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The River is Flooded by Tributaries: Incorporating ways of knowing in online pedagogy

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**THE RIVER IS FLOODED BY TRIBUTARIES:
INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY**

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An Independent Practitioner Inquiry Capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in International Education at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA

Advisor: Dr. Lynée Connelly

May 6, 2019

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

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INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

For Michelina and Michael DeBenedictis,

This capstone paper is dedicated to you, my earliest teachers, with love and gratitude.

* * *

My deepest gratitude to all who checked in, listened, shared ideas and experiences with me.
In your generous ways of being, all of you helped me bring this capstone paper to life,
especially...

Lydia and Jennifer, my *think tank*

Lynée, Chelsea, Amy, Mokhtar and Katie

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	1
Introduction: Contextual Information and Research Question	2
Conceptual Framework	3
Ways of knowing	4
Andragogy: Adult learning theory	6
Experiential education and related theories	8
Online education	10
Research Design and Methodology	12
Methodology	12
Participant selection/sample selection	12
Data collection methods	13
Ethics of research	13
Researcher positionality	14
Data management and analysis procedures	14
Credibility/validity strategies	15
Limitations inherent in the research design	15
Findings and Presentation of Data	16
Participant profiles	16
Multicultural student cohorts	17
Pedagogical considerations informed by cultural backgrounds and ways of knowing	18
Pedagogical approaches and methods:	
Perspectives on what benefits students	20
Challenges and lessons learned	23
What educators would like to try	25
Opportunities presented by the online platform	26
Challenges presented by the online platform	28
Learning within community	30
Conclusion	31
Further research	33
Practical applicability	34
Bibliography	36
Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent Form	38
Appendix B: Interview Guide	41
Appendix C: Online Survey	42

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

ABSTRACT

In the age of global education where online classes, trainings, and degree programs are drawing international and multicultural student cohorts, understanding how culture impacts a student's online learning experience deserves attention. Tasked with co-creating the plan for pedagogy of SIT's re-imagined Master of Arts in Sustainable Development online degree program, research into Indigenous epistemologies and experiential education inspired this inquiry's guiding question: *How can we, as online educators, incorporate multiple ways of knowing, pedagogically, into the facilitation of online courses?* Foundational theories and principles were drawn from the aforementioned body of literature while studies on the impact of culture in online education were reviewed. Adult learners (18 years of age and older) are at the heart of this research; in effort to understand how to support their ways of knowing, a compressed ethnography was conducted whereby 14 educators with experience facilitating online courses and trainings in multicultural contexts were surveyed and interviewed. Findings were informed by their lived experiences and revealed teaching practices, approaches, philosophies, and theories based on the educators' perspectives of success. Ultimately, their responses validated the inquiry into ways of knowing and suggest there is more work to be done in meeting adult students' learning needs given the challenges and opportunities afforded by Learning Management Systems and the asynchronous nature of online education. This research aspires to spark conversations among practicing online educators and self-reflection about their own ways of knowing which inevitably are woven into pedagogy design and practice.

Introduction: Contextual Information and Research Question

For my practicum, I collaborated with two SIT professors to develop the pedagogy plan and online environment for the Master of Arts in Sustainable Development Low-Residency degree program. Courses will be facilitated online though some are blended with face-to-face residencies in Brattleboro, Vermont and Oaxaca, Mexico. In keeping with the institution's values, and that of the professors, the Sustainable Development master's degree program is grounded in experiential learning. A key challenge, and thus the focus of my work, was to determine innovative ways to apply experiential learning to a virtual platform. The program is open to recent graduates and professionals from around the world, and the first cohort of students is expected to begin their studies in June 2019. Presumably, the cohort will consist of students from varying backgrounds and knowledge traditions whose learning needs should be factored in to pedagogical decisions. Therefore, in addition to researching experiential education theory and pedagogy, I also wanted to understand what we should be considering in terms of how culture impacts a student's online learning experience in order to accommodate varying needs. My first-year Foundations course in which we studied multicultural teams has influenced this line of thinking, and so has the Sustainable Development program curriculum from which I have been drawing to inform my practicum work.

The professors with whom I worked have incorporated Indigenous research and ways of knowing into the program's curriculum. For example, these are reflected in the online sections through a variety of resources (articles, books, films, and websites) authored by or depicting lived experiences of Indigenous populations. Students will be required to engage with these resources and may draw from them in their discussions and/or to fulfill assignments. Reviewing the curriculum sparked me to think more critically about how to incorporate multiple ways of

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

knowing, pedagogically, into the facilitation of online courses. It is this line of thinking which I will pursue in my capstone paper.

At the heart of this research is a quest to understand how people make sense of the world and the belief that all ways of doing so are valid. The meaning behind the paper's title, "The river is flooded by tributaries," is attributed to Shona culture of Zimbabwe and interpreted to mean that to more completely understand the world we must endeavor to understand it from multiple ways of knowing (Ngara, 2008). With this as my grounding principle, this capstone research is an effort to join the conversation in the field of international education (and related) on the subject of culture and its influence on the learning process. The guiding research question is: *How can we, as online educators, incorporate multiple ways of knowing, pedagogically, into the facilitation of online courses?* Subsequent questions are as follows:

- How do students' ways of knowing manifest in the online environment?
- Are ways of knowing a concern for online educators or do students' cultural backgrounds present different, more pressing considerations?

A contribution that the research hopes to make is an immediate application to the development of the online environment and pedagogy of the Master of Arts in Sustainable Development degree program. The findings could serve to refine pedagogical approaches before welcoming students this summer and inform future classes insofar as faculty wish to do so. Furthermore, this research could serve to spark conversations among practicing online educators and self-reflection about their own ways of knowing.

Conceptual Framework

Introducing this qualitative research study is an explanation of ways of knowing informed by Indigenous and western epistemologies (knowledge theories) followed by a discussion of andragogy, experiential education and its related theories. The point at which these parts merge

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

is the online learning environment, and tying them together will be a synthesis of findings from scholarly literature concerned with the impact of culture on online learning.

Ways of knowing

In a simple explanation of a complex concept, ways of knowing can be understood as ways of coming up with one's own answers (Mandel & Teamey, 2014). These ways refer to a holistic process of developing knowledge and intuition about the world around us and our relationship to it. The existence of multiple epistemologies suggests there are multiple ways in which we, humans, come to *know*. An attempt to provide a more complete explanation of the concept will be endeavored through the voices of Indigenous authors and researchers but, first, it will serve this inquiry to delve briefly into a discussion on the nature of knowledge.

Key to the concept of ways of knowing is the belief that knowledge is constructed. This idea is echoed in Timothy Reagan's work, *Non-Western educational traditions: Indigenous approaches to education thought and practice*, in which he expresses, "knowledge is not something that is out there that we need to grasp or obtain; rather, it is something that we ourselves build based on our own background, experiences, prior understandings, and the data before us," (Reagan, 2005). In their report titled "Education Indigenous to Place: Western Science Meets Native Reality," authors Kawagley and Barnhardt link this theory of knowledge construction to practice. Discussing education principles derived from the Alaskan Native context, they emphasize "all learning should start with what the student and community know and are using in everyday life" (Kawagley & Barnhardt, 1998). Thus saying, it is upon pre-existing knowledge that new knowledge is built.

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

The process of building or constructing knowledge is encompassed in ways of knowing. To unpack this further, presented here are the words of the aforementioned authors writing from the Alaskan Native perspective,

Indigenous people have their own ways of looking at and relating to the world, the universe, and each other (Ascher 2002; Eglash 2002). Their traditional education processes were carefully constructed around observing natural processes, adapting modes of survival, obtaining sustenance from the plant and animal world, and using natural materials to make their tools and implements. All of this was made understandable through demonstration and observation accompanied by thoughtful stories in which the lessons were embedded. (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005)

Ways of knowing are also informed by countless factors derived from the learner's context, both the human and non-human. This is illustrated in the following expression of Aboriginal Australian perspective,

Ways of Knowing are specific to ontology and Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and the Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups. Knowledge about ontology and Entities is learned and reproduced through processes of: listening, sensing, viewing, reviewing, reading, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging and applying. (Martin & Miraboopa, 2003)

Inherent to ways of knowing is the value of these processes to the individual and their collective. Furthermore, the process by which one constructs knowledge is rooted deeply to identity. In his article on traditional African education, author Ngara writes,

African ways of knowing not only reflect the African worldview but they also define the African personhood... African knowing is bound up with notions of affirming the self and indigenous subjectivity in ecology. Typically, Africans espouse spirituality centered thought and wisdom. (Ngara, 2008)

These three quotes were chosen because they illustrate what the concept of "ways of knowing" encompasses. However, it is important to recognize that the extent to which they are developed and expressed stretches beyond the limits of these examples. For the purposes of this research, the inquiry is based on an understanding of ways of knowing as the processes by which one

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

comes up with their own answers, and that these processes are deeply tied to identity and informed by various factors inherent in one's context and culture to which they identify.

How humans come to know and make sense of the world seem vital to the ways in which we learn. In Barnhardt and Kawagley's explanation, the authors reference traditional education processes which are "constructed" in concert with ways of knowing. In the context of online adult education with multicultural cohorts, integrating students' multiple ways of knowing in teaching methods seems unrealistic, yet does it prove a worthy aspiration? In *Ways of Knowing and Epistemological Belief*, authors Schommer-Aikins and Easter suggest that it might,

Bear in mind that the study of personal epistemology is important because it is likely that it plays multiple roles in students' learning and problem solving. Further, it is likely that it plays a role in how teachers make decisions about curriculum, instruction, and evaluation. (Schommer-Aikins & Easter, 2006)

Authors McLoughlin and Oliver drive home this point further and set it directly in the online context, "The rationale for considering culture as a design dimension for effective World Wide Web instruction is... [it] enables [learners] to relate and integrate new concepts within a coherent perspective that recognises and values their cultural heritage" and their ways of knowing (McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000). Such arguments serve to fuel this inquiry into tangible means for incorporating learners' varied ways of knowing, pedagogically, into online instruction and facilitation. To situate this research with the student population at its focus, a brief discussion of an adult learning theory will next be presented.

Andragogy: Adult Learning Theory

Ways of knowing refers to humans' life-long, evolutionary learning process and, insofar as the reviewed literature revealed, the concept does not specifically distinguish between adults and youth. Conversely, much is written and debated in the western paradigm about adult learning theories. They warrant discussion here for adult learning theories can serve to provide insight

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

into supporting the ways of knowing of students aged 18 years and older so long as the limitations are recognized.

The term *pedagogy* has been – and will continue to be – applied in this paper as an overarching term to mean methods of teaching; a term which was used in this manner during my practicum. Pedagogy, however, is a misnomer for it distinctly refers to the teaching of children while *andragogy* refers specifically to adult education. The concept of andragogy is credited to German teacher, Alexander Kapp, and was developed into a theory by US-American educator Malcolm Knowles nearly a century later in the 1970s (Loeng, 2017). Knowles proposes that adults, as learners, bear the following qualities or characteristics: (1) self-directed; (2) informed by their own accumulated life experiences; (3) oriented towards problem-solving and concerned with the immediate application of knowledge; (4) internally motivated; and (5) have learning needs closely related to changing social roles (Merriam 2001). Critiques abound such that these characteristics do not speak to the context of the learner or contribute to the understanding of adult learning processes which are the concern of this paper (Merriam, 2001). However, from these characteristics one can glean implications for pedagogical approaches which incorporate students' ways of knowing; approaches that draw from students' experiences, relate course content to their lives, and allow for autonomy.

An important distinction to be made between pedagogy and andragogy is the evolution from teacher-directed learning to student-directed learning (Merriam, 2001). This paper will explore how the asynchronous nature of online education is well-suited for student-directed learning and discuss educational theories which support this approach as well as experience-based approaches.

Experiential education and related theories

The Association for Experiential Education defines experiential education as “a philosophy that informs many methodologies in which educators purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop people's capacity to contribute to their communities” (AEE, 2018). Given that lived experience is essential to the development of humans’ ways of knowing, experiential methodologies seem at the outset a strong pedagogical partner. In their article, *Non-Western Perspectives on Learning and Knowing*, authors Merriam and Kim provide rationale such that,

Unlike the West, which privileges abstract and theoretical knowledge, non-Western traditions privilege experience in the everyday world... Learning that occurs in the experience is holistic; it has not just cognitive but physical, emotional, and sometimes spiritual dimensions, all of which are kept in balance. (Merriam, S. B., & Kim, Y. S., 2011)

As mentioned in the introduction, a key challenge of my practicum was to determine how experiential pedagogy could be adapted effectively in online courses. Because students in the online MA in Sustainable Development degree program will be working within their local contexts and separated from one another, they will be creating their own unique experiences on which their learning will be based. The question, therefore, becomes how to facilitate students’ learning from these disconnected experiences in concert with their ways of knowing.

The process of learning from experience has been conceptualized by David Kolb as the four-stage experiential learning cycle which consists of Concrete Experience, Observation and Reflection, Forming New Knowledge, and Application and Testing Concepts in New Situations (Smith & Knapp, 2011). Each of these stages are reflected in the process of knowledge construction as presented by Indigenous authors in the previous section; those explicitly stated

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

were observation, reflection, and practice. The alignment of these practices suggests that they and other experiential education-informed methods may prove an entry point for incorporating multiple ways of knowing into online pedagogy.

Furthermore, the epistemological theory of constructivism has been linked with experiential education. Its main principle can be understood as, “all learning involves mental construction, no matter how one is taught” (Swan, 2005). Swiss psychologist Jean Piaget’s theory delves into a practical explanation of mental construction involving cognitive structures (Smith & Knapp, 2011). In essence, he is suggesting that mental construction is a progressive process of building on what we already know – prior learning and life experiences – and this process evolves throughout our life (Smith & Knapp, 2011). It is important to recognize that this process does not occur in isolation; the community and relational aspect of learning is addressed through theories of social constructivism “which emphasize the notion that it is through communication or dialogue and negotiation with others regarding real-life issues and problems that knowledge is formed” (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). Evidence of social constructivism’s alignment with experiential education can be inferred by this explanation,

Experiential educators believe that collaboration and dialogue are essential ingredients to true critical analysis and reflection in problem-posing education, for individuals are rarely if ever capable of perceiving all angles of a problem or grasping all aspects of an issue alone. (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002)

Implications for pedagogy through the constructivist lens suggest experience-based and learner-centered facilitation which accounts for the need for social processing. Emphasizing experience and community as central to learning, the concept of knowledge construction is another through-line connecting experiential education and ways of knowing that could prove to be a useful, albeit, preliminary framework for linking them pedagogically.

Online education

Where experiential education and ways of knowing come together, for the sake of this research inquiry, is the online learning environment. Generally speaking, in asynchronous online learning, students and instructors are separated by geography and time; course websites created through Learning Management Systems (LMS), such as Moodle and Blackboard, serve as the virtual meeting place where information is shared and gathered. Class-wide communication may be conducted via email, online discussion boards, and synchronous web-based conference calls via Zoom and similar platforms. Teaching via virtual platform presents unique challenges for educators in terms of designing curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments as well as facilitating the online environment for a multicultural cohort of students. Since 2000, research has emerged addressing the impact of culture on online learning. Authors endeavor to explain ways culture impacts students' experiences of online learning and provide suggested best practices based on their findings. Within these inquiries, the concept of ways of knowing are alluded to, although not typically identified as such. The following review is based upon this body of research.

Many research studies and articles follow a similar pattern by which an interpretation of culture is presented, then dissected in different ways in attempt to understand what is most pervasive and influential to the experience of online learning. Edward Hall and Geert Hofstede are oft-referenced theorists whose ideas regarding high and low context cultures and cultural dimensions, respectively, have been used as frameworks for understanding culture's impact on the learning process. Less often-mentioned but intriguing are the theories of Les Vygotsky to which social constructivist theories are attributed (Swan, 2005). Vygotsky,

...believed that cognitive skills and patterns of thinking are not primarily determined by innate factors (as in genetic epistemology), but rather are the products of the activities practiced in the social institutions of the culture in which the individual lives.

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Consequently, the history of the society in which one is reared and one's personal history are crucial determinants of the ways in which an individual will think. (Swan, 2005)

That Vygotsky speaks of the social influences of one's life to the ways in which we form knowledge, and that his theories have been linked to experiential education, presents a strong argument for incorporating ways of knowing with experiential pedagogy.

Once frameworks have been established, research from these studies is presented based on data collected from students of online courses. Questions have been asked and analyzed in effort to understand how the cultural background of learners influences a number of factors, such as: motivation, expectations, their view of learning tasks, relationship with instructor, how students conceive their role and that of the instructor, academic success, goals for success, and cognitive processing which includes memory, problem-solving or, more broadly, learning and engagement with asynchronous learning environment (Wilson, 2001; McLoughlin, 2001; Uzuner, 2009). These studies, some of which are extensive and involve data collection from 200-300 online student participants, are capturing valuable data in effort to understand, from the students' perspective, how their ways of knowing are being accommodated or not.

From this research, recommendations as to what online educators could consider with culture in mind are synthesized in a few areas. Those which appear frequently throughout literature are: communication (ways of communicating and language), social environment, structuring of information, cognitive processing, and knowledge sharing. Those mentioned only once include "the complex circumstances in which women learners come to participate" and "power issues around gender and culture in the classroom and in the homeplace," findings that were drawn from a study of "Jamaican and Canadian women's distance learning experiences in a graduate level adult education program" (Uzuner, 2009). Suggested practices for addressing these considerations vary and, as such, present opportunities to explore what is working.

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

To this point, the voices that are not often heard in this literature are those of online educators. It is likely they author these research studies and their voices are heard by way of recommendations and suggestions for further inquiry based on students' lived experiences. Following the research published in the past two decades on what should be considered, a pulse check on which pedagogical approaches used to incorporate multiple ways of knowing are working, not working, and what questions are arising could be helpful.

Research Design and Methodology

Methodology

To better understand how to support the learning process of adult students (18 years of age and older) with varied ways of knowing and from varied cultural backgrounds, a qualitative methodology was used in order to gain insight into the teaching practices of experienced online educators. According to Rossman and Rallis, three conditions are required to meet the criteria for a compressed ethnography; they are: (1) familiarity with local setting and language; (2) focus on one particular aspect of culture; and (3) collaboration with local experts (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This inquiry meets the requirements such that I have (1) co-facilitated an online graduate course and collaborated with professors remotely during my practicum; (2) focused on students' ways of knowing and how they may be incorporated with online pedagogy; and (3) interviewed and collected surveys from educators to understand their lived experiences of facilitating and teaching online courses in multicultural contexts.

Participant selection/sample selection

A purposive sampling from my existing network of acquaintances was employed to recruit participants of varying cultural and professional backgrounds for this research study. Invitations were extended to educators with experience facilitating online courses in

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

multicultural contexts, and acquaintances who had connections to educators with experience teaching online were also contacted. From the latter group, recommendations for potential participants were solicited via snowball sampling method.

Originally, 15 self-described educators with experience facilitating or teaching online courses and trainings in multicultural contexts participated in this research. Seven educators were interviewed and nine completed online surveys; one participant opted to be interviewed and take a survey. One interviewee did not return a signed consent form despite requests before and after the interview was completed. As a result, their responses are not included in the findings which brings the final total to 14 participants who are represented in this research.

Data collection methods

Three different data collection methods were utilized: semi-structured individual interviews, online surveys created via Google Forms, and research. The same questions were posed in both the surveys and interviews; they were designed to explore how educators did or did not incorporate students' ways of knowing in their methods of teaching online courses. The questions were divided into three categories: participant background as it pertains to the research topic, participants' lived experiences, and demographics.

Ethics of research

Effort was made to help participants feel they could share honestly and openly about their experiences. To achieve this, interviewees were asked to choose the time and method of communication that was most convenient for them; they were also reminded that participation was voluntary and anonymous. The majority of the survey questions were open ended so that the respondents could write as much or as little as they wish. Also, they had online access to the survey and could finish it at a time most convenient for them. To protect participants' identities

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

and to allow for a frank discussion without potential harmful effects, care was taken to ensure the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. Capital letters were used in place of their real names in the interview transcriptions and in all drafts of the capstone paper. Interviews were recorded on a password-protected account with www.freeconferencecall.com (which was accessed via a password-protected personal laptop only) and deleted once transcriptions were complete.

Surveys were anonymous. Each of the interviewees were provided a consent letter while the survey respondents were required to read a detailed paragraph and check a box to indicate their agreement with the terms.

Researcher positionality

In respect to the topic of this study, awareness of how to present and discuss ideas about Indigenous knowledge justly as a non-Indigenous, American-born female of European descent was imperative. In effort to mitigate power dynamics inherent in data collection, all who were invited to participate were assured that participation was completely voluntary so that they, hopefully, would not feel pressure to acquiesce based on our existing relationship. The same consideration applied to SIT professors who may also feel uncomfortable critiquing their work and capacity as international educators; to these and all educators, anonymity and the option to skip questions were assured.

Data management and analysis procedures

Safeguarding participants' privacy involved recording interviews on a password-protected account with www.freeconferencecall.com. Transcribed interviews were saved as MSWord files on a password-protected laptop and all identifiers were removed from the transcriptions. Audio recordings of the interviews have been deleted and the Google survey responses are saved in a password-protected Gmail account.

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

To begin the analysis process, responses from the online survey were consolidated into a spreadsheet. Key terms of the research questions informed the parent codes such as opportunities and challenges of incorporating ways of knowing in the online learning environment. Interview transcriptions were then reviewed, and responses were consolidated with those from the surveys. Multiple readings of the survey responses and interviews led to identifying new and sub-categories, themes, and codes through deductive and inductive analysis. Deductive analysis was applied whereby data was reviewed with established ideas for the general categories. Inductive analysis was used to frame participants' responses that were not anticipated; *in-vivo* codes emerged from this analysis and, ultimately, were linked to broader categories.

Credibility/validity strategies

Data was triangulated in order to maintain research credibility. The use of surveys, interviews, and research meant collecting multiple points of data across various means to “ensure that [the researcher] has not studied only a fraction of the complexity” that one seeks to understand (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). This focus on triangulation allowed more complete and, thus, more credible findings.

Limitations inherent in the research design

The major limitations of this research study were access to participants and time. Participants were recruited via purposive sampling of my existing network of contacts; from these acquaintances, recommendations were solicited via snowball sampling method. The process of confirming participants, scheduling interviews, and gathering data (from interviews and surveys) took an extended amount of time.

Findings and Presentation of Data

This qualitative study endeavored to understand how to incorporate adult students' ways of knowing, pedagogically, into the facilitation of online courses. Findings were drawn from the lived experiences of educators with online teaching and training experience. Interviews evolved into intimate conversations in which educators shared the lessons they have learned from their students as well as their reflections on ways to support the learning of students from various cultural backgrounds. Similarly, the open-ended survey questions facilitated the collection of participants' experiences and reflections. From their accounts, patterns and themes emerged to inform an understanding of many interpretations of ways of knowing, opportunities and challenges to incorporating them in the virtual platform, some common best practices, and the uniqueness of online learning compared to face-to-face.

Participant profiles

In total, 14 educators participated in this research study, all of whom currently reside in the United States. The majority are concentrated on the east coast – the mid-Atlantic and New England – while one each are from Minnesota, Arizona, and Hawai'i Island. One participant each self-identified as African-American, Native Hawaiian, African, European, Hispanic, White U.S. American, and German-American. Seven participants self-identified as White or Caucasian. In regard to age, four participants are between 26-35 years; two are between 36-45 years; five participants are between 46-55 years; and three are between 56-65 years of age. Participants' careers as they relate to online education reflect a multitude of roles within institutions of higher education and include teaching in online undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs; two participants hold positions as Associate Deans. One educator each hold positions as a trainer, curriculum developer, adjunct faculty in an Adult Basic Education Licensure Program and ESL

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Certificate Program, and an Education Coordination Manager who facilitates cross-cultural virtual exchanges. Years of experience facilitating online courses and trainings range from one year to two decades; four participants have been facilitating online courses in some capacity between 15-21 years.

Multicultural student cohorts

Participants were asked to respond to questions based on their experiences facilitating and teaching online courses and trainings for adult students in multicultural contexts.

Recognizing that each participant could hold a different interpretation of what constitutes multicultural, the question asked respondents if it was appropriate to describe the student population of their online classes as multicultural and representing multiple ways of knowing. The multicultural make-up of students, as presented by the participants, were distinguished as international and coming from “all over the world,” specifically the Americas, Africa, Europe, Asia, and the Middle East; students that “are indigenous to countries as well as Americans living abroad” (E, personal communication, February 6, 2019). One respondent represents a classified Minority Serving Institution for which they estimated the demographics as 35% African-American or Black, 35% Latino, 15% Asian, and 20% Caucasian. Another respondent reported their cohorts are “Hawaii-based students, which are by nature multicultural - with special emphasis on native Hawaiians” (Survey, February 2019). Two participants identified their cohorts as predominantly women, one of whom further specified the majority as black, from all over the country, and heavily representing urban and rural backgrounds (A, personal communication, January 9, 2019). Other identifiers included students coming from “multi-lingual backgrounds” and varied learning traditions and styles (Surveys, February 2019). From this grounding in both the participants and their student cohorts, findings will next be presented.

Pedagogical considerations informed by cultural backgrounds and ways of knowing

Educators were asked directly if and how students' cultural backgrounds and ways of knowing factored in to the pedagogy - and the way educators facilitated - their online classes and trainings. A definition of ways of knowing was not provided, intentionally leaving the concept open to participants to answer based on their own interpretation. The rationale was to gauge if ways of knowing was a valid query or if cultural backgrounds presented issues that are more pervasive and influential to students' online learning experience. The varied interpretations were illustrated in participants' responses to this and subsequent questions.

Responses to this first question about if and how student backgrounds and ways of knowing factored in to pedagogy ranged from "absolutely" to not at all, and from vague to explicit. Some educators are considering the "cultural piece," striving to incorporate "cultural sensitivity," and develop "curriculum that has something for everyone" (Surveys, February 2019). More specifically, one respondent recognizes differences in terms of who we are, where we come from, and believes in different interpretations and scopes; this philosophy informs the pedagogy of their online doctoral courses (E, personal communication, February 6, 2019).

Findings also show that educators are considering a number of factors as discussed in the literature review, including students' varied learning styles, learning preferences, and connecting concepts to students' lives and interests - a tenet of andragogy and experiential education. One educator spoke of "a different kind of diversity" that refers to different strengths of students, and their attempt to be mindful not to "privilege one skill over another" (G, personal communication, February 7, 2019).

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Two unique responses alighted the value of self-reflection and positionality on the part of educators. In considering the cultural backgrounds of the staff for whom Educator A would be leading online trainings,

[I] would also say self-reflection would be integral to recognizing differences that exist between me and my colleagues. A lot of staff come from communities we are serving and I do not. I knew that when staff were getting to know me, it would be easy for them to see an upper middle-class white girl who doesn't know about anything that we (the organization) do. (personal communication, January 9, 2019)

When asked if the student backgrounds and ways of knowing factored in to the pedagogy, Educator B replied, "We thought so" (personal communication, January 24, 2019). Detailing an experience which will be explored later in the paper, Educator B expressed that, together with colleagues, they were "ethnocentric" meaning "not as culturally aware as we could have been" and "unprepared for... gender norms and... gendered differences with female students from the Middle East" (personal communication, January 24, 2019).

Not all considerations link directly to cultural background and ways of knowing, nonetheless they are important to understanding the overall picture of factors influencing online teaching. A consideration voiced by multiple participants is students' varying levels of comfort and personal experience with online technology. Online education "assumes students are already trained in technology" though responses indicate this is not always the case (Survey, January 2019). Access to "digital tech" is another concern, and it seems directly related to students' geographic locations where internet service is unreliable and inconsistent as the case may be in "developing countries" (Surveys, February and January 2019).

For two respondents, the backgrounds and ways of knowing of their students did not factor in to their approaches to teaching online. Stipulated by one educator,

All students were MBA students so we didn't take into account students different ways of knowing, we came up with the approach we believed made more sense for each of the

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

courses, the professor's teaching style and the kind of course content. (Survey, February 2019)

An important point is made here, such that course subjects influence the manner in which they are taught and facilitated online. More than one educator referenced their subject area as a limiting factor to diversifying the means of instruction and assessment.

Pedagogical approaches and methods: Perspectives on what benefits students

In light of the considerations discussed above, educators were asked to explain the pedagogical approaches, methods, and practices they felt were beneficial to the students in terms of incorporating their ways of knowing. A key theme in their responses was variety, specifically in ways students are able to access content and fulfill assignments. Using an in-vivo term, offering students a “smorgasbord” of options for assessments was echoed by multiple educators (Survey, February 2019). These options include writing, multi-media, oral and art submissions. The intention behind diversifying access and assessment is so students are able to answer and fulfill assignments from their own perspectives and in ways reflecting their worldviews and fields (E, personal communication, February 6, 2019). Variety in the ways educators deliver instruction is also important. Practices include posting videos, infographics, audio recordings, and podcasts to course websites, as well as holding synchronous sessions and discussion boards.

Two educators shared the philosophies and theories behind their teaching practices which, they feel, benefits their students. Naming experiential methods explicitly, “Experiential education encourages students to tie their lives to what they learn through continuous reflection and sharing with colleagues” (Survey, January 2019). Another educator found “constructivist approaches and inquiry-based designs to be best suited for the medium” (Survey, February 2019). Constructivism encourages learner-centered approaches which a third educator incorporates in the facilitation of their professional development programs.

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Inherent in many responses was the value of cultivating relationships and “getting to know the learner” in effort to support their varied ways of learning (E, personal communication, February 6, 2019). At the start of an online course, one educator tasks students,

...to share via a multimedia presentation who they were in terms of not just their families and ethnic/cultural background, values and practices – including how they preferred to learn -, but also the places that have shaped them into who they are. This helped me – and the rest of the class to know one [an]other and tailor assignments and assessments based on student preferences. (Survey, February 2019)

Additional practices intended to cultivate relationships between educators and their students include: holding virtual office hours, hosting synchronous sessions for the purpose of small group discussions, and inviting students to have brief phone or video calls at the start of each semester in which conversations are centered around their work, families, and what they do for fun. Getting to know the learner allows educators to “bring them into the lesson,” the value of which was echoed earlier such that students’ lives and experiences are incorporated (G, personal communication, February 7, 2019). In applying this idea to practice, Educator G sees great opportunity,

...because they [students] have such different experiences and different ways of knowing, you can also do some compare and contrast when you have someone in Asia who’s experiencing it *this* way, and someone in Canada who’s experiencing it *this* way. Getting to know your students really gives you almost an extra bit of material from which to source your teachings. (personal communication, February 7, 2019)

Educator G asks “a lot of questions because I want to learn and understand” and, as a result of this practice, gained insight into the challenges some of their Asian students have with quoting and APA citations (personal communication, February 7, 2019). In regard to quoting and using APA, the students in question shared their perspectives which Educator G explained,

They think they’re supposed to parrot what elders and professors say like it’s true. They struggle with things like citations because they just think, well of course I’m going to use that person’s words because why would I say it any other way, because if a great

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

professor is saying it, it must be okay to say it that way. (personal communication, February 7, 2019)

This example suggests that ways of knowing are not necessarily obvious, nor can it be assumed that they manifest in the online environment in ways one may expect.

What also bears attention is not only that communication between instructors and students take place, but also the ways in which they communicate. Educator G reflects, “I really learned a lot working with, particularly, international students because... the way in which you engage with someone from the Middle East versus California, it’s very different. And you have to approach it in a very different way” (personal communication, February 7, 2019). A root cause of communication differences was alighted in the literature review, and that is the varied ways students view the role of the instructor and their relationship to them (Wilson, 2001; McLoughlin, 2001; Uzuner, 2009). Educator G had direct experience with this phenomenon in a doctoral program and explains,

I told you in the beginning that we have a lot of women in our program... and this is nothing disparaging, this is a reality – women in the Middle East interact in a very different way with their authority figures which, in this case, is me which I still think it’s weird that I’m an authority figure. I think that’s also true, I’ve taught a lot of students from China and so sometimes the way in which I would approach a student from that part of the world, it just doesn’t work. (personal communication, February 7, 2019)

In these instances, what has been beneficial are Educator G’s attempts at trying “different strategies...to maybe work in a way that’s more aligned with what they’re comfortable with” (personal communication, February 7, 2019).

Responses brought to light a tenet of communication and also of Indigenous educational practices, “I think the other thing that is really important in terms of the many ways of knowing is just listening” (G, personal communication, February 7, 2019). Letting students share their experiences and expertise suggests, “look, we’re in this together, we all have a little bit of

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

information, a little bit of the truth” (personal communication, February 7, 2019). During our conversation, Educator C connects humility with how we learn and construct knowledge,

...ways of knowing also means the humbleness with regard to ancestral knowledge. It means also being humble when it comes to what we learn from nature. Being humble across which means horizontally with other people, and other beings that are not just people. (C, personal communication, February 1, 2019)

A direct correlation to online teaching can be understood as follows, “Online education sometimes really puts the teacher in a position of being the facilitator and being humble because they don’t sit on a podium and give the lecture. They don’t have that power” (C, personal communication, February 1, 2019).

Based on the range of responses, pedagogical approaches are multi-layered. When considering how to incorporate students’ ways of knowing, the decisions to be made encompass ways educators deliver instruction, engage students, and assess their learning, as well as navigate communication asynchronously in effort to build relationships with students.

Pedagogical approaches and methods: Challenges and lessons learned

To gain a more complete picture of approaches used in online pedagogy, educators were asked to explain those which they felt were not successful. Many educators referenced teamwork and, similarly, group activities and assignments as being unsuccessful. Reasons they found this to be the case included: “too many free riders” and students “not pulling their weight,” “not meeting in person makes building trust and accountability more difficult,” and “students are not centrally located (they are spread out around the country and sometimes abroad); their schedules and daily lives/responsibilities also differ” (Surveys, February 2019).

Efforts at allowing for student autonomy were deemed unsuccessful by one educator. In the context of a professional development program for practicing teachers, they explained,

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Participants can be overwhelmed when tasked with designing a cross-cultural exchange with a teacher from another country. The work style is new, the tech is new, the process may be uncomfortable, especially when the participant is given complete control over the process. (Survey, February 2019)

Knowles' theory of andragogy ascribes self-directed learning as a trait of adult students, though this example leads me to question if the online, asynchronous environment and/or students' particular ways of knowing may influence student desire for "more structure to be put forward by some type of administrator" (Survey, February 2019).

Use of discussion boards is a common practice in online education, one that allows for instructors and students to have an asynchronous discussion via the LMS. Typed messages are saved and threaded such that one may join the conversation at any point, see what has already been discussed, and add their comments and questions. One instructor recounted when the intended use of discussion boards was unsuccessful in supporting the learning needs of their students,

We've had a handful of female students from the Middle East where most of our online content... engagement is through the discussion boards... I'm not sure we were as culturally aware as we could have been about setting up that kind of model where women who are not used to being asked their opinions on something are being asked their opinions and then being graded on it. ... We do sometimes find this with certain members from different Asian countries, in particular, some women from China we find this as well, and we have one student from Japan who also shares this personality profile where they're very, very bright - very good producers - but certainly are not comfortable in a public speaking space. They're not going to be the first one to post their opinion. They will answer a question. If you're asking them fact-based questions, they'll be there with no problem. But if you're asking their opinion then that's where that line gets drawn. (B, personal communication, January 24, 2019)

This experience resonates with the findings from a study presented earlier; in it was highlighted "the complex circumstances in which women learners come to participate" (Uzuner, 2009). In the face of such a challenge, Educator B explained they ultimately tasked students to form small discussion groups with colleagues with whom they felt comfortable; reporting out to larger

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

cohort as these small units “worked in the favor of those students. Now it’s not their voice, necessarily, it’s the group’s voice” (personal communication, January 24, 2019). Reflecting on this experience as a “bedrock” moment, Educator B shared,

In one’s journey towards their own cultural competency you feel like you have a good sense of self, I think that was one of the ones that was a cold throwing ice over you, of saying geez, you should’ve known, you should’ve thought about that. (personal communication, January 24, 2019)

This experience reinforces the need for educators to be humble and recognize when their teaching methods are not supporting all students. Lessons learned serve to inform pedagogical approaches and, in the case of this inquiry, help to paint a more detailed picture of best practices.

Pedagogical approaches & methods: What educators would like to try

Having asked educators to reflect on their past experiences for both positive and, potentially, negative experiences, they were also invited to dream about and imagine ideas for pedagogical approaches that, though untested, might allow them to incorporate students ways of knowing. Two educators are keen on using Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) to “incorporate interactivity” in online courses (Surveys, January and February 2019). However, one cautions the “need to test empathy in these spaces and how it affects learning” (Survey, February 2019). Instead of presenting ideas for approaches, as presumed, two educators find technology “influences” how they teach online. Based on experience, one has “found that the learning management system factors into what I am able to do” (Survey, February 2019). In addition to these technology-driven approaches, educators aspire to meet with students in-person akin to SIT Graduate Institute’s low-residency model and to pay more attention to “who are the people that are speaking, not speaking” in their trainings (Surveys, February 2019).

Opportunities presented by the online platform

Over the course of interviews and in survey responses, educators cautioned against mimicking face-to-face teaching in the online environment (Survey, January 2019). The virtual environment is a unique space requiring specialized approaches, and educators were asked what opportunities it provides for incorporating multiple ways of knowing into pedagogy. Once again, variety was an oft-referenced theme such that educators can present content in various ways through their respective LMS. One educator elaborates, “It has possibilities of creating audio, video, text, interactive events, discussions, reflections, etc.” (Survey, February 2019). The options to present course content “visually, orally, graphically, etc.” suggest pathways for students to engage with information by means aligning with their individual ways of knowing (Survey, January 2019).

The rationale for offering students multiple ways to engage with material is further unpacked by educators who claim the value is in the opportunity to watch, listen, or read the presented material over and over again as needed. The static nature of online education such that discussions are saved, in essence, creates a repository that can be referenced (E, personal communication, February 6, 2019). That learners can “re-watch trainings” and “interact with course materials and discussion forums at multiple times” is considered helpful to their learning process (A, personal communication, January 9, 2019; Survey, February 2019).

Opportunities for peer interaction are enhanced via the virtual platform. Writes one educator, “Students learn through interacting with peers rather than with the teacher alone [which] gives the experience a level of horizontality absent in F2F (face-to-face) lecture based classrooms” (Survey, January 2019). That this interaction is possible within a culturally diverse cohort is recognized as another significant benefit to online education. “What other situation can

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

you really, in an organized way, bring together so many ways of knowing?” (G, personal communication, February 7, 2019). Emphasizing this point, Educator B adds,

The fact that I can guarantee a student who comes into our program will be exposed to education in a very global sense, not just in a book, but from other practitioners who are working in a global space, that’s something you can’t guarantee anyone in a face-to-face program. (personal communication, January 24, 2019)

A diverse cohort alone does not ensure students will learn from one another, but the potential is there “provided they are given the opportunity to do some co-teaching, presenting, or sharing their work with others” (Survey, February 2019).

When it comes to participating in online discourse, two educators voiced the benefit of time allowed by the asynchronous format. According to one, “The strength of an online classroom is that it provides an opportunity to reflect and articulate one's experiences, perspectives, and worldviews in a much more thoughtful manner, as students have more time to think through the discussion issues” (Survey, January 2019). Also, for “people who prefer to listen, to take their time and write, that’s a huge opportunity” (Survey, February 2019). In these examples, time is a factor which encourages self-expression.

A benefit unrelated to pedagogy, per se, but nonetheless valuable to include is access to education. Four participants expressed access as a main opportunity provided by the virtual platform. According to Educator F, “For me... working with my students, if I didn’t open up these online contexts and these online independent studies, a lot of these students would never have the opportunity to do a study abroad program” (personal communication, February 6, 2019). Educators cited a number of reasons that face-to-face study is inaccessible, thus making online education a more viable option; these reasons included: finances, responsibility to family and work, and the bureaucracy, expense, and uncertainty of visa processes.

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

The virtual platform is seen to provide educators with numerous opportunities to incorporate students' varied ways of knowing in their instruction and facilitation. Inviting learners to engage with content and fulfill assignments in a myriad of ways is considered a major benefit afforded by the LMS. The asynchronous format not only allows students time to participate authentically in online discourse, it also allows for collective learning which is a key principle of Indigenous and experiential education and supported by theories of social constructivism. Above all, however, is the opportunity to access education and learn amongst a global cohort of students and practitioners who, ideally, are bringing their perspectives into online discourse and collaboration.

Challenges presented by the online platform

Equally beneficial as the opportunities – those afforded by the online platform for incorporating ways of knowing – is an understanding of the challenges. This question elicited a vast array of responses and, perhaps not surprisingly, what were considered opportunities to some educators were presented as challenges by others.

The opinion that human interaction is inhibited by the asynchronous format contrasts the opinion that it enhances peer interaction. The following reflections and examples illustrate the challenges posed by the online setting where writing is the “default way” of communicating (A, personal communication, January 9, 2019). The “emotional aspect of human interaction [and] reactions to the issues discussed in real time is missing online. This might create challenges for a deeper facilitation of human interaction when what we engage with is just the text of human interaction,” (Survey, January 2019). While the medium allows for multiple means of connecting, a sharp observation by one educator highlights what could, at times, be missing and the impact, “Primarily text communication lacking context can create bias against those coming

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

from cultures where verbal communication is most dominant or most meaningful” (Survey, February 2019). Speaking from a culture where verbal expression is highly valued, an educator writing from the Native Hawaiian perspective shares the following insight,

Native Hawaiians are high touch, so online is not our best way of learning, so that is most definitely a challenge for my target population... Also, most native (Hawaiian) people have strong oral/oratory and performance-based skills which can only be exhibited to a certain extent online. (Survey, February 2019)

According to two educators, writing is also the predominant means of assessing students; one explains, “Their tangible work that they hand in to me tends to be very written” (B, personal communication, January 24, 2019). In the studies reviewed regarding how culture impacts students’ learning, communication – particularly language and ways of communicating – is frequently discussed. The lived experiences of educators in this research illustrate just some challenges when one way of communicating is privileged over others.

When it comes to supporting students’ learning and experience in the virtual environment, educators feel impaired by not being able to see their students. Detecting when students are having trouble may be akin to losing one’s sense of sight and not being able to “see them... to know how they’re doing” or “seeing the pattern as quickly” (G, personal communication, February 7, 2019; B, personal communication, January 24, 2019). I would argue this is reflective of these educators’ ways of knowing such that they had relied on *reading* students to determine if they understood the material, were experiencing challenges, or, simply, “doing” okay.

Technology is an integral part of online pedagogy and using it to support students’ varied ways of knowing has one educator remarking, “We’re trying” (B, personal communication, January 24, 2019). Challenges abound and stretch from the inevitable technical failures to “the flat nature of the LMS” which one educator finds “confining and makes less conducive to

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

navigation,” to the varying degrees of “digital literacy” of students and educators alike (Surveys, February 2019). One educator observed a side effect of poor internet connection - which is disruptive in its own right - such that it “can create bias against people coming from situations in which they have low access to tech connection” (Survey, February 2019).

Beyond the predictable technical challenges, educators brought to light the limitations imposed by text-based communication. Written assessments are understood to limit students whose ways of knowing are steeped in verbal expression, thus potentially impacting the quality of their work and participation. For educators used to face-to-face teaching, they find their own ways of knowing are compromised in the online environment; this insight could serve as a starting point for self-reflection into one’s own teaching practices.

Learning within community

Speaking on the subject of Indigenous ways of knowing, Educator C explains, “We can not know knowledge individually, it has to be done within community” (personal communication, February 1, 2019). As presented previously in the literature review, learning in community is characteristic of Indigenous education. Its value is also echoed in experiential education and related theories such that social processing through dialogue and collaboration are considered necessary for reflection, critical analysis, and the production of knowledge (Lutterman-Aguilar & Gingerich, 2002). Pedagogy which accounts for the communal nature of learning could go far in addressing students’ ways of knowing. In light of some educators’ remarks that team work and group assignments remain a challenge in the asynchronous setting, others shared uplifting stories of the community that is built amongst the students themselves.

Despite the many technologies which allow students and instructors to connect across time and physical space, remote work is isolating. Through the perspective of Educator B, this

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

isolation breeds “desire for culture” such that students are “starved for something” and, as a result, they “gel on their own” typically in the first month (personal communication, January 24, 2019). Having taught five cohorts to date, Educator B reports it has been “consistent that they’re very quick to connect” and, in their cohesion, the students “...bring multiculturalism to us. And they perpetuate the value of that culture - and each of their own cultures - while sharing it with this online community; so they never lose themselves, but they gain an additional identity” (personal communication, January 24, 2019). This story is just one example illustrating adult learners’ inclination to take charge of their learning - just as Knowles suggests through his theory of andragogy – and doing so, in the case of these students, by cultivating community among which to learn.

Conclusions

The intention behind this research was to gain a foundational understanding of how adult students’ ways of knowing could be incorporated, pedagogically, into the facilitation of online courses and trainings. Inquiry into the lived experiences of 14 educators revealed practices, approaches, philosophies, and theories based on their perspective of success. These educators generously shared stories illustrating how students’ ways of knowing manifest in the online environment followed by their reflections on attempts to navigate and understand them. Through their efforts to adjust their teaching practices based on lessons learned, the educators demonstrated humility and a spirit that reflects Indigenous epistemology that knowledge and the process of learning is one that is infinite and evolutionary. In doing so, they have also alighted their own ways of knowing and how they, too, impact pedagogy and their interactions with students.

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Findings aligned with the literature insofar as the majority of the educators who participated in this study are considering how students' cultural backgrounds inform their learning processes. Their stories and examples illustrated some of the areas most impacted by culture as discussed in the literature review; these are: communication, how students conceive their role and that of the instructors, relationships with instructors, cognitive processing and engagement with the asynchronous learning environment (Wilson, 2001; McLoughlin, 2001; Uzuner, 2009). The explicit mention of experiential education and constructivism by two educators suggests there is value in further researching and experimenting with teaching methods informed by the philosophy and theory, respectively.

The value of remote access to education is not lost on these professionals who cite the ability to “guarantee” a global community of practitioners and students in a single cohort as an overwhelming benefit to their education and that of the instructors. Pedagogically, it seems the major opportunities afforded by the online environment are the various ways educators can present content; from the students' perspective, this means there are various ways to engage with the material - repeatedly, if needed – and fulfill assignments. There are limitations, however, such that means of assessment may be confined to text-based communication and by subject matter, the LMS, and students' facility with technology, to name a few. I pause here and question, is this the end of the line in terms of opportunities? Are varying the methods of presentations and assessments the best that can be done to meet the learning needs of students?

The educators who discussed cultivating relationships with students are leading pedagogy toward meeting students where they are at in terms of incorporating their lives, interests, and experiences into teaching and online discussions. Educator G reflected on the value of their efforts to build relationships with students and summarizes,

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

...there's a transactional distance in online that we really work hard to diminish. You just have to do a lot of work on the front end. Again, going back to the listening and getting to know your students, even though people say this in the literature all the time that that kind of stuff takes so much time, I would argue that the time you spend on that piece will pay dividends across the rest of the semester. That's just one person's opinion. (personal communication, February 7, 2019)

This topic lends itself to discussing the community piece of knowledge construction that is vital to Indigenous education practices and promoted in western epistemologies as presented earlier in this paper. Facilitating knowledge-sharing and collaboration amongst students is considered important by educators but, also, they claim the practice proves to be a significant challenge in the asynchronous setting.

For a multicultural and international cohort, addressing each student's unique learning process and ways of knowing is a far-reaching aspiration for any online educator. Participants in this study have presented numerous approaches and practices worthy of implementation, as well as considerations for those that were not successful. They also brought to mind challenges and, through their words, implore the readers of this research to respect that all of us carry "a little bit of the truth" and, as educators, to open oneself to learning along with your students.

Further Research

In an attempt to narrow the scope from the broad and complex concept of culture and how *it* influences students' learning in the online environment, such has been the focus in the literature reviewed, this research focused specifically on ways of knowing. I was not successful in honing in on ways of knowing and attribute that to a few reasons, though perhaps there are more. Would it have made a difference if I presented my own interpretation of the concept in effort to bring participants on the same page? Some educators clearly had already formed interpretations while others did not; during an interview, one educator asked, "What do you mean by ways of knowing?" (A, personal communication, January 9, 2019). Unlike surveys,

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

interviews allowed for opportunities to discuss the concept and reiterate the connection to ways of knowing and pedagogy. Ultimately, responses revealed issues which the educators felt mattered, thus satisfying an intention of this inquiry.

To expand on this inquiry, I would refine the research question and adopt a different research methodology. A question that would allow deeper exploration into the complementary processes of knowledge construction and learning may be: *What value could incorporating – or focusing on – students' ways of knowing bring in meeting unique challenges of online education?* Another question to consider: *To what extent are ways of knowing valid, relevant, and useful in online adult education pedagogy design?* Responses from educators left me wanting to know more about particular experiences and challenges, how they were handled, the underlying issues, and the lessons learned. Employing a phenomenological study whereby interviewing a smaller percentage of educators on multiple occasions over a longer period of time may help achieve this depth of inquiry. I would also like to undertake this research in collaboration with Indigenous educators and those steeped in Indigenous epistemologies, education, and research practices in order to deepen my study in these areas and understanding of ways to incorporate them with non-Indigenous methods and theories.

Practical Applicability

The findings of this research could have both an immediate and long-term impact on the field of international education. There is time to edit the plan for online pedagogy of SIT's Master of Arts in Sustainable Development degree program before students begin their courses in June 2019 and also throughout the program. As educators have demonstrated, reflecting upon and revising teaching approaches can – and, perhaps, should – be an ongoing process. This research could also serve as a conversation starter; I would begin with the educators who kindly

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

gave their time to participating in this study, some of whom asked to read this paper once it is complete. As they are all practicing educators and feel this topic is relevant to their work, having conversations with them about the findings could lead to identifying avenues of further research and applications. While conducting this study, I discovered the National Association for Multicultural Education (NAME) which is a volunteer-led, professional organization based in the United States. Their annual conference and similar professional conferences could be an ideal space to invite conversations with practitioners in a mutual exchange of ideas and knowledge-sharing.

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Appendix A: Participant Informed Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent

Title of the Study: Incorporating multiple ways of knowing with online experiential pedagogy

Researcher Name: Julie DeBenedictis

I am a student pursuing a Master of Arts in International Education at SIT Graduate Institute which is based in Brattleboro, Vermont. I would like you to participate in a research study I am conducting in partial fulfillment for my graduate degree. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you do not understand before deciding whether to participate. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form either electronically or in person, and a copy of this form will be shared with you.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As an aspiring International Educator, I am seeking to understand how to support the learning process of adult students (18 years of age and older) from varied cultural backgrounds and learning traditions. Based on the surveys and interviews, this study intends to derive lessons from the lived experiences of practicing and retired educators with experience facilitating online courses in multicultural contexts.

STUDY PROCEDURES

The study consists of online surveys and one-on-one personal interviews. Online survey participants can be completed at a place and a time convenient for you on a computer. Each survey will take about 15 minutes to complete. One-on-one personal interviews will be arranged to take at a time convenient for the interviewee and, if in-person, at a place that is also convenient for the interviewee and will guarantee privacy. Each interview will take up to 30 minutes to complete. The interviews will be audio-recorded.

(for online survey participants)

You are being requested to fill out an online survey, which consists of twelve questions. This will require approximately 15-20 minutes of your time.

(for one-to-one interview participants)

Your participation will consist of meeting with me, the researcher, either by phone, videoconference (Skype, What'sApp, or Facetime), or in person and will require approximately 30 minutes of your time.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS

There are no anticipated risks associated with this study. There are no foreseeable risks to participating in this study and no penalties should you choose not to participate; participation is voluntary. During the interview/survey, you have the right not to answer any questions or to discontinue participation at any time.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO PARTICIPANTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY

Participants may benefit from reflecting upon their choices in -and efforts toward – incorporating multiple ways of knowing in their online teaching. Insofar as I can deduce from my literature

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

review, few formal studies have been conducted on this topic such that educators' lived experiences have been researched.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I will not collect your name or link responses with your identities in the final report. Collected data will be password protected. I will erase the surveys and interview audio recordings once the final report has been written.

PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL

Your participation is voluntary. Your refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

"I have read the above and I understand its contents and I agree to participate in the study. I acknowledge that I am 18 years of age or older."

Participant's signature _____

Researcher's signature _____

Date: _____

Date: _____

I may wish to quote from the interview with you either in the presentation or reports resulting from this work. A pseudonym (fake name) will be used in order to protect your identity.

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

I agree to allow quotations from my interview to be used in presentations and/or reports.

I do not agree to allow quotations from my interview to be used in presentations and/or reports.

Consent to Audio-Record Interview

Initial one of the following to indicate your choice:

I agree to allow this interview to be audio-recorded.

I do not agree to allow this interview to be audio-recorded.

RESEARCHERS' CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any questions or want to get more information about this study, please contact us at julie.debenedictis@mail.sit.edu or my advisor, Dr. Lynée Connelly at lynee.connelly@sit.edu.

RIGHTS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANT – IRB CONTACT INFORMATION

In an endeavor to uphold the ethical standards of all SIT proposals, this study has been

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

reviewed and approved by an SIT Institutional Review Board. If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about your rights as a research participant or the research in general and are unable to contact the researcher please contact the Institutional Review Board at:

School for International Training
Institutional Review Board
1 Kipling Road, PO Box 676
Brattleboro, VT 05302-0676
USA
irb@sit.edu
802-258-3132

Appendix B: Interview Guide

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participant background as it pertains to research topic:

1. What is/was (if retired) your career as it relates to online education?
2. How many years have you been teaching online courses?
3. Would it be appropriate to describe the student population of your online classes as multicultural and representing a variety of learning traditions?
 - A. If YES, could you briefly explain?
4. Are/Were you involved to some degree with developing the pedagogy (methods of teaching) or making decisions about pedagogy for the online course(s)?
 - A. If YES, could you briefly explain?

Participant's lived experience:

5. Could you please tell me if the varied backgrounds and ways of knowing of your students factored in to the pedagogy of – or the way you facilitated - your online classes?
 - A. If YES, could you please explain how?
 1. What do you think was beneficial to students and why?
 2. What did you try that may not have worked as well?
 3. Were there approaches you did not try but think may have worked based on your experience?
 - B. If NO, could you please elaborate on the reason(s)?
6. In what ways does the online platform provide opportunities for incorporating multiple ways of knowing into pedagogy?
7. In what ways does the online platform provide challenges to incorporating multiple ways of knowing into pedagogy?
8. Is there anything more you would like to share?

Demographics **responses will be used for background information only*

9. Where do you live?
10. What is your ethnicity or the ethnic background you most closely identify with?
11. How old are you?

Appendix C: Online Survey

INCORPORATING WAYS OF KNOWING WITH ONLINE PEDAGOGY

Title of the Study: Incorporating multiple ways of knowing in online pedagogy

The purpose of this survey is to collect data for a capstone research project conducted in partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in International Education from SIT Graduate Institute. Your name/identity will be anonymous and you are free to withdraw from the survey at any time. There are no anticipated risks to participating in this survey and no penalties should you choose not to participate. If you have any questions or want more information about this study, please contact jmdebene@gmail.com or my advisor, Dr. Lynée Connelly, at lynee.connelly@sit.edu. Thank you for your valuable input!

[Check Box Required] I understand that my participation in this survey is completely voluntary and my responses are anonymous. The data collected from this survey will inform graduate research in partial fulfillment of a Master's Degree in International Education from SIT Graduate Institute.

1. What is/was (if retired) your career as it relates to online education?
2. How many years have you been teaching online courses?
3. Would it be appropriate to describe the student population of your online classes as multicultural and representing a variety of learning traditions? If YES, could you briefly explain?
4. Are/Were you involved to some degree with developing the pedagogy (methods of teaching) or making decisions about pedagogy for the online course(s)? If YES, could you briefly explain?
5. How did the varied backgrounds and learning traditions of your students factor in to the pedagogy of – or the way you facilitated - your online classes? If they did not, could you please elaborate on the reason(s)?
6. What do you think was beneficial to students and why?
7. What did you try that may not have worked as well?
8. Were there approaches you did not try but think may have worked based on your experience?
9. In what ways does the online platform provide opportunities for incorporating multiple ways of knowing into pedagogy?
10. In what ways does the online platform provide challenges to incorporating multiple ways of knowing into pedagogy?
11. Is there anything more you would like to share?
12. Where do you live? **This question will be used for background information only.*
13. What is your ethnicity or the ethnic background you most closely identify with? **This question will be used for background information only.*
14. How old are you? **This question will be used for background information only.*
Mark only one oval.
18-25; 26-35; 36-45; 46-55; 56-65; 65+