and, quite honestly, if they do a presentation then I don't have to read the paper, right? So I mean, um, yeah, so sometimes I'll give them an option. Now a lot of times, there's one exam, and I know it's still an exam, where I give them two questions and they can pick. I mean it's five sections, but in each section I give them two questions to pick from. And they pick the one they want.

The idea of different assessments lends itself to multicultural pedagogy. Not only does every person have their own way of learning, but different cultures also put an emphasis on what is viewed as a better style of learning. As Carger (1996) found, if students are forced into a system of learning they are not familiar with, they tend to do poorly in class or at least they struggle. This difficulty by the instructors to use varying assessment styles may be a cause of some student failure.

When I asked instructors about group work being used as assessments, all of the instructors described very creative group projects in their face to face classes that they did not now how to convert to an online structure. Only Kelly said that she consistently does it in her online classes. But even Kelly's use of group work was limited due to it being based on student like or dislike of teamwork, if students are unable to collaborate well, Kelly changes the assessment to make it individual.

As multicultural pedagogy suggests, group work may be beneficial in helping students from different backgrounds. As Ladson-Billings (1995) argues, if the students help hold each other accountable, the students have more invested in the course, and, therefore, they see better achievement. Coldwell et al. (2008), Bos & Shami (2006), and Thompson & Ku (2005) also support what Ladson-Billings argues, when they stated that students want a community in any course environment. If more group work was involved in an online class, it could help benefit students who are not used to the cultural frame of discourse used in Western classes or those who are not used to the way academic writing is used.

Since I have covered communication and assessments with the instructors, I felt it would be beneficial to see what sort of learning resources the instructors provided for their students online. The following section highlighted what the instructors covered when they discussed their provided educational resources other than the course book.

"You have something to read and something to watch"

When discussing the types of resources provided to the students for learning opportunities, many of the instructors mentioned that online classes were better suited for multimedia. Rico explained how online classes were given more when he said that

> A lot of times online I'll give links, you know, "Here's a YouTube link on this." I don't usually do that in my in person class because I'm already talking about it; I already have the video on it, or I'm explaining it to them, but it makes me think I don't have time. In my 75-minute lecture, I can't squeeze that in.

Much like Rico, Beth also mentioned that she found online courses very useful for providing extra information that she could not provide in her classroom. As Beth described it,

> It's easier and easier because of online information, so I find myself, maybe the past two years, using this phrase, "You have something to read and something to watch." And for almost every concept, there's something to read, something to watch, and it's very easy to do it in an online class because they're used to watching TV, and I believe they read. In the classroom that's harder. If they'll go, they certainly have that opportunity, but fewer and fewer go to the Blackboard

> site unless there's some reason that they're made to do it to be tested, and you can tell who is online. You can tell who accesses the Blackboard site, and I have to say, I keep track of it, the students that need [help] most don't do it.

The instructors found online environments useful for providing more multimedia resources to their students, therefore, agreeing with Lanham & Zhou (2003) when they argued for more blended courses to support learning styles of different students.

Even as the instructors were discussing the positive aspects pertaining to online course environments, some instructors also made it a point to mention that online classes may also become difficult for students because not all of them are equipped to take classes in an online situation. Kelly brought up the fact that not all of her students know how to use the required technology in an online class, or the students may not even have the needed equipment to be successful. Leona addressed both of the points that Kelly discussed in her own interview. Leona stressed that in a predominantly black institution the students may not necessarily have computers or even internet. Even though South River is not necessarily predominantly black, it does have the enrollment of about 5,000 students from minority backgrounds, which is over 33% of student population. It is also important to note that the surrounding metropolitan areas near the school have a large number of people that consider themselves belonging minority groups, which suggests that if the student body will grow it will be with more students of diverse backgrounds. Since it is noted that students from different backgrounds do not have computers or internet access at home, it is inevitable that some of the students at South River will either have to go to the school library, friend's house, or a coffee shop to complete their

homework. Leona went on to point out that this issue is perpetrated by the schools. As Leona pointed out,

> Well see, the assumption is that if you sign up for an online class, you have access, that you have the equipment, and that you have access to the internet. You get a kid who gets a scholarship to a residential institution. The assumption is that they're gonna have the equipment and the access will be granted once they move into the dorm or you know, that type of thing. But how many of those kids receive scholarships and that's really the only way that they're able to go to college? So, yeah, they've got the scholarship, but they may not have the tools that they need to work with to maintain the scholarship.

Beth also made it a point to mention that students are assumed to be ready for online classes just by signing up for them. In her interview, Beth brought up the fact that about 30-40% of her online students drop her classes. She felt that many do so because they were underprepared for online education either by not having the right equipment or not understanding the required software. As Beth argued that "Basically they [the students] are Facebook ready but not in any other way that might help them achieve [in class]."

What Leona and Beth both referred to helps to emphasize the issues referenced by Warschauer (1998) and Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt (2006). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds attend college classes, sign up for online courses, and are expected to have the recourses and knowledge required to succeed in such courses without any other support.

Section 4 analysis

When I asked the instructors how they felt traditional courses translated into an online environment, many of them voiced the opinion that specific classes worked quite well online, while other courses are generally better in the traditional format. The instructors who thought that their classes more or less worked online recognized that there are specific things to pay particular attention to, such as computer usage at home and the differing rate of learning by the students.

Beth argued that her classes are better suited online because this gives her the chance to provide more learning opportunities other than in a limited traditional lecture class, but she also noted that students who register for online classes are assumed to have the same level of internet and computer abilities at home, which may not be the case. Beth was very cognizant that not all online students have the same socioeconomic background and digital access. This is very important to consider when embracing multicultural pedagogy. One cannot assume that online learners have the same access to resources. It may be beneficial to students if instructors are able to provide extra learning opportunities, but they need to be willing to provide more than one source of instruction, much inline with the concept of blended learning.

Rico understood that not all students reach the expected plateau of learning, or stages of scaffolding, at the same time. This is very important to consider when teaching students from differing backgrounds. Rico did point out that he felt that his courses were lacking materials, unlike Beth, because of the fact that he had to allow students to keep up. Although it is commendable that Rico wants to keep his students at the same level, one might ask if it better serves the students by removing content or holding others back?

Perhaps if different methods of presenting data were used, other than reading as Rico would later describe, the students could maintain the expected pace while maintained the understanding of student differences and learning backgrounds.

Because the curriculum requires assessment of student understanding, I found it important to discuss how the instructors assess their students online. I wanted to know what types of assessments instructors used, if they were open to adjusting their course work, and if groups were allowed or embraced in the online classes.

The response I received often was that the instructors use tests and written work most of the time for assessing students. Although the instructors recognized that not all students are prepared enough to be accomplished being assessed so, there seemed to be a lack of understanding of any other options available to the instructors. Some of the instructors expressed an understanding that some students struggle with specific assessment types, but they often did not allow other versions of assessments due to school required outcomes or inability to change. John explained how he gives options for students to pick from, which is helpful when considering multiculturalism, but students were still required to pick between a test, a paper, or a presentation. This can be a real struggle because students should be given chances to demonstrate subject knowledge that plays to their strengths, but how do they do so in a limited environment? If the instructors are aware to the fact that some students may not have the same resources due to economic reasons, how can the instructor offer more creative measurements? Can an instructor in good conscience tell the students to make a movie and upload it online even if they know the students don't have the required resources? It may appear easy to judge

the instructors for not allowing different assessments, but they seem very constrained by school policies and student resources.

When interviewing, I felt one area the instructors could improve upon was group work. Each instructor mentioned that they offer group assignments in their face-to-face classes but have no such offerings online. I found that interesting because there are many tools available to the instructors and students to allow such group interaction. Tools such as Blackboard (having a built in group tool), Blackboard instant messaging service, Google Drive, and Blackboard Collaborate are all programs that are used and supported by the college and the department of Instructional Technology. Such tools allow easy collaboration between the students that do not require new hardware on the student's part. If the instructors could embrace more group projects, they would be developing their classes to be more welcoming to students of different backgrounds and ultimately helping to build a stronger community in their classes.

Since I discussed how well course curriculum and assessments fit into an online course, I thought it would also be beneficial to ask the instructors about presenting information in their classes.

All of the instructors mentioned that they felt it easier to share videos and other resources online because there is no time cap as in a traditional class, as well as there is the added expectation for the students to access Blackboard on a regular basis, which is not necessarily true for the traditional classes. Beth pointed out that most of the face-to-face students prefer to get their information from lecture and reading their books, so unless the students are forced to go to online course shell they normally do not. The opportunity to provide learning materials in deferent modes (blending learning), gives

students varying means of accessing information. Because the delivery method is different, perhaps it would be better if it were marketed as such. If students know that their online classes present an atmosphere containing fewer lectures, it may be beneficial to students from diverse backgrounds that would be better suited for this type of learning. Reading supplemented with videos containing subtitles may be more helpful for students who struggle with certain aspects of traditional lectures. This assumption is also taking into consideration that online instructors would use more group and varied assessments instead of the traditional test or written paper.

One point that the instructors did stress was the fact that some students are not prepared to be online. This issue causes some students to struggle or fail. The problem is systemic of working with students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds or limited experience online. If students do not have the physical materials or experience they find themselves lost, confused, or unable to work in an online class. Multicultural pedagogy speaks to better student preparation and access for students who may not have the ability on their own, but how can an instructor combat this when the students are allowed to take courses they are not necessarily equipped to take?

Overview of findings

Throughout my interviews, the participants all touched on instructor support and development, instructor guidance, availability and citing sources; online course community; and their online curriculum. The following is a brief overview of how each instructor related to the main themes discussed.

Instructor Support and Development

When talking about support and development opportunities for the faculty at the school, each instructor felt that there were many support mechanisms and opportunities to develop themselves further. The instructors identified the lack of time as an issue in their ability to prepare for instruction. Rico and Beth both discussed how they have tried or desired to have peer observations and feedback, but they felt hampered by time. All of the instructors felt a sense of consistently not having enough time to get the extra support they wanted, rather than the possible assumption of the lack of support being available to them. This lack of time to conduct observations would suggest that instructors need more opportunities to see other faculty's courses in order to gain more insight on possible methods they have not discovered on their own, as well as a need for instructors to have a partner to help coach, encourage, and engage with on the subject of course building.

Instructor Guidance, Availability, and Citing Sources

During conversations covering instructor guidance and instructor availability, the thoughts of the instructor varied. All of the instructors were welcoming in their help of students, in fact each one went above and beyond the availability required by the school, but how far they would support the students had limits. For example, John would point students to resources such as the writing center or the *Purdue Owl*, while Leona, much like an academic advisor, would sit down and make a game plan with her students. Both John and Leona were impeded by the fact that not all the students who needed support came to them for help. The availability of the instructors to help their online students was very commendable, but ultimately there were limits either to physical presence required of the students or the lack of students looking for assistance. This is important

because the instructors made themselves open to their students, but the students seemed to avoid the aid offered to them. This lack of student initiative would suggest a need to create more student awareness or understanding of the possibilities of receiving direct instructor support, as well as offering more opportunities for guidance that does not require in person visits.

The differences in the instructor approachability became more apparent when discussing the issue of improper citations. Kelly, John, and Beth all appeared more open to overlook the first mistake of improper referencing by students and guide them towards proper knowledge and resources. As for Rico and Leona, they both took a stance of no excuses allowed for plagiarism. These differences could be attributed to the fact that the instructors all teach different academic levels at the school, but it does suggest a need for more cultural awareness about ethical guidelines on the parts of all instructors involved.

Community

Community was a topic that the instructors were aware of the need for, but they appeared to struggle with developing one. All the instructors were cognizant of race as a potential issue, but they felt that an online course was more void of such problems due to the anonymity of such classes. Each interviewee felt that part of the issue of building a community online was the inability of them to express their voice and communicate through traditional means such as joking and body language. This uncertainty by the instructors made me curious as to what should be the goals and purpose of the online instructor? Should the instructor recreate the online classroom to resemble the environment that they experience in traditional situation, or should the online instructor

be something else? Is Rico's example of bags over a student's head accurate in depicting online classes, or is there more?

Each class the instructors discussed encouraged students to share but it was noted that sharing would reach a limit based off of the amount students chose to participate. It was believed by the instructors that engagement would improve if they could figure out some sort of conversational hook or tool to get the students wanting to engage. None of the instructors seemed to know how to fix the communication vacuum, but they were all aware of the potential issues associated with it. This could potentially be improved if the instructors used other methods of engagement outside of written discussion boards, although this would be depended on the student access to different technologies.

Curriculum

Finally when taking about curriculum, the instructors all expressed a feeling that some courses are more suited to an online environment as opposed to a face-to-face class. Beth pointed out that she felt that a history class benefits greatly from being online because she could incorporate much more multimedia than she would be able to in a traditional classroom, mainly due to time. Most of the instructors struggled with coming up with ideas for alternative assessments. This struggle was partly due to the course content as being viewed as one-dimensional by the instructor, as well as the lack or experience or understanding of how to create new types of assessments. Out of the instructors interviewed, John appeared to be the only one who embraced varying methods of assessing students, within limits. When discussing differing content delivery most of the instructors used such techniques, or was interested in such methods, but it was

pointed out that some students lacked the technology or the understanding of the technology required to access such materials.

The themes discussed in the paper bring to light some interesting details. Because of what the instructors expressed, it is felt that more conversation on how the instructor's interviews play into the concept of multicultural pedagogy online is needed. This will be covered in the following discussion.

Discussion

Based on the interviews, it would appear that the instructors would at times use techniques that are suggested by multicultural pedagogy. Although the instructors would use such approaches, they did not seem to have made a mental connection to what they were doing in their class as being multicultural, but, rather, the instructors, when reflecting on their course decisions and interactions with the students, considered what they did as effective teaching techniques. This lack of conscience consideration by the instructors leads one to ponder why. Do the instructors sometimes engage in approaches that are generally good for diverse students because of their training in college, do they have to make flexible courses due to the diverse body of students they interact with on a daily basis, or are these instructors acting out of trial and error?

The study began as an inquiry into whether or not instructors purposefully use multicultural pedagogy in an online class, and, if they do, how does it work? During the research process, the foundation question spawned sub questions that were also asked to gain a better understanding of the environment.

When asked about what opportunities there are for the students to share their background information, all of the instructors referred to the discussion boards in their class. Besides an introduction forum for the students to post to, there was no other way for the students to share unless they shared explicitly and purposefully in their personal information. Rico describing the concept of going to a face-to-face class with a bag over one's head and relating it to sharing online, agrees with what Lai & Ball (2004) said when they bring up the fact that there is a level of ambiguity in an online class that can be hard to overcome. The inability to know the background of the student body besides making them share can be detrimental to multicultural pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) urges instructor to embrace and use cultural differences as learning opportunities, but that cannot be done if an online instructor does not know their student body.

The instructors all struggled with a willingness or understanding of the needs of their students from different backgrounds or learning styles. The argument by all of the instructors was one from the perspective of the school and future employers expecting certain proficiencies; therefore, the students have to be pushed to that level whether they are ready or not. This argument made by the instructors makes sense, but it causes one to wonder if the students are being well served that way. This issue seems to be compounded by the fact that each instructor struggled with how to incorporate group work into an online class. They all had interesting ideas in a face-to-face environment, but when it came to online instruction, only one instructor attempted to try some sort of group assessment, and this was only when it was deemed as productive. This may be something that could be addressed in multicultural training classes as Elsegood & Papadopoulos (2010) recommends, if the school decided to engage in such professional

development it would be interesting to see if these sessions would well attended or influential on course delivery.

The instructors all expressed a willingness to support their students, if they needed any help, and as long as the students reached out to them. No instructor appeared unfriendly or unwelcoming towards the students. This welcoming atmosphere agrees with Ladson-Billings (1995) suggestion that students do better when involved in a community. This idea of community improving classes carries over to online courses as well. Bos & Shami (2006) argues that students in online courses also have a desire to engage in a community much like their face-to-face counterparts. The frustration on the part of the online instructors for not being able to make a community that resembles face-to-face classes leads one to ponder if it should be the same thing, or should instructors strive to create a new type of environment?

Each instructor mentioned that in their online classes they provide more information for their students than in a face-to-face class. The reasons behind this excessive information varied, but because the instructors provide more information and differing formats, the students were able to have more accesses to learning. This type of sharing by the instructors agrees with what Lanham & Zhou (2003) argued for when describing blended learning. Because it cannot be assumed that every student is the same, using differed methods of providing materials for the students supports learners from different backgrounds. One thing to consider, some of the instructors were concerned about what they could put in their online courses because students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds may not be able to access such materials, which has presented new issues that the instructors have found themselves grappling with.

Ultimately the instructors were willing to explain new ideas to students who lacked background knowledge, coach individuals who needed the extra support, and provide resources for student development, but that seemed to be where multicultural pedagogy stopped. Even when instructors were apparently embracing diversity in their classes, the instructors would admit to not realizing that they were doing such activities, which leads to the assumption that the decisions made by the instructors were subconscious and trail and error based.

This research appears to create more questions than answers. With that in mind, this paper does help to shed some light on the thoughts of instructors who teach in both face-to-face and online environments. Every instructor interviewed was willing to adjust to the needs to their students to some extent even if the adjustment appears minimal. The simple fact is important to note when considering online education. If a conversation is to begin on the topic of multicultural pedagogy online, then it is refreshing to know that not all instructors are opposed to making adaptations to better serve their students.

Not only does this paper point to the need for more conversation on multicultural pedagogy to be incorporated into online classes, but also it argues the importance of cultural awareness by those who facilitate, create, and organize such courses, especially when considering students of differing economical means. Even though this paper does not focus directly on students of lower socioeconomic backgrounds and their learning experiences, it stresses the need for more awareness on the part of schools and instructors to the fact that not all students are able to meet requirements needed in order to sign up for desired classes. Just because a student signs up and pays for an online class it does not mean that they are prepared with the proper tools or experience.

There is much literature that argues that learning is not the same experience for every student, and individual students bring their own expectations and abilities. This research underscores the fact that all learners are different and that there is a need for pedagogy of inclusion online, not only in the traditional classroom. This emphasizes that no matter the student background, online courses and instructors need to be flexible to assist and support their students even if there is the added difficulty of anonymity and socioeconomic barriers.

It is important to realize that there are such differences because the interviewees demonstrated that they are searching for support in their effort to encourage more engagement online while also dealing with using technologies that may not be easily used by all of the students in the class. Perhaps the technology issue could be remedied if each student was provided a capable computer to run any necessary program when they sign up for the course, but in an environment full of struggling schools and tight budgets, this option appears improbable. Therefore, schools and instructors need to work together to bring awareness to the issue and develop means of engaging students online through community much like a face-to-face class, if not in the exact iteration of a traditional class. The embracing of community building online can be supported and developed with peer-to-peer support and instructional training. By offering different forms of delivery and engagement, online instructors will be using multicultural pedagogy and hopefully help their students better succeed.

Conclusion

This paper highlights the needs, challenges, and potential benefits for online instructors meeting the ever-changing demographic populations outside the traditional face-to-face classroom. Not only does this paper give voice to instructors dealing with challenges facing online course creation, it also points out the need for more research in the field of multicultural pedagogy online. Added research into this topic can potentially help bring awareness to faculty and staff on the issue of online students coming from differing situations and life backgrounds, spurring others forward to create more online equity in education.

I recognize that I sampled only a small selection of online instructors, without including input from students who partake in such classes. This paper suggests that there is a need to further research the topic of honoring diversity in an online classroom in order to better prepare and develop online instructors, online curriculum, and, ultimately, online students. Digital classes do not appear to be falling out of fashion in the near future, and the need to provide proper equity to all students in such classes should be paramount.

This paper also points out the fact that online instructors use portions of multicultural pedagogy because it appears to be successful teaching, but they could be better served if they were given more chances to utilize diversity techniques with the assistance of more peer and professional opportunities. More research in this field will expand online instructors understanding of the fact that online learners, much like their face-to-face counterparts, are not from the same social, cultural, racial, socioeconomic, or any other backgrounds. When all parties involved, students, instructors, and schools,

better understand this fact, there should be a growth in courses developed to embrace learners of differencing backgrounds and hopefully take us to a point where we can, as Rico explained it, remove the paper bags from the heads of our online students.

Further Study

A useful study would be one over a longer course of time containing a cohort of instructors where some of the instructors go through diversity training and are coached in course building and design as they develop an online class, while the other members of the cohort do not. Over time, as the instructors develop and implement their new courses, it would interesting to compare and contrast the classes that the instructors received extra training verses the ones that did not. It would also be useful including the voices of the students. The perspective of the study was solely based off of thoughts and feelings of five instructors. It could be a powerful tool to hear the voices of the students to compare them to what the students think of as useful multicultural pedagogy and whether or not the instructors embrace any of the desired techniques by the students.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are minimal in this case. All five instructors were willing participants and their anonymity was maintained. Students were not interviewed because this case study was focused on instructor's thoughts and perceptions. Pseudonyms were given to each instructor. General questions were asked about the instructors, including their experiences teaching online, and comparisons to their face-to-face classes.

Since I have a working relationship with the five instructors, there is some

concern keeping their identities confidential and also not allowing the working relationship to influence the outcomes of what was written. In order to have access to do the study at the college, I had to receive written permission from one of the school's vice presidents who directly supervises me. If handled inappropriately this situation could easily compromise my interviewees. It would not be difficult divulging information that can benefit or harm my participants in their professional careers. I have taken measures to keep their information confidential, as recommended by the review board, which includes keeping all recordings and transcriptions on a locked computer with only access belonging to me.

Interviewee opinions may potentially have influence in the work place environment; therefore, the interviewer has kept his personal opinions separate from the interviewees and has not shared with other colleagues or administrators at the school. At no point were the interviewees forced to participate or answer questions against their will.

Because I assume responsibility for maintaining and troubleshooting issues in the school's LMS at my institution, I have access to any course content online. I never asked for permission from the interviewees to view their courses to gather artifacts. Since I did not request or receive permission from my participants to look over their online courses, I made sure to not enter my participant's classes during the time of data collection and analysis to avoid biasness. In the case that I absolutely had to enter a course, which happened once for Beth, I did not navigate around her course to learn about her structure for my research purposes; rather, I went to the trouble area and focused on only fixing the particular issue addressed.

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Appendix A Table 1

United States	**Japan**
Small Power Distance • Hierarchy means an inequality of roles, established for convenience • Subordinates expect to be consulted • Ideal boss is resourceful and democratic	Large Power Distance • Hierarch means existential inequality • Subordinates expect to be told what to do • Ideal boss is benevolent and autocratic
Individualist Society • Same value standards apply to all • Other people seen as potential resources • Task prevails over relationship	Collectivist Society • Value stands differ for in-group and out-groups • Other people are seen as members of their own group • Relationships prevails over task
Masculine Society • Assertiveness appreciated • Oversell yourself • Decisiveness	Feminine Society • Assertiveness ridiculed • Undersell yourself • Intuition
Weak Uncertainty Avoidance • Dislike of rules • Less formalization and standardization • Tolerance of deviant persons and ideas	Strong Uncertainty Avoidance • Emotional need for rules • More formalization and standardization • Intolerance of deviant persons and ideas

Appendix B Research Questions

- What is your current position at the school?
  - How many classes do you teach?
    - What courses do you teach?
    - What percent is online and face-to-face?
  - What are your goals for your students?
    - What should a student be able to achieve to be considered successful in your class?
    - What challenges have you encountered in trying to meet your goals?
  - How long have you taught online?
  - What is the most difficult part of teaching online?
  - If you could change anything about online learning what would you do?

- Does the school or department have support systems to share useful techniques that can help you succeed in class?
  - Do you allow other teachers to observe or critique your class?
  - Have you taken cultural awareness classes? If so, has it helped you to better plan out your course?
  - Are there professional development courses available to support you?
  - How does the curriculum work for an online class?

- Do you ask students to talk about their background?
  - What is the group culture like in class?
  - What do you know about your student backgrounds of your online class?
    - How is it different than your face-to-face classes?
    - Do you feel that your students share enough in an online class to allow others to understand their background?

- Do you provide more resources or information in online classes verse a face-to-face?
  - Do you think you change your vocabulary in the two settings above? Which would have more complicated words?
    - Do you provide an environment free of colloquial language and cultural slang?
    - Do you identify items or language that can be offensive or misconstrued in other cultures?
    - Premium on words important for class success?
  - Are you able to have deep class conversations or discussions?
    - Do you do anything to encourage lively discussions?
    - How fast do you provide feedback?

- What balance should there be between group and individual options?
  - Will learning emphasize individual or group work?

  - Do you set up groups? And what is the process; do you try to mix the cultural groups?
  - Do your students meet outside of the online class exchange phone numbers etc?
- What degree of personal interaction should be developed?
  - How should social and contextual dimensions be addressed?
  - Is the teaching style didactic rather than interactive and participatory?
  - Does the nature of the work promote a critical, unconventional or conservative perspective?

- How should the issue of the different learning styles of learners from culturally diverse backgrounds be addressed?
  - Is it preferable to develop separate interfaces and courses for different cultural groups?
  - Should different learning approaches be offered to cater to different learning styles?
  - Should there be a choice of evaluation activities that addresses cultural differences?
  - Do you identify what might be difficult for other cultures and address a different way to present the information?