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# No One is Born a Global Citizen: Using New Technologies to Bring ‘Other Stories’ into the Classroom

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**Abstract:** This paper documents the journey of a teacher’s efforts to use new technologies to create inclusive curricula that are reflective of diverse societies. The paper spans her experiences over 20 years and documents changes in technology, approaches to content and strategies and reflects upon the successes and failures of trying to use technology to bring diversity into the classroom.

**Keywords:** Classroom Teaching/Practice, Digital Divide Secondary Education, Developing countries

## 1. Introduction

At a time of vast technological change, the world is undergoing a major revolution, where people the world over can communicate with each other instantaneously despite the vast distances that separate them.

We also live in a globalized world where intercultural and international understandings are absolutely essential. Nonetheless we currently have situations where both internally and externally, there is much misunderstanding and strife between peoples of different backgrounds. In a recent speech, Kofi Annan (2013), the former secretary general of the United Nations, explained that even those societies that have a long history of pluralism and policies that protect minorities such as those in Europe, face challenges in demonstrating respect and tolerance for all. This phenomenon illustrates the difficulties of governing diverse societies and fostering democracies in today’s world. Annan (2013) explains:

*Europe, for example, has well-established legal systems and arrangements to protect minorities and reach acceptable compromises. Yet even within Europe, pluralism is sometimes seen as a threat. Levels of social prejudice have been rising against religious and cultural minorities and new immigrants. Just as no country is born a democracy, no one is born a good citizen. Mutual respect and tolerance have to be fostered and taught..... My experience has also taught me that strong, healthy and cohesive societies are built on three pillars: peace and security; development; and rule of law and respect for human rights. Unfortunately stability and economic growth have, for too long, been the principal responses to national and global problems. We must not fall into this trap.*

In an interview about his book, *The Global Soul*, Iyer explains how new technologies and travel affect our experience of the world, encouraging us to seek an even faster pace of change and increasingly newer technologies. He questions whether we are in charge of this fast-paced change.

According to Iyer (in Cavenett, 2007), we live in societies, where it is difficult to ask people where they come from; we all seem to have mongrel identities. However, Iyer claims that if we cannot say where we come from, we lose not only our sense of place but also our identity. In the schools I teach, in the panorama of countries of origin of my students, in the multitude of identities and loyalties that my students grapple with, I increasingly find that I must teach to these very issues.

It is increasingly obvious that students need not only to appreciate their own identities but also to live with tolerance, respect and above all knowledge of other cultures so as to create viable democracies that treat all with equity. Respect for the other is certainly a prerequisite for world peace.

Over the past 20 years, I have wondered if technology is a catalyst or an impediment in the process of having our students acquire global outlooks geared towards promoting knowledge and understanding of others around the world. Let me explain.

For Iyer, finding the global soul is about finding one's identity. The challenges of losing identity for him are in some ways a form of liberation; losing old categories of the past from which we are liberated but subsequently facing the challenge of creating something new.

However, others believe that the world can remain peaceful, economically and politically viable only if we educate our children in elementary and high schools in the knowledge of the world and its peoples. We also need to teach them the ethics of equity and a sense of responsibility to each other and the world. Citizens in democracies, who have the privilege of affecting change in governmental policies need to know not only themselves but the 'other' too. A knowledge of pluralism is a necessity in a world that is full of strife.

My question is this: in a world of breathtakingly fast communication, is technology destined to break our traditional identities and society? Or can technology allow us to communicate with each other and thereby assist us in acquiring a deep knowledge and respect of the other such that we can build peaceful societies where all can live in peace? Can schools play a role in leveraging technology for this purpose?

This is a particularly important question to pose at this point in time given that we live in a world of both local and international strife and also given that we are amidst a particularly intense era of technology, one in which computer technology is widely utilized for social networking amongst young people (Twitter, Youtube, Facebook, blogs, wikis, etc.). Will these new social networks allow different voices to enter into the classroom or are they simply mirages that will not affect what we consider to be 'important knowledge,' (of dominant societies) that which we impart in schools unchanged and untouched from generation to generation?

Over the past 20 years, I have been involved in using technology to bring diversity into the classroom. Where I have experienced success is in my ability to bring many diverse voices into the curricula. However, somehow in this journey, empathy, respect and a deep questioning and critical analysis of inequities in society and conflicting

identities has eluded students. In this paper, I will illustrate why I believe this to be the case.

My journey will begin in the early days of computing in education and it ends with an action research study that ended about a year ago. I will document how despite early disappointments, I was eventually successful in getting students to incorporate knowledge of the other but also to incorporate empathy and critical analysis into the projects we studied.

My journey has taken many different paths – both in the roles I have played; doctoral candidate, educational researcher at a major university in Canada and now high school teacher. It has also taken me down the path of using ever increasing levels of computer power: from text-based simulations, networking using a single modem and print-outs and then moving to students researching using integrated technologies such as mobile phones, YouTube and wikis to link to knowledge and people across the world in order to improve inter-cultural understanding across the globe.

In this journey of my experience with new technologies and students' emerging identities, I would like to discuss several projects that I have worked on. Each of them illustrates various developments in our history of using technology in education. These developments include: the breathtakingly fast-paced development in the speed and potential of technology, its increasing ubiquity, its ability to make learning both interactive but also transparent but also an increasing awareness that educational institutions have somehow failed to use technology to its best potential.

There are 6 projects that I would like to explore: A history simulation on the *Bartlett Family*, The ICONS project on international diplomacy, The *Other Story* Phase One: Impact of Media on the Caribbean, The *Other Story* project, Phase One: Understanding Canadian History from a First Nations perspective, The *Other Story* project, Phase Two: Taking responsibility for the AIDS crisis in Africa and finally, Water as resource in a globalized world: blessing for few, curse for many.

For each of these I will first describe the project and what I learned about the potential of new technologies for the inclusion of diverse identities into the classroom from it. I will examine both the types of technology and my increasing personal awareness of the complexity of promoting inter-cultural understanding that I experienced through these encounters.

## **2. A History Simulation of the Bartlett Family**

When I think about the beginning of my long journey with educational computing, I am reminded of my early days of observing the implementation of computers in the classroom. More than 20 years ago in the early 1980s, I was a researcher in an Ontario government funded research project examining the impact of computers in classrooms. My task at one point was to observe how two teachers in one school incorporated the seven computers they had each been given into their classrooms.

At one point, I sat in the back of one classroom and watched students working with what were very specific tasks assigned to them by their teacher. Soon I found myself observing a young boy named Walter. I watched him work day after day on a history simulation called the *History of the Bartlett Family*. It took a day or two for me to

realize that Walter had developed an ingenious way to use the simulation to amuse himself while hoodwinking his teacher.

The *History of the Bartlett Family* simulation was an award winning, carefully researched simulation of a pioneer family in Ontario whose trials and tribulations of establishing a family farm, participating in the early political process in the still nascent society of Ontario became a fascinating way of exposing elementary students to history in an interactive and immediate fashion.

Young Walter, however, using the series of choices that allowed settlers to perish or progress through a series of simulated hardships, managed to sail through the simulation until it took him to a short program where the Bartletts had to cook a stew using ingredients available to them. Walter's sole objective and delight was to create a poisonous concoction for the stew that would render the Bartlett family too sick to survive, and would end the game. Walter enjoyed this process enormously and came up with varied concoctions of the recipe tirelessly in order to be able to 'die' in the shortest possible time. Walter was delighted at this outcome and considered this to be an achievement of success in the objectives of the program.

This observation of Walter and the Bartlett simulation has become for me a symbol of what new technologies mean for traditional classrooms and traditional modes of literacy. There were 3 lessons that we can acquire from those early observations of Walter, which I feel still apply today. They are:

- a) While computer technologies have an extraordinary ability to provide interactivity and immediacy to student learning, that very feature allows students to sabotage the learning process because they are now in control of the learning outcomes. *How then do we design learning in order to avoid students hijacking our best efforts?*
- b) It is clear that even from the first moments of word processing, technology changed our concept of literacy and knowledge creation. One of the ways that this change occurred was that there was interactivity in learning. For me, interactivity provided an opportunity for bringing new voices into the classroom, especially as the technology became so ubiquitous that we could communicate and interact with students even in East Africa. But I was soon to discover that the Walters of this world are very much part of the identity of our youth today. The second question to be posed is: *What are the ever increasing implications for literacy when classroom walls keep coming down? Is there going to be some impact upon the inclusion of diverse voices in the classroom?*
- c) While computer technologies provide an extraordinary amount of interactivity to students they also increasingly provide *a transparency* of student work including racist remarks and shallow analysis, which will be available for perusal by all within and without our schools (even on a global basis). *Does this mean that there will be more efficient academic accountability but even more important what does this transparency bring in terms of ethical and social ramifications? What are the issues for privacy and increasingly racism across and beyond national boundaries?*

In the next sections, I will explore the ethical and social ramifications of the introduction of new technologies into our classrooms. If computers bring down classroom walls, can they bring varied perspectives and voices into the classroom?

Can they assist students in learning about their own identities? Can they ultimately help build pluralistic societies through fostering inter-cultural understanding?

In the next section, I shall introduce a second project that I observed in those early days of computing where networking was limited and reserved for the privileged few.

### **3. The ICONS Project**

In the late 80s, as an educational researcher, I was called upon to observe a Canadian classroom at SciTech school (a pseudonym) partaking in a North America wide simulation known as the ICONS simulation, which one teacher incorporated into his teaching of the geography *World Issues* course at SciTech at the senior high school level.

ICONS, which stood for International Communications and Negotiations Simulation, was as its name implied a simulation where students became negotiators representing countries of the world in the solution of a series of important issues called subgames. In the simulation that the students at SciTech took part in, these four subgames were: Arms Control, International economic problems, Nuclear Proliferation and Human Rights.

Unlike other simulations that last only a few hours, this one spanned several months - of which the first weeks were spent in preparation, the next four were the actual simulation and the last few weeks were spent in the debriefing. The actual simulation was first of a series of conferences where participants from various countries took part at the same time. However, there was also asynchronous communication in the form of messages left in the mailbox at any time during the four weeks of the simulation. All teams were linked to a central mainframe computer at an American university, where using specially designed software, the computers handled thousands of messages. The most exciting part of the simulation was the real-time conference session, where students actually 'negotiated' with students from other parts of North America. Two teams were present from Canada, with SciTech representing Canada. Similarly, one of the teams from the U.S. represented that country, while all the other schools represented other countries (e.g. Angola, Japan, etc.). This too, was part of the exercise - which students learn to place themselves in the shoes of other cultures and countries, so as to appreciate their problems and views.

This was an exciting simulation because, for the first time it allowed networking across schools. I watched students work with a primitive modem (all I witnessed was a cable emerging from the ceiling as the students shared the one modem with the rest of school. The school was also linked to NASA as part of a science project) and the modem was connected to one computer, from which everyone made printouts. This was a particularly interesting development; now the classroom walls were coming down and I believed I would witness diverse voices in the class. However, this presence of diversity of perspective and voice proved disappointing.

In the literature, the organizers of the simulation described the simulation as being created to increase inter-cultural understanding and communication, and then present one political game that could take place, which would allow participants to come to grips and deal with rather delicate international relations.

In one instance, the simulation context is that the CIA has learned that Iran has in its possession a powerful nuclear bomb - such an incident would of course upset the balance of power in the Middle East. While describing and assigning country roles to various participants (again the participants are not from the countries they represent), a statement describing Iran's position is posited by the writers of the simulation:

*"Iran can be made to behave in more or less menacing ways, not only toward Iraq, but also toward the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia and even Israel (via Shiite proxies in Southern Lebanon). Iranian moves do not have to appear entirely rational."* (Fieldnotes, Page 17)

In an almost eerie resemblance to current global politics, we see how media stereotypes (of Iranians being irrational, menacing) are played out, even in a simulation by a major university in the U.S. This is a rather unfortunate mistake as there were many students of Iranian origin in this school.

So, yes the classroom walls came down in this project and students began to discuss other cultures, countries and civilizations, however their viewpoint of those of other cultures (here Iranians) did not change – dominant biased and racist media perspectives continued to prevail unchallenged.

What lessons can we learn from this project? New technologies can bring new subjects of study and new voices into the classroom, but this does not mean we are rid of media stereotypes in how we deal with them.

Carefully researched and carefully constructed projects should assist us in moving beyond stereotypes to a critical analysis of local and global diversities, but unless we include authentic, credible voices from the 'other' side, interactive simulations will not improve the understanding of diversity in the world.

In the next project description I will show how I created a project where I included the authentic presence of the other but I will also demonstrate how including authentic voices in the project does not always guarantee that this type of inter-cultural understanding will occur.

#### **4. Other Story Project: Phase One: Introducing the Caribbean**

It is perhaps in the next project, (which took place in the early 90s) the *Other Story* project, of which I was the Principal Investigator and creator, that the authentic inclusion of diversity (without stereotypes) had the best chance to occur. This research project entitled, '*The Other Story: Research in the Development of Telecommunications-Based Materials to Promote Anti-Racist and Critical Thinking in Ontario Schools*', was a research project funded under the Transfer Grant by the Ontario Ministry of Education from 1993 to 1995.

It is important to point out that in the first phase of the *Other Story* project I was an educational researcher at a major Canadian university. I had completed my doctoral degree in education and was thus qualified to apply for research grants and become a Principal Investigator in research work. At this stage, I was also able to visit different schools and the research funding allowed me to hire research assistants who also conducted research in schools to support my work. However, this was still the first phase of the *Other Story project* and it is also important to point out that in the 2<sup>nd</sup>



phase of *the Other Story* project, I was a classroom teacher with my own students, curriculum and connections to schools around the world (see below). In a sense, I was much more in control of the learning and teaching experience when I became a classroom teacher than when I watched various classrooms implementing a project that other researchers and I had put together.

In this first implementation of the *Other Story project*, the main objective was to bring the 'Other' into the classroom through the Internet. In this first episode of the project, students in the Caribbean and Canada were linked through an online conference (mostly through a listserv). In order to deal with the primitive resources that made up the beginnings of the new communication technologies, I as researcher, carried a 1200 baud modem to each school. The modem was linked to the school phone line in the main office and then connected to one computer in the school lab using a 50 foot cable to upload the data that students had typed up on their computers. In some schools I saved the student data to a disk and then carried it to the university from which I uploaded the responses to the listserv. Students from the Caribbean school faxed their responses to me, which I then typed up and uploaded to the listserv created. These very frustrating technology experiences more than made up with the type of data that was collected through the project.

The conference participants included students from three inner city classrooms in Toronto with one school in the Caribbean. The conference participants also included one Canadian teacher and some students of Caribbean origin. There was also one professor of Caribbean origin from a local Toronto university who acted as expert and responded to students' often very racist and ignorant remarks.

The project was carried out in the form of a simulation with each classroom posing as the government of a fictitious Caribbean island. Each government was presented with the task of debating in their parliament whether they wanted to regulate TV on their island. Each classroom was divided into 4 groups representing the Ministries of Culture, Tourism, Finance and Information. The Ministers received well-researched portfolios of materials written by authors of Caribbean origin.

All Canadian schools in the project were inner-city schools. Classroom observations showed that students were for the most part apathetic, uninterested in school and classroom discussions. A discussion with one classroom teacher revealed that despite all manner of efforts in reforming the curriculum, nothing had worked in changing students' attitudes to their schooling.

Although the materials provided to the students and the experts available online were carefully chosen for authenticity, wisdom and a true reflection of the Caribbean culture, the online interaction soon disintegrated into a racist diatribe with narrow-minded views on the part of the students. Among the first comments to emerge online are students' pre-conference views of the Caribbean:

*The Caribbean gives me a lot of different impressions. For example: Jamaica. When I think of Jamaica I think of holidays, honeymoons, sun, fun and sand. Also, I think the people would be very happy (high) because marijuana is legalized.*

In another class, students list their impressions of the Caribbean:

*Goats and pigs running around, surfing, people living in grass huts on beaches, street markets, low paying jobs, no electricity, nude beaches, cruise ships, dreadlocks (hair style), alcohol, tropical storms, tropical*

*fruit, people saying “Hey man”, black, bare footed people, dress in grass skirts....*

The researchers, while shocked at this believe that after reading the materials provided to them and especially watching the film called *the Dish Ran Away with the Spoon*, a BBC production that explored the issue of cultural domination through TV through the perspective of the people affected: artists, writers, teachers, religious leaders, politicians, school children and other ordinary people, that Canadian students might change perspectives and become more interested in issues faced in developing countries. Yet some of the answers that emerge are patronizing and similar to the following quotation:

*My impression of the Caribbean has not changed because I found the video to be somewhat unrealistic. I have been to the Dominican Republic and saw what it was really like. I mean I actually went out of the American resort that I was staying at and looked around, .. the video portrayed the Caribbean as this great place where everyone is happy and only worried about what the children watch on TV when they are lucky to even have a TV*

Another response refers to the local people fleecing the tourists in various ways. Through the data collected on-line and in classroom observations, a certain view of the Caribbean emerges. It is a view that reflects the North American attitudes of superiority, of ignorance of the rest of the world. At the same time, there is a flaunting of that ignorance.

While at first glance, it seems that digitized technologies only seem to exacerbate the open expression of racism and provide it an audience (a phenomenon that is increasingly seen on Twitter in response to certain news stories), closer analysis and discussion with the rest of the Caribbean experts that form part of this project, reveals other responses. The English literature teacher of Jamaican origin at one of the inner city schools in Toronto, explains that she is not surprised at the racism aimed at people of her background, but she is pleased that it is expressed publicly so that it can be dealt with publicly and *responded to* by the university professor on the project, who can then explain to the students the folly of their thoughts. Here the professor responds to students' on-line discussions:

*Some of you have raised the issue about ‘ripping-off’ of tourists. Do some people in the Caribbean ‘rip-off’ tourists? Of course this happens! But it happens everywhere in the world as well. Does this happen more in the Caribbean than in other parts of the world? No one really knows, but probably not. Quite often, however, the Caribbean is advertised to tourists in a very unrealistic way (is it paradise?) and this creates a problem for tourists when something ‘wrong’ happens. Does it rain in paradise? Maybe not, but it sure does in Jamaica.*

Students from the school in the Caribbean also respond angrily to the racist remarks of the Canadian students:

*One of the misconceptions about the Caribbean is that the people live in grass huts on beaches and that there are goats and pigs running wild. This is in no way accurate. Caribbean people live in regular wood or brick houses just like everyone else and like most people we build pens and sties for our goats and pigs, if we have any. Considering that we*

*live in regular houses, it is safe to assume that we have electricity and running water.*

Thus this very early communication technology provided *transparency* (the racism cannot be hidden, it is overt and available for all to see), *interactivity* (such that alternate views can be expressed and shared) and finally *equity of expression* (no longer is information shared in the broadcast mode but rather even high school students from all parts of the world can express their views for all to see and tackle). These are components of social networking sites that are still very much present today and form part of their strengths and weaknesses even today.

We now turn to another experience in the *Other Story* project.

## **5. Other Story Phase One: a First Nations Perspective**

One of the objectives of this project was that it was designed to bring the ‘other’ into the classroom but this was accomplished by using the ‘other’s own perspective’. It was hoped that through this process that we would be able to unravel history by using a critical analysis of the relationship between the dominant and other using documents that were both officially produced but also those written in the voice of the marginalized other.

The Other Story was a research project to develop curriculum for inter-cultural understanding through a critical inquiry, issues-oriented approach. The curriculum was a combination of classroom based discussion and an on-line conference linking schools throughout Canada to students and adherents of the culture being studied. The most important objective of the project was to study cultures from their own perspective. Students, teachers and adherents of the culture being studied were invited to participate in the on-line conference. It was envisaged that through this approach Canadian students would develop a deeper, more sophisticated and less media-bound understanding of different cultures of the world.

In the spring of 1995, eight Grade 8 classrooms including two from First Nations schools participated in an Internet conference that discussed issues pertinent to the portrayal of First Nations people and their relations with other peoples in Canada. The conference was entitled: ‘First Nations Peoples: The Untold Story’ and it took up a significant event in Canadian history and presented it to students both from the conventional text book view and from the perspective of the First Nations people. The conference was divided into 4 sessions - in the first session, students read and responded to a story written by Susan Fletcher and Michael Dion, who were two First Nations authors. The story was about Mistahimaskwa (otherwise known as Big Bear in conventional text books) who dared to defy the encroaching Canadian government forces who wished to occupy and take over the land of his people.

In this first session, students were to read and respond to the story, after which they were to look for information on this event in other resources: textbooks, encyclopedias and/or school library books. Students were to ask themselves the question:

*Have we been exposed to the First Nations viewpoint before? Why or why not? What does this tell us?*

The response by each classroom was uploaded to be sent to all other schools participating in the project. Schools were to be identified by the presence or absence of First Nations students and teachers in their classrooms.

In the second session, students considered responses from Session 1 from the other schools in the project and composed replies to them. The students were to discuss whether they were in agreement with views presented, if they learned anything from other perspectives and if they wanted to contribute to the overall discussion in any way. Questions directed specifically at First Nations or non-First Nations peoples were welcomed. This input was uploaded and sent to all schools in the project.

In the third session, First Nations peoples and particularly the authors of the story from the First Nations perspective were to respond to the discussion from the previous two sessions. The fourth session was to be one of reflection - have we as teachers, students and adherents of the various cultures learned anything from this exchange of experiences? How does this portrayal of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples affect our relationship? How can we use this learning experience to affect a change in the relationship between us?

What happened in the interaction? It is impossible in this short amount of space to outline the interaction of 8 classes over a period of 4 weeks. However, some interactions can be highlighted to show how difficult it was to get students to think in terms of complexities. The need to seek simple answers, to point to easy explanations for what happened in the encounter of First Nations peoples and the newly arrived white peoples seemed to be the order of the day.

In my analysis of what happened, I will concentrate here on the on-line interaction from 2 schools. As explained above, all schools start by reading the story of Mistahimaskwa written from a First Nations perspective and then compare it with their textbooks.

Here is the feedback from A.S. Dawson (pseudonym), a suburban school close to a large Canadian city:

*We compared the story from the text book and the story by Dion and Fletcher and noted the differences and similarities. Some similarities mentioned in both stories was the way the native Indians were acknowledged as poor and starving from the lack of buffalo, which a main source of their survival, had been wiped out by the incoming colonizers. Surprisingly, the text books also looked at the grievances the natives had including the fact that the land given to them as part of the treaty was poor and inadequate. The location of the battles that were specified in each story was also identical. After the massacre at Frog Lake, both stories mentioned that Big Bear was tried and found guilty of the deaths caused by his warriors. The similarities that the story shared were basically the clean cut facts.*

*Because the information in the text books was slightly more European oriented, there were a few differences in views when compared to the Natives' story. Although the text books tried to capture some of the things the Natives were experiencing, the information was still mostly factual and not as personal as the story by the Dions. The text books did a fairly good job in reporting the story of Mistahimaskwa even including the views from the Natives.*

In analyzing the data from the students, it is interesting to note that in this exercise, the most important thing in comparing the texts is to determine which one is more accurate. The students begin by identifying the similarities between the texts of the two cultural groups as being the clear-cut facts. What are facts? As Carr explains:

*The historian is neither the humble slave, nor the tyrannical master, of his facts. The relation between the historian and his facts is one of equality, of give-and-take.*

*As any working historian knows, if he stops to reflect what he is doing as he thinks and writes, the historian is engaged on a continuous process of molding his facts to his interpretation and his interpretation to his facts. It is impossible to assign primacy to one over the other.*

Thus we see that facts can never stand alone: in choosing the facts to include in their version of events, the historians from both cultural groups made choices. These choices were in some cases made to hide culpability in terms of injustice and cruelty. In other words, the facts themselves, rather than being neutral and value-free - 'what happened' in the past - become in and of themselves, an extension of the historians' perspective and interpretation. A wise and experienced teacher would and should have been able to draw these issues out.

Students from the A.S. Dawson school failed to see that what was in the history text book describes simply as the settlers taking the land of the First Nations through violent force, is actually unethical, illegal and above all cruel. It does not matter if what is reported is accurate – one must consider the legal and ethical ramifications first.

It is this exercise that Susan Fletcher (the First Nations author of the stories) was trying to get students to come through, what interpretation do we give to this event that happened to First Nations peoples, what does it tell us about ourselves as human beings, as Canadians? We cannot really complete this process until we examine the interpretation of the event from both perspectives - 'those who did it and who it was done to'.

In contrast, when the history texts and the stories written by First Nations authors are read by a First Nations school in Northern Manitoba, the students write back emotionally to the on-line conference. They say that they understand how Mistahimaskwa felt because they too had recently lost their traditional hunting grounds to the flooding from a dam built by Manitoba Hydro. Ten years later, they had yet to be compensated and they still lived in temporary housing with no access to their traditional hunting and fishing grounds. "Nothing has changed for us", they said. The story written by First Nations authors resonates strongly with them.

A.S. Dawson students, in avoiding the question of what happened in the larger context of whether it was right that it should have happened, have avoided bringing themselves and their own positions into the story. In understanding history from the perspective of history as a neutral account, with no moral accountability, students avoid the larger question of *whether the government acted fairly* in this incident. They also avoid the question of how the historian (or the textbook writer) has interpreted this event.

When A.S. Dawson receives the print-out of the other schools' responses to the story of Mistahimaskwa and their search for this event in their text books, I, as researcher was present in the class. My fieldnotes show that I am struck by the fact

that these students are adversarial in their response to all the comments that they have received from other schools – constantly trying to show that their response was ‘better’ and that each of the schools did not respond well to the task. Some A.S. Dawson students respond to other schools’ sympathy for the First Nations peoples when they lost their land, as being politically correct. Their teacher sees no wrong committed and is only interested in proving that her students are the most articulate of all the other schools. They miss altogether the suffering of the First Nations school.

While the *Other Story* project makes great efforts to bring marginalized cultures into the classroom so as to encourage students in history classes to understand history and to practice critical thinking from an ethical perspective, we find that unless the classroom teacher is engaged and knowledgeable in creating critical pedagogical environments, students descend into one up manship and petty posturing.

Instead of an ethical accountability of the government’s ‘stealing’ of First Nations land, students are reduced to arguing which text book is most ‘objective’ and which class the most articulate. And later in the project, the heart-rendering accounts from a school of First Nations students living in a reserve in Northern Manitoba, where they have lost their land yet again to a hydro project is ignored, while students in cities continue to bicker on who is producing the best sound bites.

The above two simulations reveal the following:

- a) Technology **does** provide unique opportunities for inclusion and interaction with diverse voices from outside the classroom.
- b) Technology provides unique opportunities for the creation and introduction of non-mainstream content in the classroom
- c) Technology does not guarantee a critical pedagogy in the classroom – that is contingent partly on the content of the programming but much more **importantly** on the environment created by the teacher before, during and after the introduction of any new programming.

The 5<sup>th</sup> project that I would like to report on is:

## **6. The Other Story Project, Phase 2: Rights and Responsibilities in a Troubled World – Students Reaching out to Discuss Solutions for the HIV/AIDS Crisis**

In this paper, I have thus far tried to demonstrate how the arrival of new technologies had allowed the introduction of knowledge of and interactivity with the ‘Other’ into the classroom. However, I have pointed out the importance of the presence of a wise and knowledgeable teacher to ensure that the learning exercise looks at issues of power, ethics and the complexity of diversity.

In the fall of 1999, I left my position as an educational researcher at a university and became a full-time high school teacher. Now I had the opportunity to try out the *Other Story* project in my own classroom, in cooperation with teachers in other classes in my school or indeed across the globe. Thus, in the fall of 2007, four Grade 9 English classes from my school took part in a project entitled ‘*Rights and Responsibilities in a Troubled World: Students reaching out to discuss solutions for*

*the HIV/AIDS crisis*'. The project was coordinated by myself (and I brought 2 Grade 9 classes, Ms. Neuman (and her 2 Grade 9 classes) both from one Canadian school. Mr Charles Tasma (and 144 students from a Boys High School in Kenya) also participated in the project.

The basic aim of this project was to encourage students both in Kenya and in Canada, regardless of their place at the level of privilege or poverty, to consider issues of global responsibility and social justice. As part of this objective, students considered what role they could play in increasing global awareness of the issue of HIV/AIDS and how they could get involved in taking responsibility to learn about and assist others on a global level.

The second objective of the project was to expose teenagers to issues of globalization: Who is responsible for the global world order? What responsibility do Canadians have for the way poverty is distributed in the world? Why is it that some voices and perspectives are heard in the media and others are not?

Students used resources from UNICEF including a graphic text called *Asmina's Story*, movies, and they participated in other activities and in pre-arranged e-mail discussions. It was hoped that this international student exchange would foster mutual understanding and friendships. The project was for the most part, successful as seen by these comments by David, one of the Canadian students at the end of the project:

*"From my research topic, I've learned many different consequences of our greed and demand for material goods. Knowing this point, I now understand that I'm also an indirect cause of poverty in Africa and other parts of the world. After this project, I still found it difficult to figure out a viable solution for poverty, considering the inequality most people are living in now. I also found out that only because of our aggressive ancestors that we are living in considerable wealth, while others are treated unfairly. The main message I learned from this project is that people are still living in poverty because of our unwillingness to change this fact, despite the disparity we caused."*

Why was this project successful when so many projects that link privileged and less privileged students do not achieve these ends? Warschauer (2002) believes that efforts to bridge the digital divide fail because the focus is too often solely on providing hardware and software and not on the content and social context of the interaction.

## **6.1 Construction of the Kenya-Canada Project: 3 Components**

It is posited here that, based on Warschauer's model of effective overcoming of the digital divide, three components of projects must be taken care of. These three elements (technology, content and social inclusion) will be described as they impacted the Kenya-Canada project.

## 6.2 The Technology Element

In an unequal world, how do we ensure that there is at least a semblance of equity between the two schools in Kenya and Canada? At first glance, it is clear that the digital divide is vast – the school in Canada has 4 fully equipped labs, a library with 50 computers, and all rooms with Internet broadband access. Students too come from homes where broadband is normal. The school in Kenya has no electricity, a few computers that are outdated and slow, Internet connection proves impossible. As Warschauer points out, the scaffolding needed for computers – steady supply of electricity, even dial-up connection, updated software and hardware and technical support are all missing.

The only connection the school has to the Canadian students is a weekly trip that the Kenyan teacher (subsequently promoted to being Vice-Principal) makes to the Internet café, many miles away. There are gradations of access – on the one hand, the school in Canada has instantaneous access at every moment of the day, while the school in Kenya has to depend on the vice-principal driving down to a city every weekend to send messages that he must type up.

In a world of instant text-messaging, iPods, cell phone cameras and YouTube, how can Canadian students be patient with weekly e-mail that arrives in their classroom in the form of a print-out that they must share with each other? How do we stop time for the Canadian students, so that Kenyan students can catch up to participation with respect in this project? In discussion with each other, the Canadian and Kenyan teachers come up to a solution – why not have both sets of students work in groups of 5 come up with one answer per group to promote democratic discussion (and minimize typing)? Teachers would circulate to ensure that students discuss critical literacy oriented questions and acquire background information of the issues being discussed.

## 6.3 The Content Element

Unlike the hole in the wall project that Wershauer (2002) describes in India, in the Kenya-Canada connection, technology does not *drive* the connection, but rather technology *facilitates* communication. The project is carefully constructed, week by week. During the first week, students introduce themselves to each other in terms of the philosophy of the project. They outline how they see themselves improving the globe.

In the first and second week, the Canadian students read about Africa. They study the HIV/AIDS crisis, the disaster approach to journalism and learn about how Africa did not need to be saved by celebrities (Adichie (2008) and Iweala (2007)). Students learn to apply critical literacy principles to reading two stories on the same subject of land and violence: one written by a colonizer and the other by the colonized whose land was taken from his ancestors. Throughout the 4 months of the projects, students in Canada conduct research projects on Africa. They learn about the unfair trade policies, the unwillingness to share anti-viral drugs with Africa, the exploitation of the mining industry, etc. But the most impact on Canadian students is a simulation called: World History of Racism in Minutes (WHORM), where they witness history from a



thousand years ago to today, and they watch Africa collapsing under the European conquest and the devastation of slavery.

The focus of the project is not to use technology to share communication, but rather to share the content and context of inter-global understanding through a peer relationship across the ocean. With this preparation, when the Canadian students read *Asmina's Story*, a UNICEF text about the story of a young girl who is left to look after her young siblings upon the death of her parents to HIV/AIDS, they question why all the African people in the book are portrayed negatively while UNICEF comes across as a saviour. But when the Kenyan students (some of whom are AIDS orphans) come back with replies showing that they too have been helped by UNICEF, when no one else was there, it stops the Canadian students in their tracks and gives them a reality check.

#### **6.4 Importance of Social Inclusion**

The Kenyan-Canadian connection is a strong one in that it builds upon 3 levels of scaffolding: a strong connection between the teachers in Kenya and Canada, who communicate regularly, almost daily at times, through cell phone instant text messaging. Secondly, there is a common teaching philosophy and clear objectives. Thirdly, the project limits itself to the technology available in Kenya, and focuses instead on comprehending the social and political context of the people it studies.

To illustrate, when one of my students came up to the front of the room to present on Wangari Mathai, a Kenyan female Nobel Prize winner, she was dressed in African clothes and spoke passionately of women's rights and the importance of believing in a cause – that of protecting her country's sustainability from deforestation.

Thus, while the technology was very much present, it was not the dominant force in the project. Our weekly communication with Kenyan students brought a hush of excitement to the room. In fact, at one point, when the Kenyan teacher, Mr. Tasma, arriving at the Internet café, is faced with a black-out and has to wait outside for 10 hours for the café to open, Canadian students are fascinated by this devotion and this break-down in basic amenities. They talk of it incessantly and suddenly appreciate the ubiquitous technology that they take for granted around themselves.

The final project that I would like to report on is a geography project linking students from one Canadian school to another school in Kenya – the project looks at water as a resource comparing the Great Lakes in Canada to Lake Victoria in Kenya.

### **7. The Other Story Project, Phase 2: Water as Resource in a Globalized World: Blessing for Few, Curse for Many**

The final project that I worked on was a project linking Canadian students, who live in the Great Lakes region of Canada with students who live in Kenya, close to Lake Victoria, the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest fresh water lake in the world. At the start of the project, Kenyan students shared their experiences of alternating floods with lack of access to even drinking water.

Canadian students talk of their water supply that is fresh, clean and filtered hourly – it arrives in their taps or in water fountains around the city. Their sole complaint is their increasing awareness of the waste created by the plastic filtered water bottles that they purchase for a dollar (the Kenyan students’ family income for the day), only to be thrown away after one drink. Canadian students worry about the unnecessary landfill from these plastic water bottles.

From the girls in Kenya, we hear about how one of them, “was almost swept away in the raging floods” (her words). Others describe how they must purchase water and must conserve it carefully so that it is available for drinking. Others say that water for them brings up images of water-borne diseases that they must endure. Still others speak of Lake Victoria, which is so clogged by hyacinth flower weeds that fishermen’s boats get stuck. Fish are suffocated by the clogged lake. Water cannot be drained from the lake and drinking water is unreliable.

Conservation efforts in the fresh water lakes of Canada and Kenya illustrate to the students how alternating approaches to respecting nature can lead to lives of comfort or lives full of danger. It is a sobering lesson in the importance of human agency in geography and it teaches teenagers in the North and the South, regardless of their place at the level of privilege, to comprehend other worlds: what we have been granted by nature and how important it is to use it in a sustainable manner.

## **8. Discussion of Findings**

It can be seen from the above projects that promoting inter-cultural understanding through the use of technology can be achieved if:

- a) the Curriculum drives the project, not the technology: complex context has to be part of the preparation for the project: both in terms of access to technology but also in terms of understanding the region one wants to work with
- b) The project must have clear objectives and philosophy
- c) It is important to slow one’s pace to meet the needs of the region one connects to – so that social bonding, background knowledge research, acquiring of knowledge of the two cultures and technical problems can be taken care of.
- d) Access to technology is not as important as critical reflective analysis and an ability to express oneself well in a common highly used language – in this case, English.

It is important to remember technology cannot drive the curriculum, nor the inter-cultural understanding – it is the slow pace of building context, social relationships, understanding of one’s own global responsibility to others that must drive the building of the bridge across the cavern of the digital divide. Understanding these issues requires the presence of knowledgeable teachers and good curricula.

In his article, ‘Reconceptualizing the Digital Divide’, Warschauer (2002) challenges the notion of the digital divide, stating that the concept provides a poor framework for either analysis or policy, and suggests an alternate concept of technology for social inclusion.

Warschauer (2002) points out that introducing computers into an environment is a complex affair both in terms of technology but also in terms of its content that must be relevant. In terms of technology, he points out that the computer is only a conduit – it needs many other elements of technical scaffolding: electricity, access to networks, hardware, upgraded software, etc. Concomitant with each of these is an ongoing support system. In terms of dissemination in the curriculum, Warschauer explains that ICT implementation is similar to literacy. ICT has to make sense in a social context. Similarly, literacy is not just decoding – what might work for literacy in inner city North America will not work for madrasahs in Karachi. It has to work for people.

According to Warschauer (2002), access to ICT is embedded in a complex array of factors encompassing physical, digital, human, and social resources and relationships. Content and language, literacy and education, and community and institutional structures must all be taken into account if meaningful access to new technologies is to be provided.

In a similar manner, Cummins et al (2007) point out that when introducing literacy and technology into schools and environments where there are low income kids, it is important to:

*use a pedagogical framework that identifies situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice as central components. The essence of this framework is that students should be given opportunities to engage in meaningful experiences and practice within a learning community, and the development of concepts and understanding should be supported by explicit instruction as required.*

This issue becomes even more important when we consider that this divide between the privileged and less privileged has existed in terms of civic activism and expression even in the most developed democratic countries in the world. At the start of this paper, I explained that my objective was to promote inter-cultural understanding but also the building of citizenship skills for students in high schools. Ensuring that *all* students regardless of economic, cultural and racial background are knowledgeable, articulate and respectful of the rights of all is an extremely important initiative for future peace and progress. It was hoped that the new technologies would then provide that equity of access to information to all peoples but also access to interactivity for all, regardless of income, to express one's concerns in a democratic government structure.

A recent PEW research study (2013) conducted in the U.S. has some insights in this regard, It is interesting that while online political activity has grown (the number of social networking site users has grown from 33% of the online population in 2008 to 69% of the online population in 2012 and more of these users are engaging with social and political issues than in the past. While it is promising that many youth are also using social networking sites for this purpose, it is truly disappointing that those of low income are less likely to use social networking for these purposes. (Pew, 2013):

*The well-educated and the well-off are more likely than others to participate in civic life online – just as those groups have been more likely to be active in politics and community affairs offline. Political activity in social networking spaces shows a somewhat more moderate version of the trend*

A similar study (Richtel, 2012 quoted in Kassam, 2013), shows that while *access* to technology is no longer a problem among black and Latino youth as it was perceived in the past, *appropriate* use for educational purposes continues to be a cause for concern. According to Rideout (in Richtel, 2012), author of a decade long Kaiser Foundation study:

*Despite the educational potential of computers, the reality is their current use for education or meaningful content creation is miniscule compared to their use for pure entertainment. This means that computers, instead of closing the gap, are widening the time-wasting gap. (- quoted in Kassam et al. (2012), p. 201)*

At the beginning of the paper, I introduced the case study of Walter. I showed how technology by itself left to the resources of young people could result in a waste of expensive equipment and sophisticated digital content creation.

Thus while it is very important that we teach about tolerance and access to equal human rights through networking with others using technology, we are not going to arrive at complex but sensitive understanding of others when we leave this process to the resources of young people left to themselves in the computer lab or indeed at home, where broadband access is increasingly ubiquitous.

Teaching about civic discourse and learning about and interacting with diverse peoples of the world is an increasingly vital skill to be taught in our schools, for it is only in our public school systems that diversity of income level, aptitude, personalities, ethnicities, race and religions can be found. And it is on this foundation of diversity that we can scaffold and build an education that bridges the divide between differences but also engenders the ability to use and access new technologies to promote inter-cultural understanding, tolerance and the importance of human rights.

Moreover, it is not just the technology that creates the activism of the students – it is the content of the curriculum, the context created by the teachers and certainly the activism of the students themselves.

As Malcolm Gladwell (2010) explains in an article on the role of technology in promoting activism, not all activism in recent history has had the use of technology to spread its message and empower people. Activism does not require technology to succeed. Gladwell writes that in the 60s, as part of the civil rights movement, what started as sit-down protest by four black students in one lunch counter at Woolworths in Greensboro, North Carolina to protest the store's segregation policies against 'Negroes', spread in a month to 70,000 students who staged similar sit-ins in the South.

According to Gladwell,

*By the end of the month, there were sit-ins throughout the South, as far west as Texas. "I asked every student I met what the first day of the sitdowns had been like on his campus," the political theorist Michael Walzer wrote in Dissent. "The answer was always the same: 'It was like a fever. Everyone wanted to go.' " Some seventy thousand students eventually took part. Thousands were arrested and untold thousands more were radicalized. These events in the early sixties became a civil-rights war that engulfed the South for the rest of the decade – and it happened without e-mail, texting, Facebook or Twitter.*

Gladwell questions the assertion that the world is in the midst of a revolution where the tools of social media have reinvented social activism, giving the powerless the opportunity to collaborate, coordinate and give voice to their concerns (Gladwell, 2013, p. 42). He states that studies by the Stanford sociologist , Doug McAdam showed that commitment to activism in the civil rights movement was determined more by personal connections to those in the movement.

Gladwell suggests that digitized social networks are much less powerful because they are networks that are not hierarchical and they are not based on institutions of peoples who know each other personally and that have established leadership structures. He also suggests that the weaker acquaintance like friendships offered by Facebook are much less powerful than the Sunday churches that black people attended each week (ibid, p. 49):

*Enthusiasts for social media would no doubt have us believe that King's task in Birmingham would have been made infinitely easier had he been able to communicate with his followers through Facebook, and contented himself with tweets from a Birmingham jail. But networks are messy: think of the ceaseless pattern of correction and revision, amendment and debate that characterizes Wikipedia. If Martin Luther King had tried to do a wiki-boycott in Montgomery, he would have been steamrollered by the white power structure. And of what use would a digital communication tool be in a town where ninety-eight per cent of the black community could be reached every Sunday morning at church? The things that King needed in Birmingham – discipline and strategy – were things that online social media could not provide (Gladwell, 2010, p. 48-49).*

As I have tried to demonstrate in this paper, face to face interaction, teaching students in high school classrooms where teachers, students and powerful curricula can come together and build powerful relationships that can be used to teach students about activism, are much more effective than thrusting students to their own devices in front of a screen with little or no adult supervision around.

Issues of equity and power in democracies are much better explained and demonstrated in classrooms full of people from diverse backgrounds, with competing agendas but also places where young people from different backgrounds form friendships around common interests but also common feelings of powerlessness.

Teachers and students can also come together to understand history, geography and literature through learning about human problems, understanding through dialogue, respect of others and diplomacy rather than violence. These can be achieved in traditional classrooms with traditional materials and traditional teachers. The Internet has its place but as we have shown above, social media does not in and of itself bring about activism and wisdom and above all, knowledge and respect of the other. These skills and knowledge are brought about through the wise counsel of the teacher, who too must be trained in the knowledge of the world and the importance of respect and tolerance in the creation of democracies of tomorrow.

## 9. The End of the Teacher's Journey

As I sit back and think of the various technology projects that I have been involved in: watching Walter deal with the *Bartlett Family* reducing a complex, well-written, well-researched simulation into a mindless game of destroying the family as fast as possible in algorithmic fashion, then watching the *ICONS* project dissolving peoples of the world into the rational and the irrational (us and them), and then observing the ethical and historically accurate dimensions of the *Other Story* project being reduced to mindless politically correct posturing and provocative sound bites, I ask myself why were students and technology always sabotaging our best efforts?

After careful reflection, I do not think that the fault is that of technology, but rather that of the teacher or the curriculum writer who is unaware of this attraction of gizmo-gabble for youth. I do believe that in each of the projects discussed above, if I or the teachers involved in the project, had designed the learning environment so that it involved the principles of critical pedagogy and encouraged students to look at the significance of what they were looking at, encouraged them to look for critical analysis, marked them for critical literacy that encompassed ethical viewpoints and accountability to the marginalized, we may have seen different results.

In all the projects that I described above: the *Bartlett Family* simulation, the *ICONS* project, the *Other Story* project (phase one), students were not encouraged to question and critique reality in the tradition of Freire who considered all knowledge to be political. For Freire, education was exposing students to the relationships between the powerful and the powerless and thereby awakening the students' agency.

What then has been missing from all those projects? It is not the knowledge of the other, it is not the perspective of the diverse peoples of the world, it is not the interactive participation of students and it is certainly not the absence of the latest gizmos which students imbibe instantly; it is this critical analysis of the unequal power relationships between the Iranians and the U.S., the First Nations peoples and the government of Canada. In all the projects, the marginalized other was not a free agent to do as he or she wished. In order for a project to be successful in introducing diverse voices in a respectful manner into the classroom, one needs to focus on their relationships with those in authority in various places.

In my description of the journey that I have taken with technology in the past 20 years, I realize now that it was not the absence of a literacy approach that promoted reading and writing that was missing, nor was it literacy approach that promoted knowledge of technology that was lacking. It was **critical** literacy that had not been embedded consciously and conscientiously into the curriculum.

As the students in the *Other Story* project failed to realize in their work, learning about the oppressed other is not about being politically correct – it is about the relationship of the dominators and the dominated and that relationship is ultimately not about the objective reality of the relationships between people but rather the fairness and ethics of the relationships. In seeking to encourage my students to explore their identities in class I must not shrink away from those that evoke conflict.

In the final phase of the *Other Story* project, I succeeded because I started with that philosophy. It is a noble goal to bring the 'other' into the classroom, to deal with the story of diverse peoples not normally dealt with in the classroom. But it is simply not enough to bring them in; it is important to 'problematize' the relationship of the

dominant and the less dominant – it is important to consider the conflicts and power struggles between cultures so as to engage students in more critical ways.

With the ever increasing pace of change in the development of new communication technologies, as well as with the increasing migration of peoples across the globe, new challenges in identity formation, peaceful negotiation of community, national and international co-existence, the need to learn about each other's complex identities, place greater pressures on our educational systems. This paper has tried to provide information, discussion, sample projects and above all a critical analysis on the increasingly symbiotic relationship between complex identities and new technologies.

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