Culturally Targeted Online Course Redesigns for English Composition and Research Writing: A Case Study

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Abstract

The Enduring Legacies Reservation-Based Project, now in its third year, supports Native American college students of a number of Pacific Northwest tribes.   This paper addresses the pedagogical and e-learning strategies applied to the culturally sensitive curricular redesigns for English Composition 1 and 2 (which involve essay writing and research writing respectively).   These are foundational and required courses for a number of degree programs and certificates. The curricular redesigns for both courses address issues of cultural sensitivity, learner focus, and strategy, and apply concepts of universal design for more effective learning for a wide range of learners. With the redesigns now in place for a year for the EC1 course and one quarter for EC2, some early findings have emerged as well.

Keywords: Online course redesign, cultural sensitivity, The Enduring Legacies Reservation-Based Project, The Evergreen State College (TESC), WashingtonOnline (WAOL), Tribal Based Program, Grays Harbor College (GHC), Native American learners, English composition, and research writing

Introduction

The Enduring Legacies Reservation-Based Project (funded by the Lumina Foundation for Education, College Spark Washington, and others), now in its third year, supports Native American college students of a number of Pacific Northwest tribes. Educational technologies and e-learning play a central role in the program. This project involves three main endeavors.

1) Associate of Arts. The first involves the creation of a three-year associate of arts degree that is fully transferable to any university in the US. This program combines e-learning courses offered through WashingtonOnline (WAOL), a consortium of 34 community colleges of Washington State, with some credits of face-to-face courses that focus on humanities credits and topics such as public speech, writing and literature, e-portfolios, and battlegrounds (original Native American teaching case studies learning) in order to promote the learner cohort and community. Also, the students meet with a study leader from their own tribes one day a week to focus on their studies. Tribal-based study leaders serve as "whipmen" and work with learners "for tutoring and mentoring". The study leader relates to the learners culturally, and, as a member of the respective tribe, connects to the social support and familial structure surrounding each learner. Historically, Native American societies unite around caring for their young and students "were not allowed to fail" (Demmert, Dec. 2001, "Improving…" p. 1).

The selected courses from the curricular offerings of WAOL were initially revised in the first year of the project for more Native American cultural infusion in the curriculum, and the online faculty underwent culturally-sensitive instructor training and intercultural competence at The Evergreen State College (TESC) campus, with considerable peer learning from other faculty, tribal members, and tribal learners. The online instructors were handpicked for their high engagement with learners and academic rigor. Events at The Evergreen State College's Longhouse Education and Cultural Center were designed to help learners meet and greet instructors - over traditional and friendly forms of the breaking of bread: fall

orientation events like clam bakes and salmon roasts. This curriculum related to the Reservation-Based/Community Determined Bridge Program's basic tenets of promoting student's personal authority, honoring of indigenous knowledge, and the use of academics to "complement personal authority and community knowledge." Annual themes of the 2006 – 2009 academic program include "Contemporary Indian Communities in a Global Society," "Traditional Knowledge: The Foundation for Sustainable Tribal Nations," and "Integrating Change in a Communal Society."

One-credit humanities courses are taught four Saturday afternoons per quarter at the TESC Longhouse. These provide opportunities for peer mentoring and socialization with Grays Harbor College students in their freshman and sophomore years mingling with juniors and seniors from The Evergreen State College. The design of this degree allows for easier transfer of freshman and sophomore credits to the university. The pacing - a two year degree offered over three years - acknowledges the many outside-of-academia commitments of the Native American learners and makes the work load more realistic.

2) High-tech, high-touch hybrid approach. A second feature employs a "high-tech high-touch" hybrid approach. The high-tech involves the Blackboard™ learning management system (LMS), campus-based student-owned e-portfolios (with a learning framework), The Evergreen State College (TESC) website, and digital learning artifacts. The use of e-learning technologies allows a much deeper reach into the geographically dispersed and somewhat isolated reservation-based tribes of the Pacific Northwest for "place-bound" learners. The benefits of the LMS are manifold. The courses used and developed are digitally archived and may be transferable to others. Any revisions to the courses may benefit more than the targeted Native American because of copyright releases built into all system-owned courses in WashingtonOnline. The use of accessible builds - through authoring tools and an accessible LMS - make the curriculum applicable to a wider audience.

The use of the World Wide Web (WWW) to collect and deploy various learning resources in e-portfolios and case studies magnifies the influence of this program beyond the boundaries of the various educational institutions. The ability to publish broadly affords the Native American students (and studies) voice, reach and often, respect.

The use of these technologies also involves some cultural border crossing in the sense that many Native American communities have been "have-nots" in the "digital divide." This program gives software-loaded laptop computers to the learners as part of the learning, and it includes face-to-face training on the use of BlackBoard™, the laptop, and Web resources. Native American teaching case studies may be deployed online for a wider reach for the curriculum, and many of these cases involve full-sensory digital wraps (sight, sound, and hearing). The benefits of the Web for rich research also strengthen the learning with the definition of web quests and other online assignments.

3) Native American case studies. The third strand involves the development of original Native American teaching case studies involving primary and secondary research by college instructors at WAOL, TESC, and experts in the Native American communities. Teaching case studies support the value of indigenous knowledge and the learners' personal observations of the world and their connections to vibrant communities. These cases engage issues of relevance to Native American learners and capitalize on tribal knowledge and often less-publicly-accessible primary resources. These may counter the observed Native American invisibility in both the academic research and the college teaching (Demmert, Dec. 1001, "Improving…A Review of the Research Literature," pp. 3 – 4). These teaching cases are available on the WWW and are shared with Creative Commonsk-type global publication.

Participants. The Evergreen State College (TESC) serves as the lead institution in this collaborative endeavor. Grays Harbor College (GHC) is the supporting college, and WashingtonOnline (WAOL) serves as the main online course provider. The Enduring Legacies Reservation-Based Project started in Sept. 2005 with an initial half-dozen First Nations tribes: the Makah, Muckleshoot, Nisqually, the Port Gamble S'Klallams, Quinault and Skokomish. By the second year, a number of others had joined: Squaxin, Lower Elwha Klallam, Quileute, and Shoalwater Bay. By Jan. 2007, the Chehalis Tribe had joined.

This paper addresses one aspect of this project: the pedagogical and e-learning strategies applied to the culturally sensitive curricular redesigns for English Composition 1 and 2 (which involve essay writing and research respectively). These are foundational and required courses for a number of degree programs

and certificates, and the subtle curricular redesigns for both courses address issues of cultural sensitivity and learner focus.

Paper Organization

The paper will begin with a brief pedagogical rationale for the cultural sensitivities approach, with a focus on Native American learners' cultural needs. Then, some course redesign strategies used by the WAOL instructors will be summarized. The paper then focuses on the culturally targeted online course redesign work cycle before addressing the specifics of the two English courses in the redesign.

Brief Pedagogical Rationale

Culture in learning has been discussed in the research literature in different ways - as different expectations, worldviews, assumptions, emotions and comfort zones. It is part of the social landscape that people are habituated to and often becomes invisible until it conflicts with others' expectations. Culture may be learned and unlearned. Adaptive and variable, culture evolves (Nee and Wong, 1985, p. 287, as cited by Aldrich and Waldinger, 1990, p. 125).

Culturally sensitive approaches to learning came into focus in the late 1980s and early 1990s as a response to the growing diversity in US classrooms and "concern over the lack of success of many ethnic/racial minority students despite years of education reform" (Pewewardy and Hammer, Dec. 2003). Here, a culturally relevant instructor may mitigate some of the "social-historical-political realities beyond the school" that may constrain learning (Osbourne, Sept. 1996, p. 291).

Ladson-Billings' theory of culturally relevant pedagogy suggests dynamic "culturally responsive" actions by instructors, regardless of their own cultural backgrounds. There must be a focus on three realms: conceptions of self and others, social relations, and conceptions of knowledge (Autumn 1995, pp. 478 – 481). Ladson-Billings, in a prescient work, suggests that culturally attuned instructors must see themselves as part of the community and believe that the students are capable of academic success; they must see their pedagogy as "art—unpredictable, always in the process of becoming" (Autumn 1995, pp. 478 – 479). They must maintain fluid student-teacher relationships; demonstrate a connectedness with all of the students, and develop a community of learners, among which students learn collaboratively and responsibly (Autumn 1995, p. 480). Culturally responsive instructors also need to view knowledge as "shared, recycled, and constructed," and they must build bridges or scaffolding to facilitate learning; they must use a range of multi-faceted assessments for multiple forms of excellence (Autumn, 1995, p. 481).

Adhering just to mainstream norms in education may be exclusivist and socially myopic. Pewewardy and Hammer observe: "Ultimately, the attitudes, beliefs, and actions of the school must model respect for cultural diversity, celebrate the contributions of diverse groups, and foster understanding and acceptance of racial and ethnic plurality" (Dec. 2003).

The grounds for a culturally sensitive course redesign lie in a deep knowledge of and empathy with the Native American learners and their respective cultures. Instructor sensitivity to the unique needs and personalities of each learner will be critical and possibly even more relevant than generalizations about their cultures. In this case, cultural subject matter experts (SMEs) with ties to TESC were brought in to advise and to critique the course redesign plans and actual course rebuilds.

Online means have been used to teach issues of intercultural competence, respect for others' ways of life, changing perspectives, and the promotion of knowledge about one's own and others' cultures (Liaw, Sept. 2006, pp. 49 – 64). Online learning technologies have been used for adaptive cultural heritage learning (Casalino, D'Atri, Garro, Rullo, Sacca, and Ursino, n.d., p. 224-). Culture may affect learning preferences and styles. Culture may affect perceptions of "time, gender, dress, source of authority, individualism, risk-taking, life goals, relationship of education to community goals, and previous classroom experience" on learning styles (Boiarsky, 2005, p. 48). A Native American journalist sees the Internet as "raising the volume" as a "continuing legacy of storytelling" and a sign of genetic memory for storytelling (Merina, Fall 2005, pp. 32 - 33).

As many peoples, Native American comprise less than 1.5% of the US population. Half live in urban

areas, and fewer than 33% on reservations. Some 550 tribes are federally recognized. As a group, only 15% of Native American students who went on to college achieved a four year degree, with an overall average college graduation rate of 3%, compared to 16% for the general population (Tierney, 1991; Fries, 1987). Kroc, et al. (1995, p.2) found underrepresented Native American learners with graduation rates at 17 percentage points lower than for the white student rate. Of the American Indian students entering university in the mid-1990s, only 24% had completed a pre-college curriculum compared with 56% of all college-bound graduates" (Pavel et al, 1998, as cited by Kirkness and Barnhardt, 2001, p. 3). The U.S. Secretary of Education's Indian Nations at Risk Task Force (1990 and 1991) found that "schools that respect and support a student's language and culture are significantly more successful in educating those students" (Reyhner, 2002 / 2004).

Washington State has one of the main regional concentrations of Native Americans. Two-thirds of Native Americans are found in ten states, including Washington (Shumway and Jackson, Apr. 1995, p. 191). This state's higher education statistics echo the national crisis in Native education. There are 158,940 American Indians and Alaska Natives living in Washington State, according to the U.S. Census. In this state, the large majority of Indian children are failing in all subjects at all grade levels on Washington Assessments of Student Learning tests. At least 32% of Washington Native American students do not complete high school (Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, Washington State). Thirty-six percent of Indian students receive a B.A. within six years of entering a four-year college program. Fifteen percent of degree-seeking Indian students in Washington receive a community college degree within 3 years—and the large majority of Indian students attend community colleges (National Center for Ed Statistics; Washington Higher Education Coordinating Board). Nationally, only 29% of the Indian population is a high school graduate, compared to 79% of whites. Solutions to the challenge of educating a larger number of Native American learners require partnerships, especially in Washington where half the students begin college in a two-year institution, and the transfer and baccalaureate completion rates are low ("Proposal to the Lumina Foundation for Education", Aug. 18, 2006, p. 3).

In using G. Hofstede's cultural dimensions model, Native American cultures—while diverse—may be described through the issues of power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long-term orientation quite differently than mainstream American culture ("Geert Hofstede™ Cultural Dimensions", 2008). "Power distance refers to the unequal distribution of power, prestige and wealth in a culture. Individualism looks at the degree of cultural emphasis on the individual vs. the collective. Masculinity examines the cultural focus on traditionally masculine vs. feminine traits. Uncertainty avoidance looks at the value placed on risk and ambiguity. Long-term orientation examines the focus on short-term vs. long-term forward-thinking values in a particular culture" (Hai-Jew, 2007, p. 8). Native cultures tend to be less tolerant of high power difference differentials; they tend to focus on the collective instead of the individual; they focus on more traditionally feminine values; they are comfortable with ambiguity, and they tend to maintain more of a long-term orientation.

Another way of viewing the cultural divide may be between Western and Non-Western worldviews. Some Native Americans may subscribe more to the Non-Western model, which emphasizes group cooperation and group achievement, "value harmony with nature, time is relative, accept affective expression, (value) extended family, (practice) holistic thinking, (see) religion permeating culture, accept world views of other cultures, (and) (be) socially oriented" (Sanchez and Gunawardena, 1998, p. 51). A subjective and relativist approach to reality may be more common: "Objectivist research has contributed a dimension of insight, but it has substantial limitations in the multidimensional, holistic, and relational reality of the education of Indian people. It is the affective elements - the subjective experience and observations, the communal relationships, the artistic and mythical dimensions, the ritual and ceremony, the sacred ecology, the psychological and spiritual orientations - that have characterized and formed Indigenous education since time immemorial" (Cajete, 1994, p. 20).

Academic competition between learners is discouraged, contrary to many of the confrontational student-competitive approaches. Culturally, Native Americans revere Native art and share a mythical storytelling. Native American students may mask their competence so as not to stand out from others in their communities (Swisher, 1991). Those who do earn their higher education degrees may have a reverse acculturation challenge in reintegrating with their communities.

E.T. Hall's high- and low-context cultures analysis could be understood as also applying to this cross-cultural situation. High context cultures understand information to be an inherent part of a person, so a minimal amount of verbal interchange is needed in human relationships. Because they have experienced stable traditions and history, "age, education, family background and such things that confer status do not change rapidly. In dealing across cultures, high-context cultures become impatient and irritated when low-context people insist on giving them information they do not need. They perceive low-context people as being less credible because silence sends a better message. High-context cultures tend to handle conflict in a more discrete and subtle manner and are predisposed to require learning for the sake of learning. For example, high-context cultures include … Native-American(s)" (Sabin and Ahern, 2002, p. S1C-11).

The concept of an "Indian theory of education" was offered by E. Hampton, a Chickasaw academic from Oklahoma. He listed the twelve 'standards' on which to judge any such effort for creating education for Native Americans: spirituality, service, diversity, culture, tradition, respect, history, relentlessness, vitality, conflict, place, and transformation (1998, p. 19, as cited by Kirkness and Barnhardt, 2001, p. 8).

However, there are detractors to the idea of cultural learning dispositions (Brown, 1979; Chrisjohn & Peters, 1989; Harris, 1985; Shepard, 1982; Stellern, Collins, Gutierrez, & Patterson, 1986; Bland, 1975; Kleinfeld and Nelson, 1991; Stellern, Collins, Gutierrez and Patterson, 1986). Several warned of taking uncritical approaches to the idea of Native American cultural dispositions towards learning (Chrisjohn and Peters, 1989, as cited by Pewewardy, 2002, pp. 22 – 56; McCarty, et al., Mar. 1991, pp. 42 – 59).

Culturally Targeted Online Course Redesigns

Combined with the unique needs of many in Native American communities, the instructors applied concepts of a kind of universal design. The concept is to create barrier-free learning ("Universal Design," Nov. 12, 2007), without cultural hindrances. In the same way that accessibility may be designed into structures, such broad-spectrum solutions help everyone, not just those from a special group. This approach was needed because these courses for the Native learners would be taught to mainstream learners simultaneously. Too much of the cultural tuning may conversely make the curriculum too difficult for non-Native learners.

Augmented curriculum for cultural awareness. One political science course on American government involved a deeper integration of tribal organizations, treaty rights and intergovernmental relations to include the Native American view. One objective was to ensure that students "more effectively understand the unique relationship between federal and state authorities and Native American tribal government." Textbook readings were integrated with Web links and video clips for more rich learning. A Native case study was included in the learning. A group project was designed to address Native American cultural property rights. "Redesigned assignments emphasize relationships between First Peoples and local and national governments" (Enduring Legacies Course Redesign Report, 2007). Here, the instructor strove to create more cultural relevance for Native learners.

Scaffolding for disadvantaged learners. Other courses humanized the technology for students unaccustomed to computer technologies by offering extra credit assignments to encourage familiarity and facility with the LMS and virtual learning environment. Developmental learning add-ons to mitigate the preparedness of some of the less prepared learners was designed, such as through the building of a glossary of terms, incremental assignments to help students build their larger projects step-by-step, simplified languages and terminology were used. One math teacher worked out a number of solutions for the learners to study, learn from and master. A biology instructor designed at-home "web labs" that would allow learners to buy the materials at local grocery stores and to pair up with other learners to actuate these experiments, for lowered cost barriers.

Promoting Native American scholarship. An anthropology professor used readings from Native American writer-scholars. She included more work that took place within the learners' individual tribes. Her assignments targeted issues within the tribal communities (Enduring Legacies Course Redesign Report, 2007).

Communal learning. An art instructor integrated more Washington State Native American art into her course and emphasized experiential and communal learning by using forums for student-to-student discussions. She built studio critiques or "visual evaluations of the student's and peer's work(s)". She strove to make the course "more culturally sensitive and relevant to all the multicultural aspects of contemporary society". She encouraged research topics along the lines of which indigenous people's works affected the works of modern artists, to emphasize the "fusion of materials, formal elements, and contextual themes that artist deal with on a daily basis." She avoided artificial "subjective hierarchies" sometimes used in the definition of art. Likewise, a music instructor redesigned his music course to reflect more Non-Western culture. He adapted his adopted textbook to Native American resources and Nonwestern music sites (Enduring Legacies Course Redesign Report, 2007).

Researching and learning. The course instructors all researched more about Native American studies and history. One music instructor wrote: "Also, I have been actively exploring, reading, researching American Indian music…examining its influence on Western Art music" (Enduring Legacies Course Redesign Report, 2007).

Defined virtual spaces. A math instructor defined the e-learning paths in her course more clearly and offered a richer range of assignments ("Search the internet (sic) for information about any mathematical topic of your choice such as how math was used in an early culture such as a Native American tribe or any other culture of your choice" (Enduring Legacies Course Redesign Report, 2007).

Listening to learners. The instructors also solicited student feedback ("Student Feedback: What They Say about their Courses," 2006). Many designed integrated feedback loops in their online courses to capture learner experiences in order to make the courses more culturally sensitive.

The Courses in the Redesign

English Composition I and II went through this cultural sensitivity rebuild process. While a redesign could suggest a thorough change, the limitations to this project prohibited that. The Native American cohorts taking these courses would be only a few students, or a total of maybe less than a dozen each quarter. That number would be too small to "carry" an entire course section. This means that non-Native American learners would be in the section, and their academic needs should also be considered. The shared course model of WAOL meant that these team-created courses would have to meet the academic requirements of 34 community colleges.

Whatever curricular changes are made should broaden and promote learning across a wider swath of the learning public. The changes cannot be so culture-specific or explicit that it becomes exclusivist. The "universal design" tenets and practices would have to be followed. Course redesigns could not fundamentally affect the textbook selection, main curricular build, quarter-length scheduling, main assignments, and grading structure. In other words, these course redesigns would have to function implicitly on the margins—even though they had not been revised systematically for a number of years.

The course revision build would occur in a master classroom, isolated from learner access. Once the build was complete, it would go through an alpha testing phase with the critique of cultural subject matter experts (SMEs). Then, after revision, it would go straight into "beta testing" with student feedback and insights. Another round of revisions would follow the first quarter of testing with live learners.

The work progressed in general in the following way:

1. Cultural Immersion and Formal / Informal Intercultural Learning
2. Initial Development of Culturally Sensitive Course Redesign Plan
3. Syllabus Revision, Grade book Revision
4. Creation of Digital Learning Objects
5. Course Configuration
6. Uploading of Materials / Annotations (to the LMS)
7. Subject Matter Expert (SME) Critique and Feedback
8. Further Revision (alpha testing)

9. Final Report to Supervisors on the Project
10. Going Live with Learners
11. LMS (Learning Management System) Data mining
12. Further Revision (beta testing)
13. Learner Performance Results and Learner Feedback (Hai-Jew, Culturally Targeted Online Course Redesign Work Cycle, 2007)
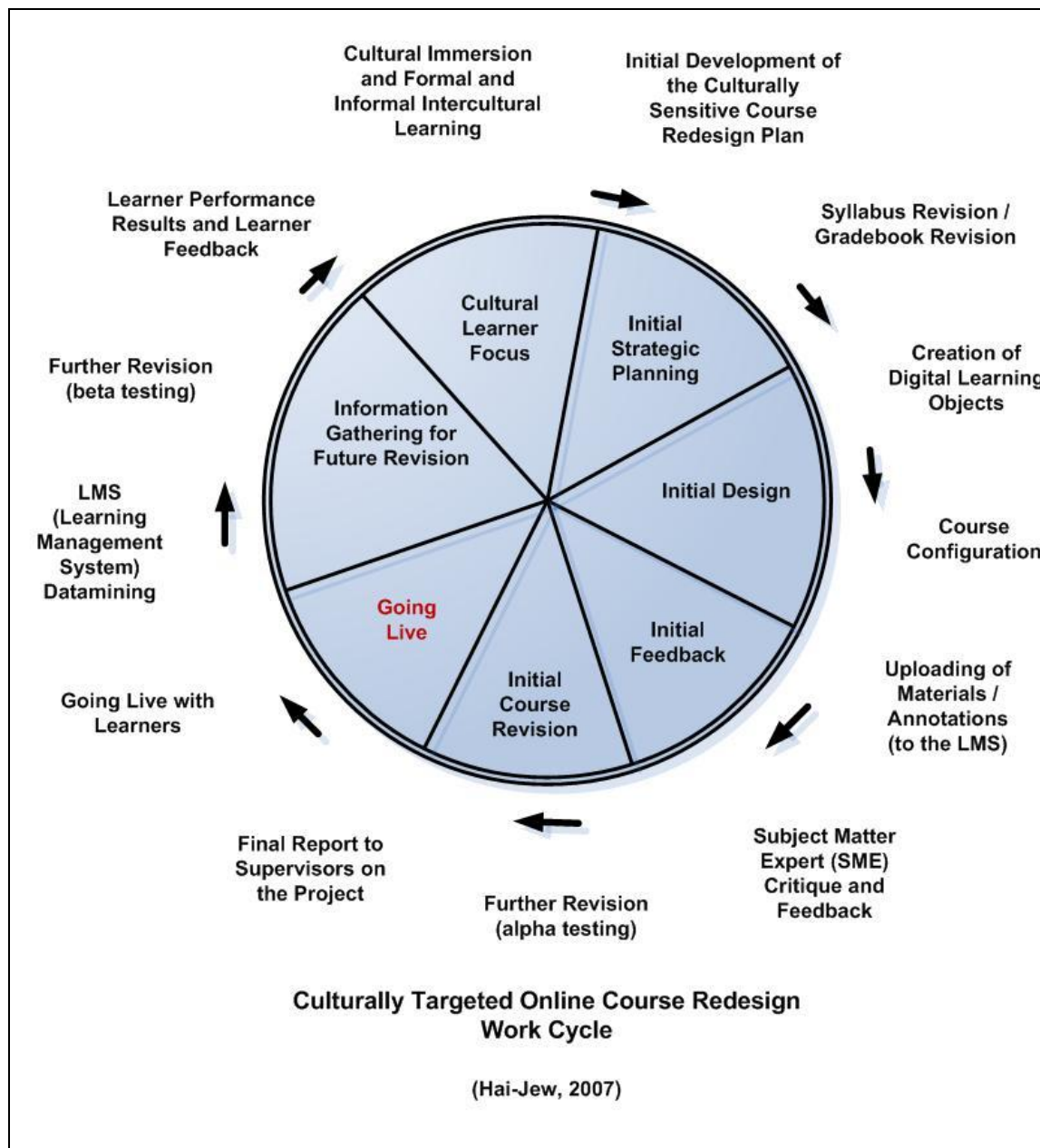

Figure 1: The culturally sensitive course redesigns followed a general work progression.

Defining a Course Revamping

The redesign approaches then are applied to a course revamping or retrofitting. In broad terms, this relates to an updating of the pedagogical approaches. This may involve the application of new e-learning technologies. New approaches regarding the design and delivery may add value to the learning and make it more applicable to learners. Learning objects may be integrated more tightly with the defined e-learning paths. A greater range of ways to move through the curricular materials may be created.

Scaffolding for both amateurs and experts in the course domain would enhance the accessibility of the course for a wider range of potential learners. (Some of these learning experiences will be mandatory, and others will be opt-in.) Course resources may be annotated for the other instructors who may be inheriting the course.

Course revamping should optimally also be informed by learner feedback about their needs and what would enhance their achievements. The inclusion of former learners' works (with their legal copyright releases) would help norm quality based on the reality of what learners are actually producing instead of a defined normative ideal.

Accessibility retrofitting may involve the inclusion of verbatim transcriptions for sound files and video files. Files may be versioned from Word and slideshow files into portable document files for easier accessibility. The technological strand is a part of online learning and should be considered an integral part of the course revamping.

Some possible re-branding of a course may be helpful. This would enhance the ecology of the online learning environment and to make the space more coherent about the learning and the professional values of the field.

Some Cultural Assumptions in Relation to English and Writing

Place-bound learners. One of the assumptions is that the reservation-based learners are place-bound. Many not only were single heads of household with children but also had full-time jobs (often within their tribes), in addition to their college studies. This suggests a requirement for distance access to courses and on-reservation activities for face-to-face (F2F) endeavors.

Accessibility. Another angle related to the place-bound learners is that most learners have dial-up access because of the lack of broadband wiring on many reservations. An occasional winter storm often knocks out electricity access for days given some of the tenuous infrastructure on some reservations. Any online course redesigns would have to take into consideration accessibility and digital file size and design strategies regarding video delivery.

Remediation. For various basic academic skills, many Native American students need remediation because of the poor quality of teaching and learning (and often low-resource conditions) that they received prior to enrolling in college. This need applies both to urban and rural learners, non-reservation based as well as reservation-based. Academic preparedness, of course, applies to a majority of conventional university students as well. A curricular build needs to scaffold for learner preparedness and academic success as well as to support an internal locus of control / sense of self-efficacy.

Cultural considerations. The cultural considerations for these course redesigns involved a complex mix of understandings of Native American learners' living situations, worldviews, academic needs, understood values systems, rituals, and motivating topics of interest (for writing and research). Their communal orientation came into play in terms of assignment designs that emphasized cooperative work and support for community-based writing and research topics.

Technological accessibility. Many reservation-based learners lack access to computers in their homes. Many of those who do have computers have only dial-up Internet access from their homes. This suggests that the accessibility design must take into consideration this aspect. Digital learning objects will need to be updated to avoid the "slow fires" of disintegration based on updated software programs (many of which may not be able to read versions from a few software cycles back).

Lowering unnecessary costs. The statistics about Native American learners' economic lives show many living below poverty. The costs of college tuition, books and supplies may be highly prohibitive. Part of these redesigns involved using electronic book resources and essays (many from published textbook anthologies) archived online to save on costs.

Acculturation into academia. The course rebuilds also involved awareness of the cross-cultural issues between academia, mainstream Native American cultures, and online learning assumptions (Web 2.0,

open-source). The awareness of such challenges led to cross-cultural and cross-values sharing moderated by the course annotations, learning activities, and informed instruction. Surfacing the various cultural understandings may enhance learner comfort and offer a language and openness to talk about their own perceptions and concerns. Defining ontologies in particular fields may help new learners more quickly grasp relationships and understandings.

Building for instructor transferability. Any course that is a shared one (inheritable by other instructors) needs to be adaptable. Given that there is little courseware space for instructor guidebooks, the learning itself must be common in the stated field, up-to-date, flexible and pedagogically transparent. If the value in the learning is not clear from the beginning, then the course adoption may be more difficult. Assignments must be able to be "versioned" for different learning contexts. The design must be neutral and generally non-political in order not to be off-putting for various instructors and their respective learners.

The Teaching / Facilitation of the Online Learning for Native American Learners

The course redesign did not only refer to the "static" curricular build elements of the courses but also in how the courses would be taught.

Connecting people. The way the redesigned courses would be taught should align with the cultural sensitivity concepts. Among some Native American learners, they talk about "checking heart." This refers to their understanding of the motives of others towards them, in particular those of their instructors. If benevolence is not found while checking heart, learners will not take the risks necessary to learn because they may not feel sufficiently free from potential harm. This suggests that the instructor's telepresence -his or her digital embodiment, voice and video and still photo depictions, and interactions in the online classroom - should align with his or her person. This also would suggest that learners should be encouraged to bring their full selves into this online space in terms of their telepresences as well. They should be welcomed and supported in a sense of belonging. E-mails sent out at important junctures to learners (beginning, midterm and the end-of-term) may encourage stronger course retention and more participation.

Building community. Building a sense of community requires the development of a shared sense of trust and open communications. Culturally, Native American learners tend to be drawn to cooperation more than competition, so shared small group tasks may be more conducive to some types of learning. Some Native American learners also feel awkward having attention directed to them, so instructors should not create such "calling on" situations synchronously or asynchronously. The mainstream American focus on individualism for topic selection, and the focus on the first-person point-of-view in essay writing may be awkward for some Native American learners, so there should be sensitivity and flexibility about these issues.

Facilitating group work online requires a range of skills given the difficulty in coordination, assignments, guidance, learning support, and assessment. However, The Enduring Legacies Reservation-Based Project educators (and administrators) who work with Native American students have found that this may be efficacious to promote their learning online.

A more relativistic sense of time. The sense of time that many Native American students share may be less driven or deadline-centered. Instructors may offer more of a flexible deadline schema. Instead of daily deadlines, maybe the closing of forums at week's end would be helpful. Extending deadlines based on the unique family, health and other challenges of the learners may be more flexible and pro-learning. However, there also need to be limits to deadline extensions—as these may be abused to the point where a learner may not reasonably catch up with his / her peers.

Protection of learner interests. "Learner interests" may be interpreted in a variety of ways in freshman composition writing and research writing courses. Of course, their quality of learning is important, so they may have transferable knowledge and skills into their future courses, careers and lives. Their ability to discover and use their own voices would be important, which would suggest their ability to choose writing topics that are socially, communally (tribally) and personally relevant (and have learning value). Their

empowerment of speaking out in the larger world also is critical. Another aspect of learner interests would be their protection in terms of copyright and publishing.

Range of assessments. People with a range of different learning styles may assess differently based on the assessment instrument. Being open to different learner interpretations of the work would be helpful. As mentioned before, giving learners a wide sampler of prior student work (with the proper copyright releases) would be helpful, too. There may be more connections between learners' expressed ideas and formal projects than the occasionally dry writing in academic texts.

Encouragement of help-seeking behaviors. Learners' help-seeking behaviors should be encouraged for enhancement of their learning. Research has found that those who have fewer academic skills tend not to use the resources provided to them. Building motivations to access and use such resources are an important part of curricular rebuilds. "As described earlier, when students in these studies were provided with helpful resources (informational and strategic) and given the freedom to use them, many elected to utilize little or nothing. As this suggests, learners may have access to relevant information or strategies but may not choose to employ them. Because strategies as we have operationally defined them, are characterized by carefully planned and intentional use, their susceptibility to motivational effects may be rather considerable" (Alexander and Judy, Winter 1988, p. 396). Lifelong and discovery learning suggest that learner help-seeking behaviors would be a critical aspect to that.

Another assessment approach could be to offer incremental assignments that coalesce to create the larger multi-week or term projects. For example, smaller fine-focused assignments may be designed for the writing, essay organization, resource evaluation and citations for the term research paper. This allows more feedback to learners and support for their larger projects in incremental ways. This helps learners focus on the building of specific skills. This also may allow more customized and unique feedback for each learner and more constructive interactions with the instructor.

Redesigned rewards structure. With the additional assignments and opt-in resources, the grading rewards structure was also redesigned to more fully represent the value in learner interactivity (higher points) and support of each other. Extra credit was added to provide incentives for some of the optional value-added learning. Learners who published their works in their respective student or community newspapers earned extra credit points. This new rewards structure encouraged deeper learning and also moving beyond the virtual classroom into the wider world of publishing and sharing.

A Virtual Community of Online Course Redevelopers

The faculty from various fields working on these course redesigns did not work in a social vacuum even though they were separated by distance. WAOL established an "open house" of courses for mutual sharing, including the creation of open guest accounts. A conference was hosted by TESC in the early summer of 2006 and another in Summer 2007 to train faculty in the writing of Native American case studies.

One of the goals of the collaboration was clearly to support each other's work. Another was to collaborate around the goals of interconnectedness between the learning and transference. For example, the research and library course was linked to the various academic projects from the areas of anthropology, history, and political science. The premise is that connectivity between the courses would create a sense of alignment in the course studies and better transference of reinforced skills.

The pedagogical theories applied to the course redesigns should lead to a sense of alignment and coherence between the learning objects. A clear learner experience and e-learning path should exist from the pre-week through the entire term and into any opt-in post-week learning. The focus should be both specific at the learning object level and broad at the course level.

The Selected Courses

Understanding the original intentions of the initial lead instructors of both courses and analyzing their digital artifacts and structural builds may form a stronger basis for the redesigns. The idea is to align with the thinking in the respective fields but also to offer some alternate narratives and options. Both of these

courses were built by lead instructors with the advisement of colleagues under course development grants in the late 1990s.

EC1 focuses on a number of learning objectives, mostly around the introduction of various rhetorical modes of nonfiction essay writing, paragraphing, organizational strategies, and the development of author voice.   There is an early introduction of analytical reading and the concepts of objective and factual summaries vs. analytical evaluations of various writings.

EC2 was built around contemporary global literature. It adds academic research, which involves research strategies, various schools of literary criticism, Modern Language Association (MLA) citation methods, strategies for writing long papers, and other elements.   The learning outcomes from both courses are fairly well defined for the respective colleges for transfer, and the skill sets expected from both have clear definitions in various master course outlines.   These learning objectives must be left intact in any redesign, but new learning may be added to enhance the courses.   A cultural redesign also strives to make the existing learning more accessible for a wider range of learners.   The original course was built around the use of contemporary international literature as a basis for the research writing.

Redesign Strategies: English Composition I

English Composition I involves a reading and a writing strand. The readings expose readers to a range of ideas and topics. The learners explore a variety of individual and public voices. They learn various ways to summarize and analyze college-level readings. They acquire new vocabulary. Students form a sense of open-mindedness to others' ideas. The writing strand emphasizes self-expression and the discovery of a personal voice. Learners practice pre-writing, outlining and organization, thesis-writing, various literary techniques, point-of-vied, proper essay writing semantics, and empowerment in building a public voice.

Online collection of contemporary essays. For English Composition I, an online reader of a variety of contemporary non-fiction essays was created with live URL links. Learners were assigned to choose a total of 12 essays throughout the quarter to summarize and analyze—to enhance reading analysis skills and the differentiation between objectivity and subjectivity. The URLs were broken up by rhetorical mode and sequenced into the existing curriculum. This was to enhance reading comprehension and analytical abilities. This was also added to address an oversight in the earlier curricular build, which left the course without a reader and only a few brief essay readings. The assignments highlighted socio-cultural and historical assumptions underlying the various literary works and therefore raised the ability of learners to see others' cultural ideas, and more directly, their own. There were efforts to avoid inaccurate, commercial, or fly-by-night sites. Rather, the focus was on quality sites which offered just the essays without excessive or unnecessary add-ons.

Skills development.   Different assignments were created for the students to focus on lead-ins and conclusions. More time was spent on rhetorical modes and outlines. Writing strategies were emphasized not only in the curricular materials but also in the feedback of learner works. The emphasis on extensive revision was brought to the fore, in part to counter amateur tendencies to go with just the first draft.

Clearly defined policies on civility, plagiarism, and other relevant guidelines were created, particularly given the academic nuances of these issues. A slideshow on how to annotate readings for helpful recollection and later analytical writing was designed and written. A clearer explanation of the course's pedagogical theory - to enhance the metacognition of learners - was created, with an emphasis on study strategies and approaches. A scaffolding piece on how to learn online was included in the pre-week, to help learners who are new to this mode of e-learning.

Some other resources defined terms with greater clarity, such as defining non-fiction vs. fiction writing. Differentiating between facts and opinions was addressed in one slideshow lecture. More elaboration on the different genres of writing was included. The use of rhetorical mode forms to create a piece of organized writing was built onto the course; learners were introduced to both writing samples and strategies based around narration, comparison and contrast, description, definition, analogy or extended comparison, collage, division and classification, causal analysis, and other modes. Using more effective thesis statements was included.

Audience analysis as a starting off point for writing a paper was introduced as a strategy. One lecture strove to show how the different stages of the writing process fit together. And at the conclusion an e-portfolio analysis was included at the end, to provide a way for learners to analyze their own work and thoughtfully approach their development.

Wider topic ranges. While memoir writing was accepted, the learners could also go to the other objective extreme and choose less individual-focused writing topics. Instructors would benefit from further readings into Native American history, literature, politics, culture, health, and other elements—in order to be conversant on some of these issues.

Promoting learner interactions. The interactive curricular build encouraged learners to read and critique each other's works and to respond to each other in every forum. The idea here was to broaden their sense of possibilities in work and to learn from each other's writing strategies.

Research transition for English Composition II. A folder focused on research as the transition piece into the next course, English Composition II. This involved a segment on research strategies, the citation of primary sources, how to use online databases, and also how to use libraries. Some resources on Modern Language Association (MLA) citation methods were created.

Other learner works. Additional annotation was added to the student essay sampler, with insights on style and writing strategies. These annotations also enhanced the accessibility of their works, and reminders were included in the Announcements about this resource. Current students were encouraged to write quality works, with a perk as possible inclusion of their works in this small in-class repository (with their copyright release).

The essay assignments will connect more clearly to community (two of the current four assignments already relate to community), especially the evaluative first essay and the research final essay.

Redesign Strategies: English Composition II

The premises of the English Composition II course redesign were to strengthen learners' understanding of information, the different valuations of researched and discovered information, its use in research, professional research citation, and research writing. The ownership of information and their de facto ownership of their own writing was also an important element. The goal was to empower learners as authors and researchers.

EC2's focus on literature may be off-putting to learners of different cultural backgrounds because so much of literature is based out of cultural world views and time periods. So one adjustment was that learners were allowed a wider range of author selection for their term projects. Learners need a sense of comfort regarding their reading milieu especially given the relative rarity of reading in today's society. More "scaffolding" would make visible the cultural assumptions behind the literary works, the authors' lives and times, the values of the times, and potential embedded worldviews.

Pre-week transition materials and tasks. An opt-in pre-week folder was set up in the Assignments area. This included transitional lectures on issues of ethics in research, research strategies, ways to write longer research papers, and schools of literary critique.

Updated learning resources. Some elements were revised for better quality learning and up-to-datedness. These included "Tips for Organizing Longer Research Papers," "Schools of Literary Critique" (with a new explanatory graphic), "Avoiding Logical Fallacies," and other related handouts / lectures in EC2. These resources were created for easy downloading and learner comprehension, with the hopes that learners would use these as resources into the future post-course.

Visual literacy. One fundamental change involved a visual literacy element. This lecture addressed the inclusion of graphics, drawings, maps, tables, charts, graphs, diagrams, timelines, photographs, and other elements, in a broad way. This encouraged the examination of visually delivered information. This covered the need to have captioning and labeling as well as clear citations in the Works Cited list. This addressed what visuals may convey in a paper in terms of learning and memory. Also, some principles of

including graphics in a research paper were included. The idea was to include more multi-sensory modes in learning and in the handling of information.

A fundamental change came with the addition of a visual literacy resource. Students occasionally will drop images into their papers, but these are often done willy-nilly and without a larger sensibility about how images may convey, summarize, highlight, or communicate information in rich ways. This touches on "other ways of knowing" promoted in multicultural learning.

Coherent research strategies. Learners often do not have a coherent research strategy, so they often end up with highly disparate works that may be unrelated to their original pursuit. A strategy lecture covered a more coherent applied way to approach research, both primary and secondary.

Another slideshow lecture addressed tools that may be used to organize and present longer works - précis, subheadings, transitions, and others. Given the difficulty of in-text citation (both in-sentence and parenthetical) for many learners, this was addressed. The relation between the in-text citations and the Works Cited list was also emphasized. Other common errors - such as how to cite one author with multiple works in a paper - were addressed. New authors also have difficult times differentiating their own writing from their cited writing, so a new resource was created about when to quote, when to paraphrase and when to summarize.

Opt-in group assignment choice. An opt-in group assignment for the third critical essay was created which would give learners a chance to communicate and interact with peers in the writing of one essay with a shared grade. This essay allows for use of personal first-hand reader-responses to a piece of literature.

Addressing common domain fallacies. The embedded schools of literary critique from the initial course design can be quite difficult to grasp. Many students assert that authors write a work to fit a particular literary critique tool and do not seem to realize that all literary critique tools can be applied to all literary works—with differing outcomes. Authors may write a work that may seem conducive to certain critique, but they do not generally write works to fit a certain school of critique. Others will reverse engineer a literary work and make assumptions about authors' lives, even without any factual support. Addressing logical fallacies and differentiating facts and opinions are crucial.

The author's hand in research writing. New research writers also need support in understanding the importance of the author hand—originality, worldview, clear values in selecting research—in the writing of research papers. Amateurs and those from other cultures seem to be comfortable letting a research paper merely be a listing of ideas from other resources, and they forget the importance of actual authorship.

A passive mitigation. A more passive mitigation involved setting up a learner lounge, a space just for learners without instructor presence or intervention. However, just the mere existence of this space often is insufficient to encourage learner participation, so designing and placing some resources in this lounge may be conducive to learner use and forum presence.

Early Results

The course redesigns have not themselves undergone rigorous testing for learning efficacy. Anecdotal support has been positive from the learners who've taken the courses. Part of The Enduring Legacies Reservation-Based Project involves regular and constant support and monitoring of the learners.

Conclusion

Planning for when to revise and update the curricular materials of both redesigned courses will be critical in maintaining the quality of the curriculum. This would suggest that having clear documentation of the decision-making for the current rebuild, a definition of the applied cultural principles, and documentation about the technological standards and software used, will be critical for later work.

The work of retrofitting courses for cultural sensitivities may be seen as a larger part of making the courses more accessible, albeit along cultural lines. Some strategies involve the following:

- surfacing cultural differences in a safe learning environment
- creating a range of assignment options for learners
- scaffolding the learning for accessibility, technologies, developmental learning, and costs
- affirming learners' abilities and experienced lives
- offering student work samplers for deeper peer learning
- creating opportunities for the development of learning communities, group work, dyadic work, and interactivity among learners
- considering learner budgets in the course design
- promoting the scholarship of the learners' works
- soliciting learner feedback for more learner-responsive cultural course redesigns
- (and) exhibiting instructional flexibility (to some degree) regarding time and student work.

The application of universal design aims to improve the cultural accessibility and intercultural understandings of all learners taking the e-learning courses. In this paper, the focus was on English Composition I and English Composition II, with a focus on Native American learners through The Enduring Legacies Reservation-Based Project. The learning and general principles from these course rebuilds may apply to other course retrofitting situations from a cultural angle.

Acknowledgments

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