Game-based Learning, Simulation and E-learning on Intercultural Communication

Literature Review Assignment

Research Methods (EDUC5002G) Course

Professor Lorayne Robertson

Submitted by Theresa Shin

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The expanding global communities interconnected through the internet, travel and migration seem to highlight the growing need for intercultural communication competence. My interest in intercultural communication began with a three-hour workshop on this topic that was held for community college advisors, provided through a Ministry funded project, where I gained awareness that educating an individual on intercultural communication was possible. The purpose of this paper is to review current technology in game-based learning, simulations, and e-learning for education in intercultural communication. Given the limited scope of this review paper, three articles were selected based on the current state of the art technical relevance, on the practical experiences/examples, and on the comprehensive background information provided on intercultural communication associated with the pedagogical framework. This paper will provide a general overview of the emerging concepts in intercultural communication and pedagogical framework associated with using technology for intercultural communication.

Current Technology in Game-based Learning and Simulations on Intercultural Communication

Game-based learning and intercultural communication are two areas that are beginning to be connected in literature with increasing level of interest. Guillén-Nieto & Aleson-Carbonell (2011) and Wiggins (2012) agree that despite of the increased interest and the acknowledged benefits of game-based learning and simulations, there is a lack of consensus on best practices. Palomba (2011) and Wiggins (2012) reviewed current literature on intercultural communication and arrived at a framework for learning models, which can be used as a foundation for future research, or as a basis for the design of new simulation or e-learning programs for learners. A number of simulation and game-based learning products are available in the market, providing a variety of intercultural literacy learning options. Benefits and drawbacks of each of these educational games were discussed in Wiggins' article. He found that Culture Awareness Training (CAT) simulation had the "theoretical base" for synthetic cultures, which used characteristics of real-world, national cultures based on experiential learning cycle; however, problem-based learning is an important feature in an effective simulation that is lacking in CAT (p. 556). Other features in the development of pedagogical framework that Wiggins found effective for improving and enhancing intercultural communication were constructivism as a set of design principles, role-playing, recognition primed decision and third place thinking.

Similarly, Guillén-Nieto & Aleson-Carbonell (2011) discuss "serious games" for professional training and for educational purposes in intercultural awareness, intercultural knowledge and intercultural communicative competence in business English (p. 436). Their study was based on a video game called "It's a Deal!" which was developed for intercultural communicative competence for students studying business English in Spain. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to determine which features in the serious game influenced learning effectiveness. The result of their research indicated that a "correct balance" (Guillén-Nieto & Aleson-Carbonell, 2011, p. 446) in the following areas was a factor for effective learning outcome in teaching intercultural communication in a business setting; they are: instructional content, game dimensions, game cycle, debriefing, perceived educational value, transfer of learnt skills and intrinsic motivation (p. 446). Although details in incorporating national cultures were mentioned in the research paper, Guillén-Nieto & Aleson-Carbonell did not mention "synthetic cultures" in their research, which Wiggins (2012) identified as one of the critical features of a game-based learning model for intercultural

communication (p. 567). Wiggins and Guillén-Nieto & Aleson-Carbonell seem to indicate that although there are many game-based educational products created during the last 10 years, most of these products are lacking in the inclusion of the theoretical learning strategies to make them effective, and this was most likely as a result of an absence of a comprehensive model to guide the game designers at the time. Wiggins (2012) hopes that the model presented in his article would "promote discussion and debate" in designing simulations for intercultural literacy. He feels that the model that he presents includes "core elements" which should be present in an intercultural simulation (p. 568).

Current Project in E-learning in Intercultural Communication

Palomba's (2011) research describes a project known as E-MIDIA LAB (Euro-Mediterranean Intercultural Dialogue Laboratory) that includes many nations in the Mediterranean area in Europe. The project aims "to offer to local communities a range of educational services that can fight such phenomena as racism, xenophobia and all forms of exclusion" (p. 619). Palomba, along with a network of partners, is currently in the process of developing an "integrated system of interventions" which can "support the social, political and cultural net with shared values of citizenship regardless of national boundaries" (p. 619). Towards this work, Palomba seems to consider "negotiating reality" as the more "promising aspect for intercultural processes in cyberspace" because it requires an individual to have an "active awareness" of the influence of one's cultural background, perceptions and behaviour (p. 617).

The challenge that both Palomba (2011) and Wiggins (2012) considered in their creation of a learning model or framework is stereotyping and prejudices associated with an individual's perception of national cultures. Wiggins approached the issue by defining "synthetic culture"; a culture that "exists only in the game or simulation for which it was created and may represent characteristics of national cultures" (p. 552). Palomba's approach to the challenge involves "negotiating reality" on the internet using an action strategy that "combines high advocacy with high inquiry as a means of exploring and testing theories of action and reality images collaboratively" with other individual(s) involved in the intercultural interaction (p. 617). The E-MIDIA LAB project uses a network of intercultural laboratories using e-learning courses and online workshops in English and French to provide young people with an opportunity "to [explore] the differences in order to find common roots, without deleting the different elements of the socio-cultural identities" (p. 617). This project was initiated as a permanent, on-going network of study to promote cultural dialogue and to support mobility, exchanges and professional training of young people.

Conclusion

Wiggins (2012) states that "cross-cultural contact does not lead to or create intercultural literacy" (p. 559), and Palomba (2011) also mentioned that "internet brings about the contact of cultures, but this does not automatically imply cultural understanding" (p. 615). As a result, creating a model or simulation that relies on an experiential, performative, and problem-based framework; and incorporating synthetic and national cultures seem to be effective tools in improving and enhancing intercultural literacy and intercultural communication.

References

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