

**ABSTRACT**  
**PARALLEL WORKING SESSION**

**TEACHING & LEARNING**

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**The Classroom Without Walls in the Global Village: Linking Ghanaian and Canadian Students in the Virtual Classroom**

While Canadian Communications scholar Marshall McLuhan put us all in a “Global Village,” the benefits of the village appear to elude a sizeable number of the villagers as the digital divide between the technology-haves and technology-have-nots has been growing ever wider and wider. Knowledge and ideas flow in a uni-directional, North-to-South (from the Global North to the Global South) fashion with little going in the opposite direction. A lopsided flow of knowledge, values and ideas creates an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and recrimination, with some of the villagers complaining of “cultural imperialism” and others fending off such charges by saying they are only promoting the ideas of “democracy.” But for the cultures of the “Global Village” to flourish in a tolerant, mutually beneficial fashion, it is imperative that there be real sharing of ideas, knowledge, and values.

There is no better forum to address the ever-increasing need for mutual understanding and mutual respect across cultures and national borders than via collaborative learning. The British Columbia-Ghana Online Collaborative Learning Project (BCGOCLP) intends to do just that. It is international online and webconferencing venture to use modern information technology to enhance shared educational resources, knowledge, and experience among students and professors in British Columbia and Ghana. The pilot project is a web-based and video-conferencing course that will link students taking Sociology of Global Inequalities and Globalization course at the campuses of two institutions of higher learning — Kwantlen University College and the University of Ghana. This project will offer Canada a fine opportunity to play its part in bridging the digital gap between a developing country and a developed one, while facilitating mutual enrichment of the life experiences of Canadian and Ghanaian students, improving and innovating pedagogical methods of educators in Canada and Ghana.

This paper presents preliminary overview and findings of a pilot course webconferencing course on Globalization involving largely students and instructors in Canada and Ghana. It must be said here that one Canadian student took the course from India, where she is currently based. The overview will focus more on the planning and implementation stages of the course than on the delivery and content. It will highlight the challenges confronted, lessons learned and lessons unlearned throughout the more than two years planning and implementation of the project, whose principal objective was to create geographically distributed collaborative learning and teaching between students and faculty in developed and developing

countries.

The undergraduate and graduate course on Globalization (Sociology of Global Inequalities), which was implemented in the Spring of 2008 (from January 7 to April 21), was conceived on the basis of two ideas—"Classroom without Walls" and "Global Village." It was designed, using a unique interactive multimedia approach to link students and faculty in two international locations—Ghana and Canada. The course, through the integrative information and educational technologies, aimed to break the boundaries of time, space and distance thereby facilitating the sharing of knowledge between the students at the three sites. What is more, it sought to create a "networked collaborative learning environment" for students and instructors at the University of Ghana and Kwantlen University College in British Columbia, Canada.

The partially on-line course used a mixed mode delivery approach, combining synchronous video-audio streaming (videoconferencing), real chat, online materials, pre-packaged online materials, as well as asynchronous chat sessions. The course had a classroom component at each of the host sites that was supported by a course web site. Interaction between learner and lecturer was primarily through text messaging and online chats during synchronous lecture sessions. Students also had to use online chat sessions and discussion forums with teaching assistants.

The course had a mix of synchronous and asynchronous activities (i.e., some activities took place at the same time, same place; some at the same time, different place; and some at a different time, different place). The course provided continuous feedback, high levels of interaction and an emphasis on student work and group projects.

In all 31 undergraduate students from Kwantlen University College (KUC) and six graduate students from the University of Ghana, Legon (UGL) took the course. The preliminary study showed that while the preparatory stage was quite daunting and the project leader had some harrowing experiences in finding collaborators and accessing funding, the overall benefits of the project to both students and instructors were quite substantial, making the efforts and sacrifices worthwhile.