Respecting Difference:
Developing Governance of International Online Student Collaboration

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Abstract

The paper reports preliminary results of action research in the development of ethos and governance arrangements of an international online collaboration space, CABWEB that has been created for the Collaboration Across Borders project. Our theoretical motivation is that the governance of online learning communities is a practical necessity in such a cross-institutional space, and offers opportunities for enlarging the universe of discourse. Culture, language and pedagogy are all important in this context. Our first cycle of action research has revealed interesting findings that will inform future planned interventions and our support for communication contexts where participants can develop inter-cultural communication competences. We see the CABWEB governance as an ongoing and organic process which should take into account intentional and emergent outcomes, thus employing pro-active and responsive means of development. Development of inter-cultural competences through true dialogue (where each may emerge thinking differently) is key, and may present challenges. We have broadened the scope of the guidelines we offer, yet seek to express them even more simply and clearly. We have found that it is important to offer opportunities for dialogue that emerges from participants' sharing of aspects of their own cultures. Our guidelines should promote ethical, pedagogic and cultural behaviours as part of the CABWEB project of enlarging the universe of discourse. This is a process that will take time and require enrolment and engagement of students and tutors from across the world.

1   Introduction

Educational virtual communities (VC) present opportunities and challenges to users: opportunities from their potential for co-construction of knowledge, and challenges from the impact of reduced social cues in online communication. Introducing an international dimension amplifies both opportunities and challenges presented by inter-cultural communication. We explore the role of governance in the development of ethos in educational VCs, using theories of computer-mediated communication, virtual communities and inter-cultural relations, within the context of a European project, Collaborative Across Borders (CAB), which offers an independent online space (CABWEB) for student and tutor communities. Such governance is an under-researched area, presenting novel issues arising from international, intercultural aspects, the variety of stakeholders and the extra-institutional setting of CABWEB.

The aims identified for the Action Research reported in this paper are to contribute to an understanding of such governance arrangements, building on a framework already developed for use in the setting of a single institution. We intended to explore the use of specific sets of guidelines that are clear, supportive of harmonious communication and based on ethical principles broadly acceptable to people from different nations; and to offer guidance to tutors in their roles in the governance of learning communities in an international or multi-cultural context. The UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance (*UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, 1995) has provided an external framework for the exploration of an inclusive ethos for this community, within which governance can emerge and be sustained. A literature review is presented in Section 2, covering Culture in Computer-Mediated Communication, Governance of Virtual Communities and International Ethics. In Section 3, we justify and outline our method and ethical framework for the research. Section 4 describes the events and artifacts we designed for our intervention, followed by an analysis of the discussions in Section 5, and conclusions in the final section.

2   Literature Review
2.1   Understanding Culture in Computer-mediated Communication

Culture is a notion used widely in Sociology in the understanding of various groups of people within society: diverse groups differentiated by nation, language, age, etc. Culture is often characterised as consisting of values or abstract ideals held by the group; the norms that they follow; and the material goods that they create, including language and

technology (Giddens, 1993). Culture can be regarded as a given, a fixed property of that group such as "the English like queueing", or "Germans are precise in their use of terminology" which may be offered to help us understand common behaviours in a foreign country but does tend towards cultural stereotypes, blinding us to diversity within national groups. In our lives, we find that the actual groups in which we interact do not map on to simplistic cultural groupings, for example so-called ethnic characteristics may not advance understanding in a multi-cultural society where values, behaviours and attitudes are too complex to be explained away by cultural stereotypes. Semiotic notions of culture from the anthropological literature offer an alternative perspective when considering the emergent cultural context of CABWEB (Geertz, 1973: 14)

This has led us to view CABWEB as having the potential to enlarge the universe of human discourse and to consider in our research the ways in which this has taken place. We see this as something that has to be understood in terms of individual behaviours and competences, as well as group or community aspects. Communities that take cooperative action and share resources are characterized by a focus on community control and adjustment to environmental situation, (Cherny, 1999). The social dilemma literature identifies the tension between individual and collective rationality; whereby behaviour benefiting an individual may disadvantage the group, and the group may establish norms that disadvantage individuals, sometimes called "the tragedy of the commons" (M. Smith & Kollock, 1998).

Social network studies take an individual perspective on communities, using the term private network community to describe a group of people with the common tie of the person, unique to that individual though others may share large sections of it. Strong ties are often found between family members or close work colleagues and are important for confirmation within the group or community whereas weak ties play a part in the dissemination of ideas between groups or communities (Hamman, 2001; Haythornthwaite, 2002).

Virtual Communities (communities whose interactions are conducted, at least in part, by CMC) offer another form of tie, the latent tie, a tie not yet activated by social interaction but for which there is a technical connection, such as in an online address book or user list. CMC can enable community members to convert these latent ties into weakly active ties (Haythornthwaite, 2002). As part of our social learning, we all participate in what Wenger calls Communities of Practice (some of which CoPs are VCs), which are characterised by *joint enterprise,* a collective understanding of what the community is about; *mutuality*, interactions and ensuing norms; and *shared repertoire*, the communal knowledge resources (language, artefacts, stories, etc.) produce by the community. CoPs offer opportunities to convert opportunities to convert weak ties to strong ties and latent ties to weak ties. Wenger identifies the potential for learning of what he calls boundary interactions, since they expose us to competences that are foreign to us (Wenger, 2000).

2.2 Governance of Online Communities

Dictionary definitions of governance relate to the action, the function, the manner or method of governing, the conduct of life, and discreet behaviour. Governance is a concept that is applied increasingly to governments, national and international institutions, large firms and even online communities, where governance is usually perceived as being self-organising (Graham, 2003; Kim, 2000).

Voluntary associations tend to promote the concerns of their members rather than having economic interests, whose resources are mainly the members themselves and the knowledge they share (Desanctis, 2003). In contrast with formal organisations, members can more easily join and leave. They do exercise procedural authority, i.e. the incentives, social norms and power, and the means by which the collective of members exercise power and make decisions: indeed, knowledge about this is one the key knowledge resources. Formal organisations exercise not only procedural authority but also institutional authority that deals with the recruitment of members to an organisation, assignment of roles, government of membership conditions and of expression. It is this which Steinmueller sees as the distinction between a voluntary association and a formal institution (Steinmueller, 2002). In the corporate setting, governance is seen as

> "the creation and implementation of processes adopted by a properly authorized and constituted board seeking to optimize the return to shareholders whilst satisfying the legitimate expectations of stakeholders who include employees, suppliers and customers as well as members of those communities with whom their business activities interface" (Cassidy, 2003).

Formal organisations who recognise that they should satisfy the legitimate expectations of this broad range of stakeholders will seek to learn from voluntary association internal or external to the organisation, as was found in the case of the European Technology Transfer Commission where a self-organised association was able to influence the strategic direction of the ETTC (M. Y. Smith & Stacey, 1997).

An investigation of the governance of online educational discussion fora resulted in a framework that can be used to develop online discussion guidelines (Bell & Heinze, 2004). This framework covers (institutional) ethos, non-negotiable guidelines decreed by the institution, negotiable guidelines that may be developed by, say, a group of students, pedagogic guidelines issued by the tutor, and finally some criteria that may be applied to the guidelines themselves. Any guidelines produced within an institutional setting, such as a university, exist within a complex web of policies and procedures that may be largely unknown and invisible to students but invoked when serious problems occur. As such, artifacts such as guidelines may be regarded as enablers of harmonious and effective educational discussion, or as constraints to "free speech" or conversation or learning (Bell, Heinze, & Ferris, 2004). Governance may be better understood from a process perspective – what do people DO in online educational discussions?

An organisation that aspires to a very broad scope is the United Nations, whose aims include the prevention of war and maintenance of peace, seeing the promotion of tolerance and international cooperation in problem-solving as part of the means to this end. The Declaration of Principles on Tolerance was adopted and signed in Paris by UNESCO's 185 Member States on 16 November 1995, as part of the Year of Tolerance, 1995. In Article 1 of the UNESCO Principles of Tolerance, 'tolerance' is characterized as "an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others" (*UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, 1995). Thus we can exercise our own rights and freedoms as long as they do not compromise the rights and freedoms of others and we can expect the same of others when we are all observing the Principle of Tolerance. This is easier said than done, and the Principles expand on how the observance of these principles may be promoted, underlining the roles of :
• Communication media in facilitating open dialogue and discussion (Article 3)
• Formal and non-formal education in the promotion of tolerance and the shaping of attitudes of openness, mutual listening and solidarity (Article 4) (*UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance*, 1995).

2.3 International Ethics
Ethics is the study of morality that helps an individual decide whether their behaviour is right or wrong. For many, ethics are embedded within their religious beliefs, and ethics may also be used to guide professional practice, to theorise about the route to peace, or to de-escalate conflict. From a pragmatic perspective, Evanoff has identified the function of ethics as assisting in people's interaction with each other and with the world. Ethics and norms are organic, being adapted to changes in environmental and in social practices as part of an ongoing process of construction. Thus this adaptation has elements of intentional (re-)construction in response to perceived inadequacies of existing norms, but also a bottom-up emergence of behaviours that become accepted or proscribed without being "written down" (Evanoff 2004).. This constructive approach leaves space in which to develop a multicultural ethos, our long-term aspiration on CABWEB.

By defining ethos in terms of the Aristotelian notion of invention, St Amant characterises ethos as being something that takes place over an even shorter time frame. He gives the example of the 'ethos' that a presenter creates course of a presentation—something that causes the audience to find that presenter worthy of being listened to and believed (St. Amant, 2002). Historically, ethos is associated with communication, indeed is a dominant factor in inter-cultural rhetorical communication, but this ethos can be interpreted flexibly by participants, e.g. their interpretations may differ for cultural reasons (Okabe, 1983), or for psychological reasons. The cultural norms we initially bring with us to inter-cultural encounters tell us how to deal with people from our own culture, not with people from another culture whose norms are different (Evanoff 2004). It is neither likely nor even desirable for individuals from different cultures to come to share understandings or values but, through dialogue and critical reflection, they may come to establish common ground where they integrate positive aspects of both traditions into a broader conceptual framework. Evanoff claims that inter-cultural interactions can generate new ethical norms, rather than seeking to establish universal moral truths (Evanoff, 2004).

We do not seek a rule-based ethics but one that includes *phronesis* or practical judgement that is shaped by experience, and thus we may exhibit different yet morally legitimate 'judgement calls' according to our experiences

(Ess, 2004). In our understanding of the ethics of CMC, Ess encourages us to go beyond approaches that emphasise control of harmful behaviour towards the use of CMC as a means towards greater human excellence, perhaps on new scales and levels. This is orienting computer ethics towards culture and communication as a form of virtue ethics (Western) that also moves towards becoming "exemplary persons" (junzi – Confucian).

> "… at the same time, this form of computer ethics emphasizes the need to design and implement CMC technologies in ways that sustain and enhance diverse cultural values – in part by requiring that users of a genuinely world-wide web develop a cultural- and communicative literacy that allows them to comfortably negotiate among a diversity of culturally-distinct moral communities" (Ess, 2004).

3   Research Method

In this paper, we adopt a heterogeneous approach to understanding computer-mediated communication (CMC), seeing relations as social and technical (Law & Bijker, 1992), and socio-technical ventures such as CMC as exhibiting interpretive flexibility, i.e. those involved can interpret the technology, and the communication it mediates, very differently. This has significant implications for our research methodology, requiring us to capture those different interpretations, and to take account of them in our analysis.

For practitioners and researchers in education, Action Research (AR) is an attractive research method for the following reasons: it is very practical and offers a good combination of practical and theoretical enquiry; it provides a framework of continuous improvement that is well-suited to organisational change; and it is a means of generating and testing theory (Baskerville, 1999). For our purposes, it provides a framework within which we can develop an ethos for CABWEB, and generate knowledge in accordance with our interpretivist approach. AR has been widely used in educational settings (Goodyear, 1999; Zuber-Skerritt, 1992); and specifically, Salmon used AR in a closely-related research area to develop a model for teaching and learning online through computer mediated communication (Salmon, 2002).

Our first step in establishing an ethos for CABWEB was to establish ethical guidelines for practice and research on the CABWEB portal. As well as the research reported here, there are pieces of research being undertaken, thus we started by establishing the following principles, to be adhered to by anyone conducting research or evaluation on the CABWEB portal

"1.   Clarify the nature and purpose of the research/evaluation. The research objectives should be stated clearly to the participants in the network or space in which the research is being done, and reported to the CABWEB administrator.

2.   Confidentiality – all data should be held securely and the confidentiality of individuals be maintained.

3.   Anonymity – Researchers should seek to maintain the anonymity of the research subjects in their publications. Such publications should be reported to the CABWEB administrator for listing on the CAB web site.

4.   Obtain informed consent from research subjects.

5.   At CABWEB, we are committed to expanding both the opportunities for international online student collaboration and knowledge about how this can best be achieved." extracted from document called "Ethical Guidelines for CABWEB, linked from front page of http://moodle.cabweb.net

The purposes of this research are clearly posted from the CABWEB front page. Confidentiality and anonymity are interesting issues in the context of public and semi-public spaces on the Internet. Any personal information on the participants that we have that is not public we keep confidential. We also observe anonymity in our use of survey and discussion data. We collected data using focus groups and from the discussion forum transcripts (task-related and reflective). Our work reflects the paradigm shift from positivism to post-positivist learning. We have established a formal research agreement, presented our theoretical framework as a premise, and we have the warrant to take action based on findings in this first cycle, and on our role within both the project and the CABWEB networks.

Thus we have adopted the strategies recommended in (Baskerville, 1999), in order to distinguish our research from consultancy, and to help us decide on how many iterations we undertake. This paper covers the first cycle, reflections and recommended actions for the next iteration.

4   Developing Governance – a Start

4.1   CAB Project and Ethos

Ours is a philosophical yet practical endeavour: the development of ethos in an online space. The European Union funded project 2003-2005, Collaboration Across Borders (CAB) http://www.cabweb.net offers an independent online location for student and tutor networks to organize online collaborative activities for students. Supporting these activities requires us to consider culture, language and pedagogy. The CAB project is a partnership between higher education institutions from Poland, the Netherlands, Spain, Germany and the United Kingdom, for practicing and learning about collaboration between staff and students, for mutual educational benefit. CABWEB is an online space that hosts a tutor and a student network, as well as the collaboration spaces managed by tutors, where students can do international collaborative activities. Our task has been greatly eased by the availability of Moodle, an Open Source Virtual Learning Environment that we have configured for use as a community and collaboration tool.

Early in the project, we were conscious that not only did we wish to conduct our research ethically, but we wanted CABWEB to be a space with an explicit purpose and ethic. We had clearly articulated our purpose in the project proposal in the objectives that cover the purpose of CABWEB, namely:

- To establish a network for collaboration and to encourage internationalisation
- To facilitate online collaboration between students and staff within this network, with an emphasis on critical evaluation and reflection.

We adopted a constructive approach and used the concept of ethos, with its associations of communication and malleability, to capture how we wished to combine ethics and purpose in our explicit (formally documented) and implicit (observed by behaviours) norms on CABWEB. Although we wished to develop our ethos collaboratively we felt that "we had to start somewhere", as this extract indicates:

> "Whilst based on these fixed guiding principles, the CAB ethos is put into practice by processes, the most important one of which is the one whereby members of the CAB networks play a part in keeping the ethos statements, rules and processes fair, clearly stated and accessible to all network members by contributing to dialogue about them when being developed, and giving feedback to the CAB project team about their operation and supporting and enforcing them in use." (extract from document presented to CAB Project meeting, in Zakopane, September 2004.

Table 1 CABWEB Ethos Statement

Ethos of Collaboration Across Borders Online Space

"Tolerance is harmony in difference"

As students and learning professionals, we come together on the CAB portal to pursue our shared interests in collaborative learning online. Our ethos will always be under development, reflecting the current membership of CAB, but is broadly based on the UNESCO Principles of Tolerance, http://www.unesco.org/tolerance/declaeng.htm. These principles show tolerance as an active attitude prompted by recognition of universal human rights and the fundamental freedoms of others. We expect participants not to deceive, defame, or harass others, and to show respect to all.

We shall explore the use of communication media to facilitate open dialogue that can shape attitudes of openness, mutual listening and solidarity, within a minimal governance, that promotes tolerance and harmony.

To achieve these aims, we shall:

· Discuss and review our ethos statement and governance processes in action, on a regular basis
· Organise public events on the Higher Education Learning Professionals and Student Networks that promote open dialogue
· Conduct research into the social and technical aspects of online collaboration in education.

Version 1 of this living document. We welcome your input to regular discussions will be held in the HELP network (for tutors) and in the Student network. Please join us and help to develop an ethos that has meaning internationally.

We wanted to explain to participants the character of the community, what they can expect from this virtual space. When somebody is going to come into a new group of people, questions such as "Will I be comfortable with these people?", "How do I know they'll accept me?" are inevitable. Guided by the framework from (Bell & Heinze, 2004), we developed an Ethos Statement see Table 1 and (non-negotiable) Discussion Guidelines see Table 2, and started to assemble resources to assist tutors with what we saw as their responsibility, the negotiable and pedagogic guidelines.

Table 2 Online Discussion Guidelines

Online Discussion Guidelines The Collaboration Across Borders (CAB) project (http://www.cabweb.net) provides these guidelines to promote enjoyable online discussions that encourage learning within a community based on mutual respect. Online discussions enable communication independent of time and place, support from peers and tutor as well as the construction and sharing of knowledge but participants may need to think more carefully about how they express themselves, particularly where the communication is text-based.. In the absence of additional cues - body language, facial expression and vocal intonation - misunderstanding and offence can occur more easily. You may have experienced these problems with email. Anyone who posts to this discussion board takes full responsibility for the content of their message. The moderator reserves the right to remove postings or ban participants that may, in their judgment, break the general rules below but hope that this does not become necessary. Anyone complying with the following **General Rules** is unlikely to run into problems (Johnson, 1997).
1. Know the rules of the forums in which you communicate and follow them. **2.** Respect the privacy and property rights of others. When in doubt, assume the user wants privacy and ownership. **3.** Respect the individuals with whom you communicate and those who are affected by your communication; that is, do not deceive, defame, or harass.
Additional Guidelines Your tutor will probably give you additional guidance on collaboration. If problems occur: Any student who experiences a problem in online discussion should report it to your tutor, in the first instance. Problems that remain unresolved should be reported to Elena Zaitseva, the CAB administrator. We also welcome feedback on these guidelines.

4.2   Development Activities

During this cycle, CABWEB hosted seven collaborative activities organised by tutors for students, one of which was a discussion on the Ethos Statement held on the Student Network; three staff activities, one small event on Internationalisation (initially private and subsequently made public), one larger, public event on the Higher Education Learning Professionals (HELP) network, and an ongoing forum where tutors can meet other tutors to organise collaborations; and the general social interaction on HELP and Student networks.

In this paper, we use examples from two events that were explicitly designed to contribute to ethos development. The first of these was an assessed student discussion, scheduled by Marcel Heerink, from Institute v Information Engineering, Almere, Netherlands, during December 2004, January 2005. Students were required to read the UNESCO Declaration of Principles on Tolerance and the CABWEB Ethos Statement (see Table 1), use English, cite the postings of others, make their postings relevant, and give examples from their own experience of online interaction where possible. Although the discussion was held on the (public) Student network and other students were welcomed, only Almere students joined in. There were 97 postings in the main threads, and 7 postings in a reflective thread, with 69 users subscribed to that forum. The second event was held on the HELP network and was also focused on the Ethos Statement (Table 1) and the Discussion Guidelines (see Table 2). There were 56 postings in several threads, and 31 users were subscribed to the forum.

5   Discussions on Ethos
5.1   Student Discussion

The student discussion began by questioning the meaning of the word "tolerance" and very quickly moved into a discussion about the fairly recent murder of Theo Van Gogh, a Netherlands film-maker who had directed a film about Muslim extremist, and the media handling of his murder (this was mentioned in 17 postings), for example

> "Recently, the film maker Vincent van Gogh was murdered in the Netherlands, by a radical Muslim….. In a way, this awful happening created an opening for the discussion between Muslims and others.
> …. But I think, by always writing about the terrible things radical Muslims do, the media also makes people frightened about all the things that can happen and afraid of the Muslim community. After all, it's in the nature of people to generalize."

This strand of the discussion provoked some strong and wide-ranging views, for example

> "You want to live in Canada? burn your passport you will get a Canadyan one in return, and here is a little booklet with our rules!, you don't want to adapt? sorry were closed."

"Some people gave up their nationality years ago to get a better life (not because they so much wanted to be European), but do they also have to give up their own identity? Definitely no! I agree with you that if you want to live abroad you should respect the country's rules and live according to the country's laws, but it doesn't mean that you have to change as a person. I do think that if a country has too many rules you can't accept (because of your own believe(s), culture and yourself as a person), then you should consider going back home."

Many posts state a personal view of tolerance illustrated by their own personal experiences, rarely taken from their online experience, but recognising cultural influences

"Because tolerance is something very personal it also is impossible to talk about a tolerant society."

"It is good to be or learn to be tolerant of differences in others. It isn't always easy because of our upbringing, our morals and cultural influences"

Others reflected the Golden Rule, introduced by Confucius and accepted by some humanists, "Do as you would be done by" by humanists, or expressed as "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" by Christians:

"- Tolerance is a game of giving and taking. This game is all about mutual and reciprocal respect. In this tolerance game it doesn't matter how big the difference is between the two parties interested. I like to think people respect me for who I am since I am doing the exact same thing for them."

The discussion moved on to the knotty problem of what we should not tolerate and what we should not, again using personal experience:

"To share with others means you have to be tolerant of other people's beliefs and customs. I travel a lot by bus and it's a case of if you're looking to have a peaceful journey, you're not going to find it. There are people speaking on their mobile phones or having discussions in general. …There comes a cut-off point, a threshold, when you think, this far and no more."

There was some evidence of the students returning to the Principles of Tolerance to help them find ways of dealing with differences and even intolerance, e.g. by education and open communication

"This collaboration website is a nice example of statement 4.4: with this educational technology we aim to open op ourselves to other cultures around Europe.
……If we don't agree with someone's contribution, we have to wonder why that person has posted his or her message. The only (and simplest) way to do so, is by asking that person WHY he or she posted that message."

In the reflective thread after the discussion had finished, one participant highlighted the possibilities for using images to create empathy

"… way to accomplish that at an online space is perhaps by showing a little flag, underneath the (obliged?) photograph, from the home country of the person."

Interestingly, a minority of the students used images, we do not know why. Only one student actually commented on the discussion guidelines, (mis)interpreting them as proscribing rational argument, showing the importance of having guidelines that can be understood, particularly by those whose first language is not English.

"I think the best way to promote tolerance is … by letting everyone taking part the discussion and by letting them give their opinion, also if these are against the common opinion or what we want to hear. This include people who have an extremist opinion, as long as it is not getting personal. …Discussion is al about different opinions and letting others start to think about their opinion and state their opinion by arguments…..I have noticed that point three in the discussion guidelines is ´ Respect the individuals with whom you communicate and those who are affected by your communication; that is, do not deceive,

defame, or harass.´, but I think that this limits the possibility to have a real discussion about really difficult issues"

5.2 Tutor Discussion

There was a discussion on the meaning of tolerance, whose meaning most people took from their daily lives rather than from the UNESCO principles. Some contributors found the concept of tolerance a useful one e.g. one participant found it " a respectful and purposeful first step towards understanding and harmony". Another participant shared with us an example of active tolerance from her own (Bulgarian) cultural history:

> "….the most famous of it is the saving of 50 000 jews during the second World War from the Bulgarian volk and the Bulgarian Parlament. We have not deported them. At the same time we were allians to Germany."

Another participant made many insightful contributions, reminding us that the development of cultural competence is a process, and that we need to explore behaviours in closing the gap between our different and shared understandings of tolerance.

> "… in common every day language usage, most individuals even after reading that great and lengthy UNESCO denotation, will still revert to attaching their own personal connotation or experiential definition of tolerance."

The discussion then moved on to the issue that there may be behaviours that we do not tolerate, and in an online setting these are likely to be communicative behaviours. One tutor alerted us to the role tolerant dialogue (as opposed to discussion) in developing new understandings with the exciting possibility of emerging from the dialogue thinking (and behaving) differently. Tutors also explored the conditions in which dialogue could flourish, and began to think about those in the context of CABWEB.

The most encouraging outcome of this thread was the realisation that problems are rare in our experience of facilitated student discussion, and some tutors doubted that we needed guidelines A participant gave us some practical advice on the use of Moodle customised rating scale that will be trialled in a forthcoming event on the HELP network, and advised on style and content of discussion guidelines, recommending that clear behavioural expectations should be set to help:

> "in building community and constructing new meaning. I almost always include at least 4 collaborative learning guidelines in the following areas:
> - participation (initiating dialogue-proactive behavior)
> - interaction (providing quality feedback-reactive behavior)
> - reflection (thinking about the learning)
> - assessment (e.g. simple course end evaluation and self-assessment)"

This suggestion was interested in that it strayed into the category of pedagogic guidelines that we had planned to leave to tutors.

The task of implementing and refining governance arrangements in CABWEB is not a once-only activity but rather a process that requires us to try out different approaches: extensive community consultation (students' and tutors'), reflection on our previous experiences (in our institutions), surveying/questioning participants of the collaborative activities, and researching what other communities are doing.

Reflecting on this first cycle, we have understood that we should be sensitive to the context, bearing in mind that this is an educational community, and that every student collaborative activity is different in terms of national and pedagogical cultures involved. In our intentional, planned approach of setting up processes and policies to effect a collaborative approach to ethos development, we may have adopted the typical academic approach of coming from theory instead of from people's current understanding (e.g. what tolerance means to them, what they understand about inter-cultural communication). Whilst these two discussions were proceeding, there was another very active discussion (JILID), for tutors and students, taking place elsewhere on CABWEB. The JILID collaboration was

about the use and meaning of colours in different cultures, and offered a set of structured dialogues where participants posted information from their own culture on colours in flags, cultural artefacts, historical situations, phrases and symbolic meanings, from which dialogue flowed. This approach aligned with the advice in Articles 3 and 4 of the UNESCO Principles of Tolerance to incorporate social dimensions and education but places a greater stress on knowledge of each cultures, and dialogue as a means of achieving that.

Re-examining ethos is needed in case of dynamic, multicultural communities. Having initial ethos and discussion guidelines is important and useful, and as CABWEB members engage with these over time, then they will evolve in response to the community's use of them. However, Frank Thissen has shown us in JILID that a core activity for CABWEB members (students and tutors) should be inter-cultural dialogue where students learn more about each other's cultures as well undertaking course-related tasks in collaboration spaces. CAB's task is moving from tolerance (that one participant identified as being at a relatively low level of cultural competence) to a deeper cultural understanding.

Students engaging in collaborative activities as a obligatory part of their course, particularly when the activity is assessed have little choice about participation, but we believe if they can perceive their contribution to ethos development, they will feel *involved* and value CABWEB as a place for academic and inter-cultural learning. This is a subject of future research in CABWEB.

6 Conclusions

Our research has been limited by the relatively limited period of interaction (five months since the launch of the portal). We still have a large volume of data to analyse and will refine our findings over the next six months. However, from our analysis of two of those collaborative activities and participation in a third, we are able to draw some initial conclusions that will help us to refine our ethos and governance arrangements for the next cycle of action research.

CABWEB is a purpose-built virtual community that exists within the space between the voluntary association of an international online community of scholars and the formal organizations that are the universities whose students are asked to join in collaborative activities as part of their course requirements. As such, it does need to offer a safe space for what are student activities required by their course, yet are not strictly covered by their home university conduct policies. We have found that problems are unlikely to occur but it is helpful to have an explicit ethos to promote the development of competencies in inter-cultural communication.

Of even more importance is to encourage tutors and students to learn about each other's cultures as well as the more obvious assigned tasks and information exchange that take place on CABWEB. This is interesting dialogue from which can emerge cultural understanding and competence, engaging those who see little point in discussing ethos or guidelines. It remains to be seen whether such dialogues will raise challenges for participants and allow them to find the third fragile 'truth' described by one of our participants:

> "So the dialogue, as Martin Buber, David Bohm, Freeman Dhorithy and others described is a "thinking together", finding a third fragile "truth""

Although we found the framework from (Bell & Heinze, 2004) to be useful in drawing up our governance arrangements, we have now decided to incorporate broader expectations into our discussion guidelines to promote ethical, pedagogic and cultural behaviours as part of the CABWEB project of enlarging the universe of discourse. This is a process that will take time and require enrolment and engagement of students and tutors from across the world. Language continues to be an issue. Many members of CABWEB are communicating in other than their first language. We wish to encourage clear and understandable communication, in our policies and in the online discussion, as well as using any aids (such as emoticons and images) that help offset the lack of social cues.

Finally our awareness is growing that we need to pay attention to opportunities for *emergent* ethical and cultural outcomes from our activities as well as the *intentionality* of planned ethos discussions and requests for feedback on governance arrangements. This has implications for our ethos development and for our research methodology.

110681-CP-1-2003-1-UK-MINERVA-M) that made it possible; and finally, the Moodle Open Source Software community who provided the excellent software that we configured for our purposes, see http://moodle.org .

7   References

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