المحور الثالث: مستقبل التعليم والتعلم في مجتمعات المعرفة.
Theme III: The Future of Learning and Teaching in K-Societies.

Connecting Classrooms: Connecting Cultures

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Abstract: The school partnerships and international online programmes prepare children to take their place in the 21st century. Through inclusion of an international focus, schools are able to offer pupils, a range of experiences to enhance their learning and raise awareness of their national and international identity. Connecting Classrooms is a global online programme funded by the British Council around the world many years ago. It works on three domains:(a) professional development core (2) collaborative learning core and (3) school awards core. The programme aims at developing links with schools in many countries, raising awareness of environmental issues through joint projects, promoting communication, providing staff with opportunities to compare different teaching and learning styles, and encouraging motivation through the provision of the first hand experiences of life in another country . This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of online teacher training courses on teachers' performance, exploring teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards online teaching and blended learning, measuring the students' English language performance after participating in activities about global issues and the effectiveness of implementing some activities on students 'academic achievement. Study sample will be about 30 teachers and about 300 students from an experimental language school, Egypt. The researcher will develop four tools. Recommendations will be drawn based on the study results.

Key words: online programme, blended learning, teachers' attitudes, language performance, culture, global issues.

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Introduction

The school partnerships and international online programmes prepare children to take their place in the 21st century. Through inclusion of an international focus, schools are able to offer pupils, a range of experiences that will enhance their learning and raise awareness of their national and international identity.

Connecting Classrooms is a global online programme established and funded by the British Council around the world many years ago. Connecting Classrooms is responsive to its audience and to the different education systems around the world. As such, it offers flexibility for customization through a unique menu of optional choices in addition to the core offer. The connecting Classrooms program has begun in Egypt since 2007. There are more than 30 private and governmental schools have been involved in international activities. It adopts group collaborative learning to achieve the programme goals.

The Group Collaborative Learning

The Group Collaborative Learning is a unit of students who maximize their learning products under some encouragement mechanism with the common learning goals, which includes all the relative activities in the process of collaborative learning (Huang, 2001). At present, with the rising-up of network technology and the innovation of a teaching concept, Web-based Collaborative Learning has increasingly attracted universal attention, and more and more teachers have attempted to put it into their teaching practice. Under this new situation, the combination of network technology with the Group Collaborative Learning will turn into the main trend; the building of multimedia learning platform with the characters of active interaction, open dialogue, and common sharing will dominate online learning space. This innovative strategy mainly follows the principles of cooperation, equality, and encouragement, which strongly advocates open dialogue, interaction among community members regardless of their status or attainment. In the process of online learning, however, we met with a series of problems, such as how to nurture the students' cultural values under network environment, how to fulfil equal and open dialogue among all the group members, and how to set adjustable and appropriate strategies.

Online Learning Community

A. The Teaching Concept Innovation: From Knowledge Transmission to Knowledge Construction

The information society prompts transformation of living environment and lifestyles; the speed of knowledge renewal is increasing so fast that the knowledge structure system has to be modified accordingly; information technology, especially the rapid covering of information network, is changing the ways of cultural transmission. All these external alterations constitute the impetus to transform the traditional teaching concept and thus implement the principles of Constructivism. The newly-emerged learning theory of Constructivism is mainly reflected in learning goals to realize the transformation from teacher's knowledge transmission to students' active construction. From the perspective of Constructivism, the purpose of learning is to construct the individual meanings rather than the repetition of others' meanings in order to find the correct answers through individual exploration and effort. Meanwhile, this theory underlines the learner's function as the learning

subject. This conceptual change enables the students to enhance their learning, motivation and momentum, gradually developing their subjective awareness in learning.

B. Online Community: Definition and Function

Online Community refers to a new living space in which a group of people with similar interests and demands take advantage of the peculiarity of network to accomplish mutual communication and interaction, thereby forming the close and identified relationship (Gan, 2005). Apart from some common features of ordinary community, a certain number of people, communication space, similar interests and ideals, Online Community owns its kernel elements including similarity, interaction, trust, and culture. It is a learning and communication space filled with cultural and reliant atmosphere; the community members can seek the sense of belonging and obtain the emotional support and academic improvement through online interactive activities.

In this special Community, every member equally takes part in different activities and shares abundant resources; everyone can express his unique opinions and discuss with other divergence. This mechanism of free expression and equal discussion will promote mutual understanding and common improvement, building up friendship simultaneously. Online Community helps the learners construct their individual identities, overcoming anxiety and isolation resulted from online learning process. This interpersonal communication and emotional interaction can make one's learning experience accepted, encouraged, and supported by other community members. Therefore, the sense of belonging, identification, and the community cohesion is greatly reinforced, which, in turn, all the community members to play active role in its routine interactions. In terms of social communication, Online Community can not only support interpersonal communication, but also facilitate the creation of positive learning environment and diverse community culture. After all, online social interaction in the learning community is the vital means to fulfil emotional communication and form the sense of social belonging and identity (Ma, 2009).

C. The Network Cultural Educaiton: An Indispensable Part of Education

According to Stoddard, culture is composed of three parts: artefacts, mentifacts and sociofacts (Stoddard, 1986). Artefacts refer to the physical matters, such as tools, houses, and production. Mentifacts refer to the ideological mark of culture, such as belief, world views, values. Sociofacts refer to various structures to maintain interpersonal relations, such as political, legal, educational, and religious organizations or institutions. Culture can penetrate into every segment of social network, and Internet culture is one of its parts. Internet culture is the product of the Internet, and the extension of the previous culture. It normally refers to the culture of virtual community formed through media of information and communication technology (ICT). In the virtual community, people apply special software, or utilize the mass network platform to communicate with each other limitlessly on the information highway. The fast development of ICT is changing the people's language styles, cognition, aesthetics, values, cultural identification, and identity distinction. The main feature of Internet culture is globalization (Palaiologou, 2007). From the perspective of social biology, culture is similar to language, for both of them have the creatural attributes (Laponce, 1993).

Objectives of the programme
- Provide students and teachers with a wider variety of experiences about national Curriculum.
- Develop links with schools in other countries.
- Raise awareness of environmental issues through joint projects.
- Promote communication through e-mails and writing letters.
- Give the teachers the opportunity to compare different teaching and learning methods.

To achieve the previous aims ,the programme works on three domains(figure 1):

(a) A professional development core which includes internationalizing the curriculum and deals with students as leaders,

(b) A collaborative learning core which includes collaborative curriculum projects which probe language projects, community action projects, and arts projects,

(c) A school awards core which includes international teacher awards, global citizen award, and international leader award.
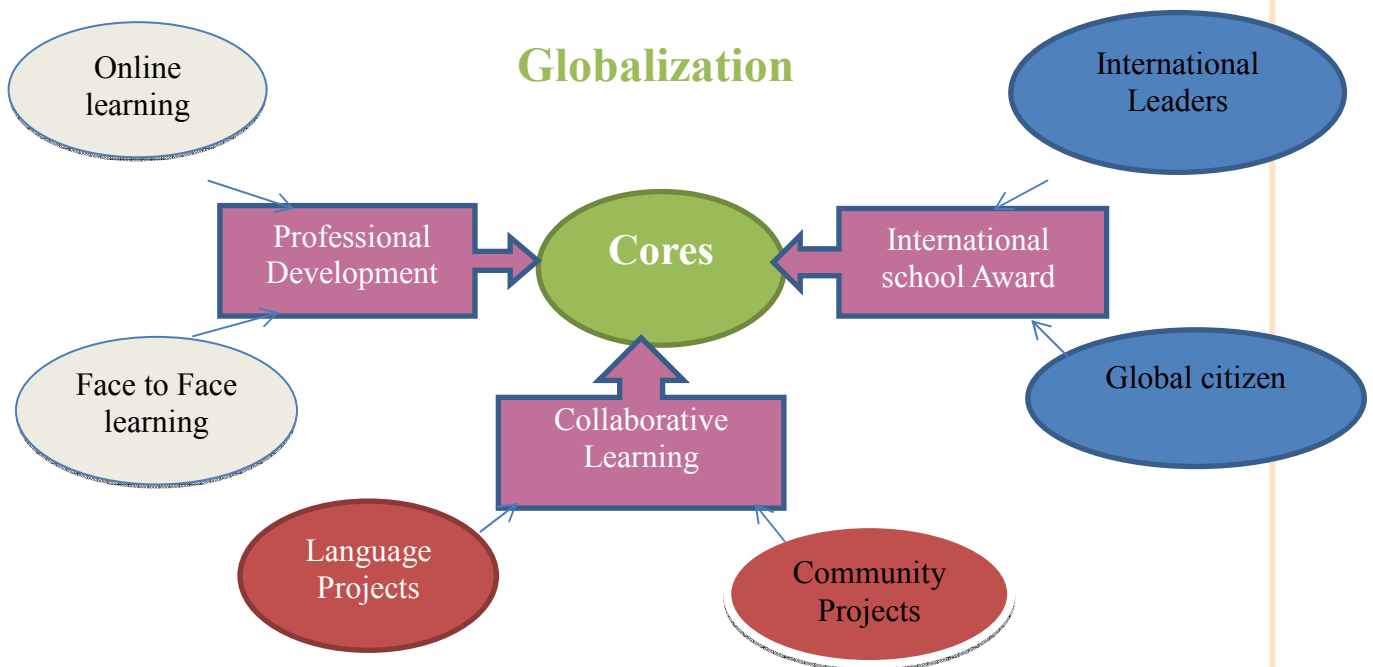

Figure (1):

Connecting Classrooms equips students with a deeper understanding of:
- Other countries and cultures.
- Their rights and responsibilities as global citizens.
- The skills needed to work in a global economy and build a fairer, more sustainable world.

Teachers also benefit from:
- Gaining understanding of other countries' education systems.
- Being better equipped to teach about global issues.
- Improving their own teaching skills.

Developing Teachers' Teaching Kills

In a rapidly changing globalised world, schools, teachers and young people need the skills and values base to make sense of what is happening in the world around them. Connecting Classrooms professional development courses play an important role in supporting the development of an international learning community that equips educators to develop young people into global citizens.

Courses are designed to suit teachers' needs, whatever your current level of experience in international learning and global citizenship. These courses support schools to teach global citizenship and international learning in the classroom, and help develop ICT and English skills.

Both online courses and face-to-face workshops draw on the experience and knowledge of education practitioners and experts from around the world. It provides an ideal opportunity for teachers to share experiences, increase knowledge, discover new ways of doing things, network and inspire one another. Teachers return to their classroom with renewed enthusiasm and a host of new ideas to share with the wider school community.

The programme introduces Global citizenship courses as follows:
A. Online learning. Location will not be a barrier to development, with free online courses for teachers in global citizenship, ICT and English for international exchange. These are provided through the Connecting Classrooms Professional Learning site.

B. Face to Face learning. These courses complement the online courses and are a fantastic opportunity to meet and learn with fellow teachers in their areas.

A. Online learning
1- International learning- get started- new to international work?
Throughout this course teachers will explore a range of ways of working with schools in other parts of the world and of developing international learning and global citizenship in your curriculum.
The course aims:
The course will enable teachers to:
- Explore the benefits and challenges of working with schools in other countries.
- Explore ways that education for global citizenship and international collaboration can enhance learning
- Improve inter-cultural practice
- Consider how to prepare for international collaboration
- Identify the support available from the British Council and other organization.

2- Education for Global citizenship
Embarking on international collaboration is a learning journey for all involved. This suite of four courses draws on the experience of hundreds of schools in the UK and countries across the world that have built lasting, equitable relationships and high impact collaborative classroom projects.

The course aims:

This course will help teachers to explore ways of enhancing education for global citizenship in your school and classroom. It draws on the experiences of schools working with international partners to share the powerful learning experiences that can result.

Education for global citizenship is about how to equip young people for the world they will live in as adults. We don't know what the world will be like in the future, but educators have a role in helping young people acquire the understanding, outlooks and skills to live and work as effective and responsible global citizens in an interdependent world.

3- Inter-Cultural and global awareness
The course aims:
This course will help teachers to reflect on and deepen their own inter-cultural and global awareness. International collaboration:

- Identifies and builds on what teachers, learners and communities world-wide have in common
- Respects and engages with differences
- Critically reflects on the impact of historical and current global interdependencies on us all
- Promotes an open-minded, reflective global outlook

By developing teachers' expertise in inter-cultural and global awareness, they will be able to understand, create and support effective collaborations with schools in different parts of the world.

Establishing an effective, sustainable school partnership is not a straightforward process. As school partnerships develop and mature, deeper and longer lasting benefits begin to emerge. Truly successful partnerships become part of the ethos of each of the schools involved. This course aims to support partnerships with this aspiration.

4- ICT in primary Education MOOC (Massive Open Online Course).
Course aims:
If teachers are interested in why and how they can integrate ICT (Information and Communication Technology) into primary education, the Institute of Education, University of London and the UNESCO Institute for IT in Education are collaborating to run a free professional development course for those working in the Education sector.

This course analyses examples from schools in different parts of the world, and brings professional teachers, head teachers and policy makers together to share their best ideas and inspiring stories. To register for this free course, teachers go to the ICT in Primary Education page and then click on the blue button (right hand side) that says 'Join for free'

Objectives of the study
This study aims at:
- Investigating the effectiveness of online teacher training courses on teachers' performance.
- Exploring teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards online teaching and blended learning.

- Measuring the students' English language performance after participating in activities deals with global issues and the effectiveness of implementing some activities on students 'academic achievement.

Method
Sample
- Thirty teachers (18 female and 12 male) from an experimental language school, Giza governorate, Egypt, will participate in the study. The school is participating in the Connection classroom program. Teachers are teaching different subjects at preparatory and secondary stage. They are teaching different grades.
- Three hundred students from preparatory and secondary stages. The students are the classes of the teachers who are participating in connecting classroom programe.

Tools of the study
The researcher will develop the following tools:
- An observation form to investigate the effectiveness of online teacher training courses on teachers' performance.
- A questionnaire to explore teachers' attitudes and beliefs towards online teaching and blended learning.
- English Language Test to measure the students' English language performance after participating in activities about with global issues.
- Academic achievement test measures the effectiveness of implementing some activities on students 'academic achievement.

After piloting, the observation form, questionnaire and academic achievement test will be administered as pre-post experiment tools.
Results will be analyzed. Based on the study results, recommendations will be drawn.

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