

Chapter 12

Exploring the Literature and Rationale for Global E–Cultural Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter is the work of scholars across five countries and three continents. This chapter will provide an extensive review of the relevant scholarly literature that grounds the early partnership work of these researchers. The literature will be used to identify gaps and to provide recommendations for future research, policy, and practice toward the advancement of digital engagement across geographical and cultural divides. The authors will draw from related subjects as needed and will delineate the gaps in the literature. The chapter will be of interest to scholars and practitioners in the fields of service-learning, virtual partnerships, and community engagement and others interested in the utilization of technology to build bridges across cultural and geographical divides in higher education and in communities.

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INTRODUCTION

In an era of global challenges such as climate change and pandemic, coupled with technology that offers the opportunity for real-time communication between individuals and communities throughout the world, higher education institutions must create pathways and opportunities for students across geographic and cultural divides to learn from and with one another. Graduates of higher education institutions must be prepared for global citizenship and diverse work environments. Opportunities for connecting undergraduate and graduate students with peers and communities across the globe abound. It is the responsibility of faculty, staff, and administration in higher education to seek out partnerships that offer the benefits of intercultural learning, exchange, and global service-learning and community engagement.

This chapter is the work of scholars across five countries and three continents who are connected with one another as country directors for the International Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association (HETL). Under our leadership, students from five higher education institutions are developing a brief e-community engagement project in conjunction with twenty secondary school learners in the Mamelodi community of Pretoria, South Africa. The institutions of higher education that are part of this initiative include Merrimack College (USA), the University of Pretoria (South Africa), Tishk International University Erbil (Iraq), Sidi Mohamed Ben Abedellah University (Morocco), and the ICFAI Foundation for Higher Education (India). The project will require and support the development of skills in communication, collaboration, and teamwork. Longer-term, the authors envision opportunities for continued and deepened collaborative projects focused on a digital exchange, engagement, and learning.

International collaboration is critical for building global connections for faculty and students. This supports the development of global citizenship identities and peace and understanding among citizens of the world. Capitalizing on technologies, virtual collaboration is important because it provides an example of how faculty and students can engage in community work and build intercultural competencies from afar. The five countries represented in this collaboration include diverse and distinct cultures, varied religions, and histories marked by social stratification, ethnic violence, and having been colonial territories. The collaboration is in an early stage, allowing the five scholars involved to explore the potential of building connections among our students focused on intercultural learning and inspiring curiosity about the world and its people.

This chapter provides an extensive review of the relevant scholarly literature that grounds the early partnership work of the researchers. The literature will be used to identify gaps and to provide recommendations for future research, policy, and practice toward the advancement of digital engagement across geographical and cultural divides. The chapter will be of interest to scholars and practitioners in the fields of service-learning and community engagement and others interested in the utilization of technology to build bridges across cultural and geographical divides in higher education and in communities.

BACKGROUND

This chapter provides intellectual grounding for a remote intercultural initiative that is in process involving the five authors of this chapter and students from our respective institutions. The chapter has been developed at a unique moment in time as the world continues to confront the evolving COVID-19 pandemic. When academic institutions reverted to remote learning in March 2020, researchers used the term “emergency remote teaching” (ERT) to describe and understand the experiences of students

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