Conflict in Virtual Learning Communities in the Context of a Democratic Pedagogy

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May, 2011

Submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DECLARATION

This thesis results entirely from my own work and has not been offered previously for any other degree or diploma

Signature -

Acknowledgements

At the time of writing, having been successful in my viva, I am feeling extremely elated and have surrendered to a number of emotions. There is a taste of independence and victory, of praise following the years of strenuous labour and a feeling of great gratitude towards the people who have helped me feel this way.

To my supervisors, Prof. Mary Hamilton, Prof. Vivien Hodgson and Dr. Gale Parchoma, I owe a debt of gratitude. PhD is a really daunting process in which I would be defeated without them. They taught me not only subject matter, but also professionalism. It was three years of hard and stressful work, and I only managed to survive with their support and professional guidance. I may have made mistakes, but they never judged me. Perhaps, I disappointed them on many occasions, but they continued to support me. They taught me how to use this hierarchical relationship in such a way as to provide knowledge and experience, rather than it being turned into a power relationship. I admire their professionalism, knowledge, experience and sympathy. I do not know how I could ever pay them back for their help…

Also, I would like to give a warm word of thanks to my examiners for their invaluable constructive comments... Of course without them, I would not have found the opportunity to be proud of myself and improve my thesis!

Also I want to give a big thank you to my family members: to my husband, Halil Öztürk, who always maintained a constant mood and gave me regular support, while I was being driven mad, working on this thesis and suffering the ups and downs of regular mood changes, who also did the washing up and cooking! when I was hopelessly working until dawn; to the new member of my family, Öykü Öztürk who had a stressful tummy life growing up during my pregnancy. She did not deserve this stress, especially compared to her peacefully growing peers. I owe both thanks and an apology to her… and to my sister, Gökçe Ünlütepe, thank you very much, sister, for always being with me in my life.

My Lancaster crew. PhD is a matter of team work, and there are secret legends in this team. Many times I caught the Lancaster train from London to take a break and smile my thanks to them. How can I forget that, while I was having my viva exam, they were anxiously waiting for me, coming out of their offices each time they heard a foot step in the corridor, to find out whether I would pass? The support and love they gave me was continuous. I love you all and thank you very much….

Also, a big thank you to the whole Educational Research department: it is incredible that everybody in this department always smiled at me and supported me for 3.5 years. This brings me to my second thanks which go to Mrs. Alison Sedgwick and Mrs. Alice Jesmont. Their office is the first place where I knock on the door to get guidance and support. For 3.5 years, I was so much looking forward to receiving Sedgwick's departmental email which starts with "Very many congratulations to Dr. Tugba Ozturk who had a successful viva today…". I was dreaming to see my name in these departmental emails and many thanks to her, she made my dreams come true before opening the celebration champagne!

Keith Sowden who did my proofreading, my thanks to him in this section for correcting it! Without him, I would have finished this thesis 3 months later! He is the hero of the international students like me. Thank you so much, Keith…

Antonio Vivaldi. Thank you very much because your music gave me the inspiration. Sleep in peace!

Finally, thank you to my sponsor, Ankara University, for giving me the required permission (on leave) and financial support to study in the UK. I hope I will be able to meet your expectations of me in my future academic career…and thank you to all the participants in this research, for allowing me to write your stories….

THANK YOU SO MUCH!!!!!

Tugba

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Abstract

In this thesis, I discuss conflict in virtual learning communities in the context of a democratic pedagogy. Democratic pedagogies are underpinned with emancipatory educational values through enabling students to participate in governance of their learning processes thus taking responsibility for their own learning. In these communities, knowledge is socially constructed through interactions and negotiations. The method and content of the learning programme are loosely structured in order to fulfill the community members' wishes, interests, ideas, and so on throughout the learning process. Within this framework, my point of departure is that emergence of conflict among the community members is probable given the diverse and sometimes clashing individual differences in participation in the negotiation process; in the loose structure of the programme which brings about uncertainty; and in the nature of the technological environments in which learning takes place.

To address these issues, I conducted field work with third year undergraduate students enrolled in a Computer Education and Instructional Technology programme. The field work consists of two staged studies: pilot study and main study. Respectively, a four week course for the pilot study and a fourteen week course for the main study were designed according to learning community principles underpinned with a democratic pedagogy, and students were introduced with their respective learning communities. Throughout the field work, I collected data via interviews, focus group meetings, pre-post questionnaires, essays, Moodle logs and field notes.

Drawing on my findings, I discuss the dynamics and the roles of conflict in learning through a model of conflict which I developed. This model identifies 3 types of conflict: intrapersonal, interpersonal and socio-cultural. I show how small groups of students in the community experienced different conflict pathways during the course of study. The findings show the importance of taking a holistic, processual view of the emergence of conflict in a learning community. The implications for theory and practice are discussed.

GLOSSARY

Collaborative learning: "A situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn together" (Dillenbourg, 1999:2).

Conflict: Perceived overt or hidden events which are generated from differences among a group of people that are triggered by conflict dynamics and which have a role in social learning process.

Cooperative learning: A learning situation where the division of labour among participants is shared (e.g. each learner is responsible for part of the work) (Roschelle & Teasley, 1995).

Community members: Stakeholders in the learning process who share the responsibility of learning/teaching activities. In this research, a learning community consists of student members who are primarily responsible for their own learning, a facilitator (tutor) who facilitates the learning process without actively interrupting, a guest tutor who advices the student members when they need and help them learn from different perspectives and a designer who advises about democratic pedagogy.

Democratic Pedagogy: Teaching and learning practices in which educational stakeholders (students, tutors, administrators, etc) equally govern and social knowledge construction essentially occurs through negotiations.

Learning: Socially constructing knowledge through interaction and negotiations.

Learning culture: The attitudes and customs of learners and the ways that the learners construct knowledge.

Virtual Learning Community: A democratic learning culture in which a group of individuals come together to work collaboratively and autonomously in a life cycle in order to reach the common aims by utilizing online tools to create a sense of community with shared values.

PART I

CHAPTER 1: Overview & Introduction
CHAPTER 2: Literature review
CHAPTER 3: Research Design

Preamble

Part I consists of the first three chapters of this thesis in which I present my point of departure, research questions and literature review regarding my research questions.

In Chapter 1, I present my point of departure by introducing the idea of democratic pedagogy and then the place of conflict in this pedagogy. In this chapter, I include the basic elements and essential points of view in democratic pedagogies, rather than a detailed review of the theoretical background of democratic pedagogies. I introduce Virtual Learning Communities as a model underpinned with democratic pedagogical principles. I discuss in what sense virtual learning communities (VLCs) embody democratic education characteristics and why I focus on these communities. Subsequently, I present Schwier's (2001) VLC model by which this research is inspired. Finally, I formulate my research questions drawing on my arguments.

In Chapter 2, I review the literature in order to seek the answers for my research questions and identify gaps and areas for further investigation. However, it is important to note that in this Chapter, I solely present the literature review regarding the initial answers to my research questions and in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I analytically examine my research questions, based on the data, by building on my initial findings in the literature, as presented in Chapter 2. Briefly, in Chapters 6, 7 and 8, I try to find answers to my research questions (conflict in virtual learning communities) through data analysis when there is not sufficient information in the literature.

In Chapter 3, I present the research design and include a detailed description of the virtual learning community through which I examine conflict.

CHAPTER 1

Overview & Introduction to Democratic Pedagogy

In this research, I examine conflict in virtual learning communities in the context of a democratic pedagogy in higher education.

Democratic pedagogy in this research signifies teaching and learning practices in which educational stakeholders (students, tutors, administrators, etc) govern equally, and knowledge construction essentially occurs through negotiations.

Democratic pedagogy in education came to prominence at the beginning of 1900s with John Dewey. He advocated democratic pedagogy, maintaining that emancipation of mind could be achieved through freed capacity of thought, fostered in democratic schools (1903). In materializing democratic pedagogy in schools, he referred to subject matter, method and administration in his book titled Democracy and Education (1916). "Subject matter consists of the facts observed, recalled, read, and talked about, and the ideas suggested, in the course of the development of a situation having a purpose" (pg 212). Method refers to the process which makes the subject matter most effective in use. The method in a course promotes students' engagement in the participatory democratic decision making process. According to Dewey, subject matter and method are intertwined and influence each other. From this point of view, the administration of education concerns two aspects: how to organise the learning process (method) and what (subject matter) to teach. Drawing on his arguments, students are encouraged to learn from their own experiences and subject matter which constitute authentic knowledge.

It is noteworthy that while Dewey's principles have not been broadly adopted in the North American educational context, his contribution to the literature on democratic education remains important in the present context.

In parallel with Dewey's ideas in the 1920s, the implications of democratic pedagogy can also be seen in the UK. However, these implications are not part of the mainstream; rather they represent only a few examples in the education system. In 1921 A. S. Neill founded the Summerhill School in Suffolk with a course in which "the main idea is to make the school fit the child – instead of making the child fit the school" (Neill, 1961:20). In order to achieve this, the children in the school were

given democratic rights in determining school regulations at regularly held meetings. With regard to this, according to Neill (1992: 23), "Democracy should not wait until the age of voting, twenty-one, and then it is not democracy at all; to be one of thousands registering a vote for a candidate is not democracy". In addition to equal participation rights, self-government was also essential as an infinite value in Summerhill School. The students were not obligated to attend a course unless they wish, as self-government means the right of an individual to live freely without outside authority (Neill, 1992).

So, how are these democratic principles reflected in the stakeholders' educational practices? According to the inspectors` official report (they were appointed to Summerhill School in 1949 by the British Ministry of Education), the majority of students did attend the classes although they were not entitled to, students had not only subject matter courses but also art or creative writing related and physical training courses and students' success in these course impressed the inspectors. In their report, they gave an example of a student who does not wish to attend classes but rather he improves his skills in tool making. They described their observations by saying `Freedom is real`. However, in the overall evaluation, the inspectors assessed the whole result of the system on students as meagre. They referred to the possible reasons for this result as 1) lack of junior teachers, 2) the children's lack of sufficient guidance 3) Lack of privacy, as none of the children has a private room and there are no quiet study rooms.

As for the other stakeholders in Summerhill School, teachers followed the timetable set up for the academic year, and there was no specific new teaching method that they were expected to use. Along with the Head Master and students, they also attended the meetings to administer the school and have equal rights with others.

Above, I try to summarise two practices by Dewey and Neill as examples of democratic education. However, Dewey and Neill essentially focused on pupils in their theories and practices and this limits their arguments to a certain age group of learners, given the whole education system concerns a wide range of learners of different ages. Also, given the value system of education in those years, which can be characterised as didactic, teacher-centered and where, for instance, the students were severely punished, the underlying ideas of democratic pedagogy in those years' educational philosophy remained idealistic. In fact, Neill mentioned his experience with some of the inspectors who required Neill (as a head master) to apply top-down official regulations in the Summerhill School. Neill (1992:139) told an anecdote to

describe a short account of this incident: “We had two inspectors, typical dead officials. Everything wrong, not one word of praise. They wanted me to retire and close the school. `Even if you get your premises up to standard I doubt if your teaching would allow you to continue.`” As this short incident demonstrates, the implications of democratic education were not always well received and in particular the top-down regulations made these practices idealistic in those times.

A final point about these aforementioned democratic schools is that, as these implications date back to almost a century ago, it would be helpful to review recent literature on democratic pedagogy within the context of the more recent epoch.

In the 1970s, drawing on radical democracy and other social movements such as feminism and social justice, critical pedagogy developed from very similar discourses to those concerned with democratic education. Paulo Freire (1970; 1998), influential theorist of critical pedagogy, emphasised the relationship between education and ideology. According to him, official ideology is taught at schools through the curriculum, and learners and teachers are left with no choice but to oppressively `deposit` the knowledge underlined in these curriculums. Freire (1970: 53) coins the term Banking System in his critique of the education system and he says: “Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits”. Therefore, as happens in the democratic pedagogies, he idealises an education in which the stakeholders (teachers and learners) administer their own teaching/learning process and critically construct the knowledge. In parallel with this, in the same way that democratic pedagogues idealise, Giroux (2007) describes critical pedagogy as a vital element of democracy which enables students to learn not only how to be governed but also how to be capable of governing.

However, there are also differences between democratic and critical pedagogy as the latter puts more emphasis on hierarchy, oppression and social justice. Critical pedagogy emerges in the context in which Freire conducted his experiments before the military coup and then was exiled from his native country, Brazil. He worked with farm-workers who were learning literacy. In his early life, he struggled against the World’s economic crises and all these experiences influenced how he structured the critical pedagogy. Democratic pedagogues such as Knight and Pearl (2000) also point out this historical and contextual background from which critical pedagogy is

developed and they suggest that critical pedagogy discourses and current educational practices do not demonstrate the same reality. In a similar way, other scholars such as Brookfield (1994) and Reynolds (1999) point out the `dark side` of the critical pedagogy approach in adult education. Reynolds (1999: 178) remarks that "Engaging in critical reflection can prove unsettling, mentally or emotionally and a source of disruption at home or at work". Therefore, in addition to the similarities between these two pedagogical approaches, there are also contextual differences and the primary focus of this research is democratic pedagogies.

On examining recent literature on democratic pedagogy, in their article, Pearl and Knight (Knight and Pearl, 2000: 198) define seven characteristics of democratic education which are as follows:

1. the determination of important knowledge;
2. the nature of educational authority;
3. the ordering and inclusiveness of membership;
4. the definition and availability of rights;
5. the nature of participation in decisions that affect one's life;
6. equality;
7. optimal learning environment.

According to the authors, a democratic pedagogy is defined by

(1) The determination of important knowledge. The authors question the ontology of the knowledge by asking who makes the decision on the important knowledge which is taught at schools. According to them, while determining the important knowledge, stakeholders should democratically participate in the decision-making process irrespective of authority. For instance, students should also decide on the knowledge which would influence their life.

(2) The nature of educational authority. Education is a participatory process and there should not be any specific authority which signifies a privileged epistemological position.

(3) The ordering and inclusiveness of membership. Accordingly, the stakeholders in education may come from different backgrounds, cultures, socio-economic status and so on. When looked at from that point of view, education must be sufficiently comprehensive, as otherwise it may cause, for instance, impediments to meaningful communication.

(4) The definition and availability of rights. Everyone in an educational environment has rights and they are protected by them. In determining the rights, in the authoritarian classroom, responsibilities take an important place and rights are subordinate to responsibility. Whereas in the democratic classrooms teachers discuss rights in depth with students and they guide them how to practice these rights. Essentially and very briefly, Knight and Pearl (2000: 211) describe these rights in democratic pedagogies as "1) the right of expression; 2) the right of privacy; 3) the right to a special kind of due process (presumption of innocence, the right not to testify against self, the right to counsel, the right to trial by independent and impartial jury, and protection against cruel and unusual punishment; and 4) the right of movement".

5) The nature of participation in decisions that affect one's life. Citing from Goethe "A useless life is early death", the authors point out the importance of making sense of the school time to prepare individuals for real life. Thus, by being actively involved in the decision making process, the stakeholders have a feeling of belonging to the school and perceive the school as a place which will be of benefit in the future.

6) Equality. Equality is a crucial element in democracy. With regard to democratic pedagogies, although each individual may find it difficult to achieve equality, it is nevertheless quite realistic to struggle for a democracy which aims for equality.

7) Optimal learning environment. In order to establish a democratic classroom, necessary conditions must be provided for optimal learning. Briefly, these conditions can be provided by (Knight and Pearl, 2000) encouraging the stakeholders to take risks, eliminating unnecessary discomfort, meaning making, helping them gain a sense of competence, feeling the belonging, usefulness, hope, excitement, creativity and ownership of the learning process.

After identifying characteristics of democratic pedagogy, it is equally important to reflect on how to apply these principles into compulsory education. In particular, autonomous educational practices can be controversial in compulsory education practices. For instance, as happens to Neill's Summerhill School, the autonomy given to the students may be in contradiction with structured curriculum in the educational system. On this point, in materializing the democratic pedagogy, Boud (1988) elaborates three practical aspects of autonomous educational ideas in higher education: goal of education, use of autonomous methods and autonomy in relation to

subject matter. Very briefly, goal of education signifies an ideal form of individual behaviour; autonomous methods signify approaches to run activities in a way of encouraging learner independence as well as responsibility for decision making; and finally subject matter signifies domain of knowledge which empowers students' critical and independent thinking ability.

Boud (1988) also describes three approaches to an autonomous teaching in higher education as: individual centered approach, group centered approach and project centered approach. Individual centered approach focuses individuals and their learning needs. Learners specify their goals and decide in learning activities in accordance with their learner needs. They are also involved in the decisions about assessment criteria. In group centered approach, the focus is shifted from individual to group's learning. In Boud's words (1988: 25), "individuals pursue their own learning needs with the context of the group, referring to others for support and feedback and for validation of the enterprise". Democratic decision making process takes place in the group discussions. Final approach, project centred approach, concerns a particular project and outcomes of this project. Through projects, learners engage in situated activities and are actively involved in the learning practices.

In the overall review of these points of view, there are some common attributes of democratic education described by different authors. Dewey, Neill and Knight & Pearl include *authenticity of knowledge*, *self-regulation, plurality, participation* and *equality* as elements in their definition of democratic education.

There is also another common dimension to these view points which is Education for Democracy. The approach here deals with democratic education from a macro perspective: with the long term aims of education in society. For Dewey (1938), education serves to train independent- and intellectually-minded individuals. Knight and Pearl (2000) refer to the purpose of education, which is to prepare responsible and informed citizens. In order to achieve this, "students learn to be responsible citizens by being citizens in situations where they are able to exercise ever increasing power and in situations where they have very little power and use both to develop an understanding of citizenship responsibility (pg 202)". In parallel with this, Neill (1992) believes that any form of authority imposed on an individual to think in a certain way is wrong and an individual should not do anything unless this is his own ideas/ thoughts/conclusions. As a result of this education, the benefit of practical civics is that Summerhill School students experience the chance to think

independently and participate in the decisions which influence their life, as well as being aware of their rights and defending them.

To sum up, the concept of democratic education concerns aspects of both *Democracy in Education* and *Education for Democracy*. In the former, the concern of democratic education, the emancipated nature of democratic pedagogy, problematizes the process of transmitting power from instructor to learners and allows learners to take responsibility for their own learning. This requires learning contexts in which learners have freedom of choice, organise their own learning process and learning through negotiation, which takes over from teacher directives (Gore, 1999). In the latter aspect of democratic education which is Education for Democracy, the schools are regarded as primary institutions for preparing individuals to be democratic citizens. In order to achieve this, the democratic classrooms provide a model of citizenship for the students.

Here two questions arise which are also my motivations for conducting this research. In the first place, in the educational context where individual differences exist, where there is no authoritative figure and the course is loosely structured to fulfil the learners' needs, expectations, etc., do the stakeholders (students, educators and so on) encounter conflict? If so, what is the influence of conflict in their learning experiences? In the second place, although education serves for a democratic society, what if society is not ready for democracy and in that situation, how does this socio-cultural context, which is in conflict with democratic education, influence the educational experiences of the stakeholders?

In order to examine these questions, in this research, I take a model of virtual learning communities designed with principles aligned to democratic pedagogies and investigate the aforementioned questions, both from the perspective of the stakeholders' experience of conflict and from the perspective of the socio-cultural context.

Virtual Learning Communities and Democratic Pedagogy

Democratic pedagogy discourse underpins the conceptual framework of the learning communities which include *authenticity of knowledge*, *self-regulation, plurality, participation* and *equality* elements of democracy.

The *virtual* dimension of the learning communities is technology, which plays a role in the emergence of pedagogies and provides a platform for the learning communities.

With regard to the technologies and their role in the democratic pedagogy, in the literature, a growing body of research is concerned with how technologies promote democratization and/or emancipation of the education process (Boyd, 1987; Garrison, 1997; Riel, 1995; Sorensen & Murchu, 2004).

Lankshear et al (1996: 160) argue that pedagogues "must reconfigure teaching and learning in terms of the concepts of `links` and `networks` which have the power to redefine the roles of teachers, administrators and learners. Here, the notion of virtual communities holds interesting possibilities for greater democratization of education".

Garrison (1997) suggests that technology has potential to support learner interaction, social construction of meaning and confirming a common understanding. Learning technologies offer an environment in which the learners can share references, learning materials. In that sense, technology helps learners connect to each other and to the resources. He gives an example of computer conferencing as a learning technology tool and suggests how this tool improves the social tie among learners through two way communication and improves the dialogue for democratic learning.

In the same vein, drawing on Habermas' concept of discursive emancipation, Boyd (1987: 167) argues that "The usual communication media of schools tend to favor conformity. However, the close match between Habermas' criteria for emancipative discourse and the main characteristics of computer-mediated conferencing favor this medium for education". He refers to Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) as a tool for creating ideal conditions for "liberative discourse because of its potential for reducing dominance factors and for filtering of verbal distractions and rhetorical tricks" (1987: 168).

However, some scholars are critical of the view which takes for granted the technology as a medium to foster democratization of education. In his article, Mantovani (1994) remarks that technology as a tool per se is not sufficient enough to solve basic social problems such as social inequality and in fact these tools are not independent but rather are integrated in the socio-technical network. He adds: "Barriers in communication and status differences in organizations are clearly more a social than a technological issue, and the search for a technological remedy to social inequality seems somehow naive" (1994: 14).

In a similar way, Levy (2004:51) also points out the growing body of research which questions the technologically deterministic approaches in the light of the view that

"pre-existing social categories and norms in the construction of social presence and identity in online settings, challenges the claims of the democratic theory as overly deterministic".

To sum up, in the literature, there are ongoing discussions about the role of technology in the democratization of education. Although I support the idea of employing technology for the purpose of empowering learners, promoting dialogue and connecting the learners with each other and with resources, I took different points of view into consideration and I tried to apply democratic principles in the virtual learning community model in this research which embodies a democratic pedagogy approach and therefore represents a micro model for this research. It is important to note that it is not only the *technology* aspect of a virtual learning community which represents a micro model of a democratic learning and plays roles in materializing democratic pedagogy but also other VLC elements such as mutuality, plurality, autonomy and participation. In the sections below, I present these core concepts of a virtual learning technology.

Virtual Learning Communities

Definition of learning community

In literature, the definition of learning community varies. Briefly, it is defined by different authors as:

"A group of people as peers to meet personal learning needs primarily through a sharing of resources and skills offered by those present" (Pedler, 1981: 68).

"A learning community is an advanced interpretation of collaborative design in that, as well as sharing ideas, tutors and students take joint responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating the detailed design, content and direction of the course" (Hodgson & Reynolds, 2005: 15).

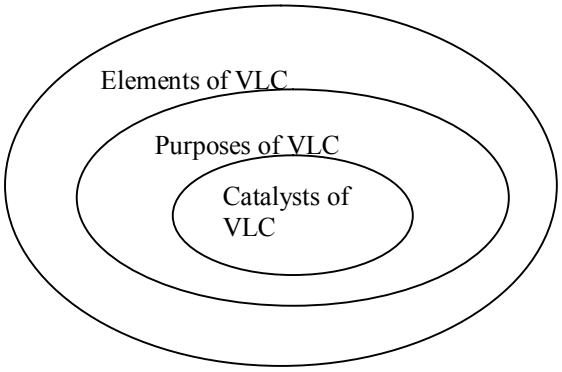
"A learning community is a group of individuals engaged intentionally and collectively in the transaction or transformation of knowledge" (Schwier, 2011:2).

"A learning community is a cohesive community that embodies a culture of learning" which "attends to issues of climate, needs, resources, planning, action and evaluation"; and "responsibility for learning is `shared` among community members" (McConnell, 2006: 19).

Apart from the definitions above, with regard to a learning community, there are some points such as basic elements of a learning community that need to be taken into consideration when defining it as I present below.

Conceptualizing democratic VLCs: Aspects of a learning community

In theorizing virtual learning communities, Schwier (2001) refers to catalysts, elements and purposes in a Virtual Learning Community (VLC). Elements of the community signify the components which bring the community members together. The purposes of the community signify the different purposes of learning communities such as ideas, reflections etc. Finally, catalysis of the community signifies the events which stimulate the evolvement of the community. Detailed review of these aspects and their brief explanations can be seen below.



Elements of VLC: Learning – Historicity- Identity – Mutuality – Plurality – Autonomy – Participation – Integration – Future – Technology
Purposes of VLC: Relationship, Place, Reflection, Ceremony, Ideas
Catalysis of VLC: Interaction, Engagement and Alignment.

Figure 1: Aspects of virtual learning communities (Schwier, 2001: 9).

Elements of a VLC

Elements of a VLC accommodate characteristics of democratic education such as plurality, autonomy and participation. According to the model which Schwier proposes, elements of a VLC include learning, historicity, identity, mutuality, plurality, autonomy, participation, integration, future and technology as I describe below.

Learning

Learning is regarded as a crucial element for a virtual learning community, as learning is the reason why the members come together. Learners are encouraged to contribute to the knowledge construction process in the community.

Historicity
Members sustain the community's existence in a historical cycle. Living in an historical circle such as past, present and future can make members' engagement more meaningful.

Identity
Identity signifies the belonging of the members to the community as well as the boundaries (`recognized focus`) of the community. Throughout the time, both individuals and community may foster an identity. A thoughtfully facilitated VLC accommodates individual identities.

Mutuality
Mutuality signifies interdependence and reciprocity of the community members negotiating meaning. This element refers to "constructing purposes, intentions, and the types of interaction" (Schwier, 2007: 41) among participants.

Plurality
Plurality signifies different points of view and diversities in VLCs; from them, learning experiences of the members may gain vitality and richness.

Autonomy
Autonomy refers to the community members' capacity to express themselves freely and negotiate meaning. This element also refers to the members` free will to withdraw without penalty. Through autonomy, members protect their identity, express their opinion and live with their individual diversities. In the learning process, interactions emerge from participation and shifting power relations.

Integration
This element signifies integration of other elements of a learning community and associated with supportive values of a community. According to Schwier (2011: 12), as an example of implication of this element, community members "articulate a set of belief statements, and identify group norms as they evolve".

Participation
Participation is also one of the basic elements as it requires members' contribution to process (Lewis and Allan, 2005; McConnell, 2006; Schwier, 2001; Wenger, 1998).

Participation in collaborative learning settings provides evidence of working together (Dillenbourg, 1999: 9).

Technology

Equally, another element, technology, is important to provide the basis and medium for the growth of virtual learning communities. It is a medium to bring the members together and a base in which they can pursue their learning activities.

Purposes of VLC

VLCs emerge in order to reach a shared purpose. In a community built upon a shared purpose, Schwier (2001) identifies five emphases which are relationships, place, intent, reflection and ceremony.

The VLCs are formed by the people whose learning purpose is shared by all members. Members share the same issue, curiosity or a learning problem and this brings them together.

The community exists in a space in which members feel a sense of security, share common attributes, and heritage (Kowch & Schwier, 1997). According to Hodgson (2008), online learning communities can be considered as learning spaces where participants inhabit and, at the same time, by which individual and collective identities are constructed. There are two emphases here which might be helpful in defining VLC: identity construction and learning spaces. Identity construction is a distinctive property of a VLC especially when compared to any ordinary group as the members feel they belong to the community and also know the boundaries of the community in a certain time and space. As for the latter, the emphasis is upon community members' shared social practices rather than on physical learning spaces (Hine, 2000; Jones, 1995; Watson 1997).

A further dimension of purpose of VLCs is community of ideas. In these communities, which are different from others, members focus on a specific aspect of their learning purpose, share common interests and are usually achievement- or product-oriented. Compared to community of ideas, community of reflection is built by drawing on the members' historical relationships of a shared the past. These communities serve the purpose of making sense of the shared events and they usually focus on the process rather than outcome.

Finally, ceremony is also emphasised in virtual learning communities. Ceremony signifies the rituals and important dates such as annuals. In Schwier's (2001: 17) words: "These communities are ceremonial, in that their purposes are linked to larger entities that have an element of ritual or high degree of personal identification associated with them".

Catalysis of VLC

Schwier (2001) argues that catalysts are required to nurture the development of a VLC. These catalysts include communication, interaction, engagement and alignment which foster the learning process. Communication as a catalyst has a crucial role in sustaining the community's existence. The learning process begins with communication which then stimulates interaction, engagement and alignment. This learning culture proposes "norms of continuous learning and improvement; a commitment to and sense of responsibility for the learning of all students; collaborative, collegial relationships" etc (Ford, et al., 2008: 165) which are catalysts in the learning processes in order to reach the community's purposes.

Conceptualizing democratic VLCs: `Group or Community`

Learning communities differ from learning groups in a way that community accommodates communitarian values which hold the community members together and learners share the collective responsibility to reach the shared goals.

According to Parchoma and Dykes (2005) "shared purpose, collectively defined and carried out activities directed toward active solution seeking are, at once, the fuel and the rationale for community existence" (np).

As Ng (2001: 199) points out in a learning community the potential for a collaborative learning experience is possible through promoting technologies "only if participants can relate to one another, and share a sense of community and a common goal".

In another study of Hodgson and Reynolds (2005: 14), they remark that:

> "…to use Clark's term, the notion of community as sentiment, conveying a sense of solidarity and of significance, of individuals belonging to and in some way contributing to the whole so as to derive a sense of self-worth" (Clark, 1973: 409).

To sum up, drawing on the literature, community possesses certain values such as working in solidarity, constructing identity and shared beliefs, which are different from the group. "It has a culture created and recreated through communication" (Guilar & Loring, 2008: 22). Apart from that, sharing a sense of community among members is also important in formulating a learning community. Moreover, in the learning communities, the autonomous structure of the group and knowledge construction through negotiations could be considered as peculiar.

Based on the discussions above, in this study, a virtual learning community signifies:

A democratic learning culture in which a group of individuals come together to work collaboratively and autonomously in a life cycle in order to reach the common aims by utilizing online tools to create a sense of community with shared values.

A critical reflection on virtual learning communities

In the sections above, I tried to briefly present descriptive information and core elements of the virtual learning communities. I will further my discussions with the literature in regard to critical approaches to the idea of learning communities in a sense that in practice some elements of the community remain problematic.

I referred to the autonomy element in the early part of this chapter and discussed why autonomy of the stakeholders in education can stand in contradiction to the reality or regulations of an educational system. I expanded my discussions with possible practical alternatives drawing on Boud's work (1988) to materialize the autonomy of the learners in practice.

A further point concerning the core elements of a learning community is about mutuality. Mutuality signifies interdependency of the learners and interdependency requires trusting to others. Smith (2008) and Bruffee (1999) stress learners` need to trust one another with their learning in addition to accept responsibility for peer learning. However, trust to others as well as taking others' learning responsibility may not always be achieved in a learning community and remain problematic in a community's learning process.

Finally, some scholars (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Ferreday & Hodgson, 2010/053; Pedler, 1981) are concerned with the element of participation in the learning communities. According to Ferreday and Hodgson (2010/053: np) although

"participation in learning is pedagogically very effective", there are some issues need to be taken into account. They point out that "participation without reflexivity has the potential to be not only oppressive but can develop into a form of tyranny of the majority". Pedler (1981) also touches the issue of tyranny of majority and suggests that in particular in didactic learning pedagogies, the majority's goals override personally significant learning. In order to lessen the tyranny, he proposes a learning model in which learners can individually pursue their individual goals but to some extent comply with the sharing norms of the community. In this model, the content is loosely structured and a teacher facilitates the students' learning by initiating the discussions and providing the students with resources so that individuals can actualize their learning goals with guidance of a teacher.

Research Problem

In the VLCs, educational practices are loosely structured in order to fulfil the members' changing learning needs, interests, aims, wishes and so on. There is no hierarchical structure and therefore equality is the key element in VLCs. Teachers also learn in the learning process and their role is to facilitate the students' learning with guidance and resources. Students lead the learning process through selection and use of resources in loosely structured learning activities. Learning occurs through social interaction and negotiations.

Within this context, my departure point, which also drives me to conduct this research, is that given the emancipated nature of this pedagogy and the uncertainty which derives from the loose structure of the course, emergence of conflict among learning community members is probable, as learning heavily depends on inter/intra relationships. In addition, when people work together towards the same goal, as they usually come together in different relationships and from different conditions of life, they are apt to generate diverse realities, logic patterns and values (Gergen & Gergen, 2003).

A further point is that even though individuals in the community share similar intentions and purposes in the democratic pedagogies, it does not necessarily mean that community members will demonstrate strong coherence and will collaborate effectively for the purpose of achieving common goals and shared meaning (Murphy & Laferriere, 2005). "The intrapsychic and interpersonal dynamics, the paradoxical tensions of individual and group development, and the paradoxical nature of group

dynamics issues" (Smith, 2008: 326) could end up with conflicting situations. Conflicts in interest, aim, ethnographic characteristics, expectation etc., could bring about an impasse or, on the other hand, lead to a positive learning experience in the life cycle of a community.

Conflict stands out in the learning experience of learning communities, as knowledge is co-constructed through negotiations and therefore learning depends highly on inter/intrapersonal values. Taking a closer look, conflict can be dealt with from both an individual and a group perspective. Accordingly, conflict becomes an issue for an individual with his/her personal values clashing with those of other community members. Also, it is important to note that the individual imports personal issues into the group, which then become an issue for the group (Smith, 2008) and consequently may lead to conflict. Therefore, identifying the conflict in a community is important to illuminate the social learning process.

A further point about VLCs is that, as I discussed in the sections above, from the macro point of view, the democratic pedagogies adopted in these communities serve the ultimate aim of the educational system of a society which is Education for Democracy. However, what happens if the socio-cultural values or more explicitly the society and educational system in which the VLCs are embedded do not have any democratic characteristics and do not support the communities' development and learning experience in general? As Freire (1998:62) points out, socio-cultural values and the educational subjects are not separable: "… the school [the VLCs in this research], which is the space in which both teachers and students are the subjects of the education, cannot abstract itself from the socio-cultural and economic conditions of its students, their families, and their communities". In a similar way, Zenios, et al (2004) note the importance of socio-cultural values in understanding a community's learning process through the members' shared understanding which is shaped within a socio-cultural context.

So, how is the VLC members' learning experience influenced by the socio-cultural conflict? As a concrete example, what happens if the education system does not embody equality, plurality and participation elements but rather proposes a didactic education directed by the tutors? Is it possible for the community members to put aside and disregard their traditional learning habits which they acquired during their education history and traditional education outside of their learning communities? Likewise, what if the society, which community members are part of, has different epistemological values? For instance, what happens if hierarchal learning is essential

among the society whereas VLCs require members to socially construct knowledge without any hierarchy?

After raising these questions, it is important to note that socio-cultural or individual differences do not necessarily demonstrate the existence of conflict between individual, group and community. Conflict is a concept which is beyond the differences. In that sense, to uncover what makes the issue of differences a matter for conflict is important in virtual learning communities underpinned with democratic pedagogy. In order to examine this, the internal dynamic of conflict needs to be researched through identification of the parameters related to triggers and avoidance of conflict.

After identifying the dynamics which make the differences a matter for conflict, it is equally important to examine how conflict results in the learning process or how these results can be patterned. For instance, what happens after the members experience interpersonal conflict? What are the possible scenarios? These sorts of questions are also the focus of the research. Subsequently, as virtual learning communities' main focus is `learning`, in this research I also investigate the role of conflict in the community members' learning experiences.

In that sense, these discussions have helped me formulate my research questions and in my research, I examine conflict as a key issue in the learning experience of the community members. I focus on the conflict with its intrapersonal, interpersonal & socio-cultural types and influence of these types on the members' learning experiences in this research. In doing this, I also focus on the dynamics which can trigger and avoid the conflict. Finally, I investigate the results of conflict in the learning process.

The following research questions are the focus of this study:

1. What types of conflict can be experienced in virtual learning communities?

2. What is the internal dynamic of conflict?

a. What triggers the conflict?

b. How is the conflict avoided?

3. What is the result of these conflicts?

4. What is the role of conflict in the social learning process?

a. To what extent might an intrapersonal site of conflict have a role in learning?

b. To what extent might an interpersonal site of conflict have a role in learning?

c. To what extent might socio-cultural conflict have a role in learning?

5. To what extent can understanding the nature and role of conflict in virtual learning communities underpinned with democratic pedagogy contribute to informing the practice of educational designers, practitioners and researchers?

Contributions to the field

By doing this research, I propose to contribute to the literature on virtual learning communities underpinned with democratic pedagogies academically, by examining conflict as an obstacle or a supportive element in the social learning process.

In addition, this study could be also helpful to educational designers of emancipated education, and contribute to more collaborative, inclusive decision-making and democratic pedagogy in general in the virtual learning communities; it could also provide an insight into technology use in education. I paid special attention to the use of terminologies (These terminologies can be seen in the Glossary at the beginning of the thesis). Accordingly, instead of using `web based learning`, or `computer assisted learning`, I preferred to put the stress on learners first by seeing them as members of the community, which might be helpful in changing the perspectives on technologies as taken-for-granted tools and students as passive adaptors and learners.

Apart from practical contributions, I also aim to propose a typology for conflict in the virtual learning communities which provides a conceptual framework for the field of technology enhanced learning.

CHAPTER 2

Literature review "Conflict in virtual learning communities"

In the literature, there have been research studies describing conflict from different angles. In these studies, the definition of conflict varies depending on the relative discipline, as for example sociology, political science, psychology and cognitive science. In terms of learning theories, much has been written on the cognitive and conceptual conflict concerning knowledge obtaining and processing. However, very few research studies focus on conflict in the social learning process which is based upon emancipated pedagogies. Therefore, as I present below, I could examine very limited bodies of research in order to identify the gaps in the literature in relation to my research questions.

In this chapter, I very briefly present different perspectives about conflict and then narrow my focus to conflict in the social learning process in relation to my research questions.

Conflict

In sociology, conflict is known as social conflict theory, and is mainly based on Marxism. Social conflict theory (Conflict Theory, n.d) "is mostly applied to explain conflict between social classes" and ideologies. In political science, conflict usually refers to international relationships or local problems such as civil war. In cognitive psychology, conflict occurs when two incompatible cognitive structures which signify the same reality clash (Tiberghien, et. al., 1998).

The definition of conflict also varies. According to the interpretive view, conflict is an interpretive phenomenon which refers to the perceived incompatibilities between the views, wishes, and the desires between parties (Ayoko et al., 2002) and "a process of ongoing negotiation about what is valued and the meaning of events" (Isenhart & Spangle, 2000:6). In defining conflict, emphasis is usually put on the relativity of perception which leads to differences in interpretation. In some of the research studies, conflict is regarded as a perceived phenomenon (Paul et al., 2004; Cheng et al., 2007; Swenson & Strough, 2008) and therefore is difficult to examine in tacit zones. In line with this, it is possible to see that the perception of conflict in the literature varies.

Piaget (1961) remarks that there are schemas in the human brain which are changed through the assimilation and accommodation processes which are described as complimentary processes. This view explains that in order to learn new knowledge, there must be conflict between the existing schema of a human and the new knowledge which has just been obtained. According to Duschl and Hamilton (1992), cognitive conflict stimulates the learners to change from one conceptual structure to another.

Briefly, cognitive conflict studies deal with the conflict from the cognition point of view. However, it is important to note that in this research, I focus on the social dimension of conflict, such as the learning experiences of students through different points of view and negotiations rather than processing knowledge through cognitive structures, schemas in the brain. The closest conflict type to the cognitive conflict in this research is conflict in arguments and counterarguments which is linked to the direct involvement of individuals to knowledge construction. To sum up, cognitive conflict is not included in this research; by presenting the approaches to conflict in literature in this section, I only aim to briefly introduce the reader to different types of conflict and then demonstrate the conflict which I focus on.

In this research, conflict signifies perceived overt or hidden events which are generated from differences among a group of people that are triggered by conflict dynamics and which have a role in social learning process.

In order to examine conflict in this research, firstly I review the literature dealing with conflict; secondly focus on the conflict types which concern the democratic pedagogies and finally identify the conflict emerging from the data as I present in Chapter 4. In other words, I examine the conflict drawing on the literature as well as the data.

Types of conflict

In the literature as I presented below, conflict has two sites (1) Intrapersonal sites of conflict (an individual with his/her personal values which are in conflict with the others such as working preferences) and (2) Interpersonal sites of conflict (explicitly emerging during social interactions such as power relationships). There is also a third category which is (3) conflict in socio-cultural values; however, there are insufficient research studies in the literature into this third aspect of conflict. Nevertheless, in order to find an answer to my research question regarding socio-cultural conflict, I include this category as a third conflict type in this section.

Intrapersonal site of conflict

In the literature, the intrapersonal site of conflict is dealt with in different contexts.

Adult learning focuses on learners as individuals since they have a variety of prior experience or knowledge (Huang, 2002). Adult learners usually bring their unique ethnographic characteristic to the learning situation (Ference & Vockell, 1994). For example, it could be assumed that the inflexible participant is not conducive to collaborative learning, because they would like to see their own learning preferences in the learning environment.

According to Ke and Chellman (2006), working preferences might result in conflict. Their study shows that solitary learners are prone to prefer work on subject matter on their own rather than externally through interactions with other students or tutor, reluctant to be interdependent, and interact with others about subject matter, rather than socially in the learning process. Here, conflict could be seen between the working preferences shown by different individuals in a collaborative learning setting. Also, collaborative learning in democratic pedagogies could be in conflict with the individual's learning preferences. Taking a closer look, adult learners usually prefer to work independently and take the control of their own learning; however, in the pedagogies in which collaboration takes place, adult learners' working preferences might be in conflict (Huang, 2002). In a similar way, competitive students are apt to keep up and set goals for learning; while doing this, they may turn less competitive people off, making it more difficult for people to appreciate and to learn collaborative skills because of the conflict between these two learning preferences. In conclusion, working preferences of students in a group might bring about conflict.

Finally, Thompson and Ku (2006) conduct research into different online learning groups and they identify conflicts in each group as individuals in the group could not materialize their wishes because the group interest which was set above individual interest constrained their freedom. So, here, conflict in interest plays a role in students' learning experiences. In addition to *interest* as an intrapersonal conflict, as I quoted from Ayoko et al. (2002) in the previous section, different *wishes* among persons are also described as a matter for conflict.

Interpersonal site of conflict

In the literature, interpersonal conflict essentially consists of conflict in argument/counterargument and conflict in power relationships.

Stegmann and others (2007) point out the concept of conflict in contrasting arguments in the social knowledge construction process. An argument is a set of statements which accommodates opinions or knowledge about the proposition that has been made, whereas counter argument represents the opposite proposition. The following can be a concrete example of argument: "Tablet PC seems like a good idea. If we also use a microphone, there you are, it is a Smartclass". This example can be countered by a different dimension of the preceding argument: "But it is very expensive, tablet PC is not possible, very expensive". Interpersonal conflict emerges from these two contrasting arguments. Here, students construct their knowledge about the tablet PC as a learning technology by discussing its advantages or disadvantages (by developing arguments/counter arguments).

A further interpersonal conflict type which emerges during social interaction process concerns power relationships. Conflict as a matter of power is an approach to explain it (Blasé, 1991; Gronn, 1986; Minter and Snyder, 1969; Wenger; 1998; Yanoov, 1997). Conflict becomes a matter of power when people compete with each other to get what they want. As the diversities are polarized and turn into power relationships, conflict could occur as these powers actively clash. When considering conflict as a dynamic process, a strong imbalance in power relations leads to a situation with a supervening authority. This leads others to become passive and is called conformism. Against dominant power, individuals might comply with the mandates. Thus; even though there is a conflict, this might be obscure. As Curle (1971) describes, conflict could be unperceived, so to speak, latent. In a similar way, parties might not be aware that they experience a conflict situation. Conflict is not always explicitly experienced and thus covert or not assessed as such by participants, because having conflict is perceived as an antisocial behaviour (Greenhouse, 1986). In these cases, Kolb and Bartunek (1992: 3) point to hidden conflict and they remark that "one party does not acknowledge directly to the other a perceived grievance or injury, and so the mode of expression may be avoidance, camouflaged self-help, or toleration". Briefly, members of the community might experience a conflict; however, they might not make it explicit for the sake of maintaining their existence in the community and of social stability. In this research, I also focused on hidden/latent conflict.

Hidden Conflict

Above, I tried to explain hidden conflict and possible scenarios which lead to the emergence of hidden conflict. However, it is important to note that hidden conflict is not a conflict type, rather a form of conflict which is implicitly experienced by the

members. For instance, an individual may experience conflict in power relationships as interactions emerge in the group; however, he/she may not make it explicit to the other members of the community. In this case, this member experiences (hidden) conflict in power relationships.

After reviewing the types of conflict, I concluded that every individual has personal values which might conflict with the social system to which s/he belongs, as they involve interpersonal relationships, or the performance of his/her commitments. The individual imports personal issues into the group, which then become an issue for the group (Smith, 2008). For instance, it is an individual who brings his/her own wishes, expectations, interests, ethnographic characteristics, learning preferences and so on to the learning process, which might end up in conflict with others' individual or community values. In a similar way, the interpersonal growth of participants sometimes could be seen as challenging (Fahy, 2003) as it is interrelationship that brings out the power relations, dynamic social system and construction of knowledge. Therefore, it could be argued that conflict could arise in both ways: from the individual with his/her idiosyncratic personal values (internal-intrapersonal) and conflict between people (external - interpersonal) (Kellett & Dalton, 2001). In this research, my focus is upon interpreting the conflict from both intrapersonal and interpersonal perspectives.

However, sometimes it is difficult to differentiate where the individual borders end and zone of the collective begins (Wenger, 1998) in a community. As Wenger (1998: 147) points out "…for every case where there is a conflict, you can find a case where individual and social developments enhance each other". Conflict is not only constituted by an individual, but also emerges during social interactions. In a similar way, it is difficult to differentiate individual and sociocultural values, because individual values are "not a private achievement but owes its origins to community participation" (Gergen, 2003: 3) and are socially rooted. In that sense, it can be assumed that individual values are constituted by social factors, and at that point it is difficult to differentiate where individual borders end and social borders begin. However, there are some distinctive characteristics of these categories which are helpful in differentiating among them, and looking at the conflict from the perspective of the individual, community and society allows me to examine how an individual, a community and society experience conflict, separately and holistically.

In the section below, I present sociocultural conflicts in the literature.

Socio-cultural conflict

As I discussed in the first sections of this research, as a longterm aim, democratic education prepares learners for a democratic society. However, what if the society and educational system, in which the community is embedded, is not in line with democratic values? How is this socio-cultural conflict reflected in the virtual learning community members' learning experiences? What if, for instance, the learners have traditional learning habits, due to the education system they have been exposed to prior to becoming members of the learning community which is underpinned with democratic pedagogy? In the same way, what if the tutor in the community has adopted didactic teaching pedagogies before becoming a community member, and then s/he takes the facilitator role as a member of the VLC? What if the learners are a part of the society whose epistemological stance is based on hierarchal structures whereas democratic pedagogy requires the learners to have a learning experience without hierarchy?

In regard to these questions, unfortunately there are not sufficient resources in the literature. Campbell et al. (2009) touch upon the socio-cultural issues in Instructional Design; however, there is still a need to deeply investigate socio-cultural conflict in virtual learning communities as it is very important to find out how the communities are influenced by this type of conflict.

Overall, in the literature there are two conflict types 1) intrapersonal and 2) interpersonal conflicts. As a research question, I added a third category which is 3) socio-cultural conflict.

However, dealing with conflict merely as types is not sufficient to comprehend the issue holistically. In order to present the whole picture, it would also be helpful to examine the internal dynamics of conflict (what triggers and what prevents conflict), potential results of conflict as well as the role of conflict in members' learning experiences.

Dynamics of conflict

Differences or Conflict?

As I discussed in the Research Problem section, having differences in the community does not necessarily mean that an individual/group/community experiences conflict. It

is the internal dynamics that make the differences in the matter of conflict. For instance, community members may not even notice the differences they have, such as each member's different working preferences or interests etc. Internal dynamics trigger these differences and consequently an individual/group/community perceives them as a matter for conflict. On the other hand, if, for instance, the character of the group's learning culture accommodates the learning culture as an internal dynamic, the emergence of conflict can be avoided. Therefore, it is important to uncover the internal dynamics of conflict in a learning process.

Briefly, in this research, I examine the internal dynamics of conflict which I classify as triggers and avoidance of conflict. Based on this classification, I aim to find out what triggers or prevents emergence of conflict. In that sense, researching the internal dynamics of conflict contributes to a better understanding of conflict and to management of conflict situations in the learning process.

The dynamics of conflict also enable me to reflect on conflict within certain situations. For instance, identifying the dynamics allows me to investigate under which conditions conflict is triggered or avoided. As is discussed in the social science, certain conditions tend to influence certain results, even though they might not be repeatable. Nevertheless, it is worth reviewing these dynamics in order to understand conflict holistically.

In the literature, the dynamics of conflict can be summarized as learning culture, ontological security and technological factors.

Learning culture

The learning culture of a group/community signifies the attitudes and customs of learners and the ways that learners obtain, negotiate and process the knowledge.

As an example of learning culture, members' attitudes towards the group's/community's learning situations signify a learning culture. In their studies, Thompson and Ku (2006: 368) observe that "some participants felt that they should convince the whole group to accept their opinions, whereas others were more accommodating; some participants were more open-minded and willing to take suggestions from group members, whereas others had difficulty taking criticism and were not willing to adapt their own working styles to others; some participants had a negative attitude toward group work to start with and purposefully built up a barrier between group members and themselves". In this case, the members' attitude can be

described either as accommodating or antagonistic. When members have an accommodating attitude, then they are likely to avoid possible conflict, unlike those with antagonistic attitudes.

In a similar way, Avruch (1998) posits that culture as a social action could be seen in the evolution of conflicts. Culture embodies belief, norms, aspects of self and others, attitude and values of the individuals. In particular, conflict could be seen when heterogeneous cultures coalesce towards homogenous culture, in other words, when members orient themselves towards shaping community's own culture in a collegial harmony.

Ontological security

Ontological security refers to existential feelings of an individual in relation to his/her experiences concerning a sense of social order and continuity (Giddens, 1991). According to ethnographic research results, ontological security as well as aspects of identity, control and guilt may have a central place in collaborative virtual learning groups (McConnell, 2005). "Students talk about being 'happy', 'anxious' and 'guilty', all of which suggest a deep concern for their personal identity and ontological security" (McConnell, 2005: 28 – 29). It is suggested that in order for learners to feel ontologically secure in a learning process, a sense of trust must be promoted in the network which learners belong to. (Shyu, 2002). "Trust as an element of ontological security is a psychological state comprising the intention to accept vulnerability based upon positive expectations of the intentions or behavior of another (Rousseau et al., 1998: 395)". It is a very influential emotion in building relationships, exerting effort, creating a feeling of belonging to community, etc. Historicity as a basic element of VLCs (Schwier, 2001) is intertwined with the concept of trust. Trust among individuals can occur in time because in time the individuals' behaviours become predictable and time signifies historical relationships in communities as individuals' trust based on their past experiences.

Given that VLCs also have a technology dimension, different dynamics influence the trust of others in these technology enhanced learning settings. Members collaborate with invisible, or in other words representative, virtual identities which has the potential to make trust more difficult in others. Gerdes (2010) refers to the difficulties, in a virtual setting, of establishing trust, by pointing out the lack of bodily presence and the lack of interpersonal interaction with the people whose opinions one values. To establish trust with the others, a long-term relationship, in which mutual patterns of behaviour become predictable, is needed. So, what is online trust? Corritirea and

others (2003: 740) define trust as "an attitude of confident expectation in an online situation of risk that one's vulnerabilities will not be exploited". In a VLC context, the risky situation may be, for instance, uncertainty because of the loose structure of the course. While taking decisions to determine the next learning phases, individuals in fact may take a risk and need to trust each other's decision for a productive learning experience. In that sense, trust is a very crucial element in the individual's sense of ontological security in VLCs.

Anxiety in the social community is another element of ontological security and an important aspect of a learning group dynamics (McConnell, 2005). Anxiety is a psychological state which is characterized by distress and uneasiness. When anxiety is generated in a state of uncertainty, individuals tend to feel ontologically insecure and in the process of terminating the anxiety, conflict can be triggered and emerges. The relationship between ontological security and conflict is that the more members feel secure, the less conflict could erode. For instance, a deadline causes anxiety among members and they feel the fear of failing. This is reflected in their decisions and behaviour. As a result, tension intensifies and inflames discussions and disputes which in turn lead to the emergence of conflict.

Technological factors

Benbunan-Fich and Hiltz (1999) point out the virtual presence of the participants in asynchronous collaborative learning settings and remark that it is demanding for the participants if they are not present at the same time and place while coordinating the group work and meet the deadline by 'anytime' communicating. They refer to the nature of asynchronous interaction and note that when participants do not get a prompt feedback, they may get anxious or frustrated. So, here characteristics of asynchronous communication have potential to trigger conflict among the collaborative learners.

Potential Results of Conflict

Once conflict has emerged, how does the process end?

In the literature, conflict resolution is stated as a possible result of conflict (Agerback, 1996; Tartas & Mirza, 2007). Dialogue and mediation take important place in conflict resolution. Agerback (1996) refers to dialogue as a way of constructive conflict resolution by noting the importance of communication channels. She remarks that (1996: 27): "So long as the social and political processes provide channels for dialogue, participation and negotiation, conflict plays a constructive role. Where such

channels are blocked, and yet basic needs go unmet, then resentment and desperation build up".

Smith (1997) refers to mediation in conflict resolution. Mediation signifies a third person's assistance in negotiations between conflicting parties in order to resolve the conflict. Tartas and Mirza (2007) also point out the importance of mediation, when tension is seen in the collaborative learning process and suggest that mediators bridge the gap between differences which lead to tension among collaborative learners.

So, what are the possible scenarios when conflict is not resolved? Whitworth (2005) refers to repression which occurs when conflicts cannot be resolved and when objectors deny any other voices.

Unfortunately, in particular with regard to virtual learning settings, the potential results of conflict have not been clearly published in the literature and there are only a few resources as I stated above. Therefore, in this research, I aim to address a gap in the literature concerning how conflict results in the virtual learning communities.

How does conflict play a role in learning?

In the literature, there are two contrasting views about the role of conflict in learning. While one view posits the positive role of conflict in learning, the other view emphasises its negative role.

Clouder and others (2006) examine conflict in blended learning settings (both face-to-face and virtual setting). Drawing on Davis and Denning's research (2000), they posit that positive group dynamics can be seen when learners experience conflict rather than avoid conflict. Positive group dynamic reaches the highest point as the learners face with conflict along with the situations of risk taking, humour, etc and this, in turn, is reflected on group's social and emotional climate evident in their interactions.

In a similar way, according to Tartas and Mirza (2007), tension management in the collaborative learning process is in fact very instructive, as students learn how to develop their argumentative competencies (how to develop and defend an argument, how to listen to each other etc.).

Stegmann and others (2007: 432) point out that conflict in argument and counterargument can be resolved when these two arguments are integrated in a way of defining a new "perspective in which the main claims can be sustained in a logically

consistent and coherent way". Thus, this integration leads to knowledge production in the social learning process when conflict is resolved. In a similar way, Zenios (2011) remarks that knowledge production in a learning community is achieved through the arguments and counter-arguments of the participants, along with other epistemic activities. She reports that in the process of knowledge production, the participants in her research "shaped and developed epistemic activities through starting the inquiry process, combining new arguments, generating relationships between what has been said, and relocating initial question posed" (2011: 265).

According to social constructivism, when a complex problem is faced in a community, it is easier to find a solution when worked collectively, because different arguments that are formed by different points of view create alternative solutions. (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992).

Conflict which emerges in uncertainty may not necessarily lead to destructive learning experiences. Because in the situation of conflict and uncertainty, the students engage in inquiry based learning to resolve their problems and according to Levy (2007:300) student-led inquiry "offer the possibility for students to experience the uncertainties, conflicting ideas and open-ended problems of what has been called the 'supercomplexity' of the contemporary world". Thus, the students prepare themselves for real life.

On the other hand, conflict sometimes impedes the progress of collective work. As researchers point out, conflict faced in the learning process could end with reducing group effectiveness, in an impasse, undermining cohesiveness (Folger et al, 1997; Kuhn & Poole, 2002; Passos & Caetano, 2005; Pondy, 1967) or even cause the student to drop out. The destructive dimension of conflict focuses on process. Learning, in particular learning which occurs within a social context, is also an issue of process. This process-based approach well suits learning communities in becoming a community and sustaining themselves as a community. Conflict, resulting from unstable dynamics, is sometimes seen as a destructive factor within the learning process. As Giddens puts it (1994: 126): "Those who think of `community` only in a positive sense should remember the intrinsic limitations of such an order".

CHAPTER 3

Designing the Research Site

In order to examine conflict in Virtual Learning Communities, I conducted field work which consists of two stages: 1) Pilot Study and 2) Main Study. The pilot study gave me an insight into the conflict in VLCs and using the experience I gained from the pilot study, I designed my main study. My main study is more comprehensive than the pilot study; therefore in my findings, I largely use the data from my main study and data from my pilot study supplements my main study.

Choosing a research site

I carried out both my pilot and main study with the students who enrolled in the Distance Education (DE) Course in the Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology Programme at a university in Eastern Turkey. I have kept the name of the university anonymous because of ethical considerations. I chose this university because my colleague works there; I believed he adopts a similar pedagogical approach to mine and democratic pedagogy in his courses, and he is knowledgeable about and uses technology in his courses. Also, taking control of a tutor's course as an outsider (researcher) during one term and manipulating the course in a loosely structured learning setting for research purposes requires strong and supportive interaction between researcher and the tutor; because of that, as I have known the tutor for a long time, I believed working with him and in his conditions (at the university where he works) would be convenient for me to conduct this research and consequently give me an opportunity to examine my research questions in depth. In addition, I wanted to scrutinize the Virtual Learning Community implications for undergraduate programmes, in order to examine the conflict in higher education and the tutor was running a course for third year undergraduate students. Furthermore, by working with the same tutor in my field work, I also had the opportunity to repeat my main study in a very similar context to the one in which I carried out my pilot study; and this enabled me to benefit from my experience in designing a VLC for my main study. Finally, the research site where I worked is situated in my home country, Turkey, and I wanted to contribute to my country academically by doing this research.

Drawing on these considerations, I found it appropriate to work on the research site, the contextual details of which I give below:

A. Pilot Study

In my pilot study, I worked with the third year undergraduate students studying at the department of Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology Programme at a university in Eastern Turkey, during 4 weeks of their course. Students were enrolled in a Distance Education course. The tutor and I designed the course, based on the virtual learning community principles set out in democratic pedagogy. In the scope of this course, students were randomly divided into groups and work together both in face-to-face (FTF) and online settings.

B. Main Study

The research field of my main study is identical to my pilot study as I worked with the same group of people who are enrolled and work for the same university in Turkey in the department of Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology Programme. I worked during one academic term (14 weeks) with 33 students on their 3rd year registered for the course titled Distance Education Course. The tutor and I designed the course based on virtual learning community principles, informed by democratic pedagogy. In the scope of this course, students randomly divided into groups and worked together both in face-to-face and online settings.

Study Process: Designing a Virtual Learning Community

I used the same design principles and stages in both my pilot and main study. However, although the research sites in these studies are identical, they contain different characteristics (learning materials, duration, learning outcomes, etc). In addition, because I use the data that were obtained from both studies, it is appropriate to deal with these two studies separately. Therefore, in the following sections, I include both studies and demonstrate how I apply the same model in two different studies.

Essentially, in order to build a virtual learning community, I utilized a model proposed by Lewis & Allan (2005). The reason why I chose this model is that it proposes very practical and concrete design principles and stages for practitioners. In this model, the tutor is in a facilitator role and community members have collective responsibility and co-dependency in the learning process. This model is helpful especially in providing practical guidance to the designers.

However, although Lewis & Allan's (2005) model proposes a very practical basis for designing a community, in order to build a VLC based on democratic pedagogy

principles, the tutor and I modified the model rather than simply following the principles/stages in their book. Within the scope of this course, we tried to achieve the design of a community in which learners pursue their own individual goals and the tutor is not at the centre of the learning network, but is a learner at the same time.

The content does not have specific boundaries and is loosely structured. While designing the syllabus, the tutor and I considered the context of the field work. Although the tutor and I tried to apply the design principles of a VLC within the context of the undergraduate programme, there were some restrictions that we needed to take into consideration:

1. Turkish Higher Education Council (HEC) : Every university (private and state) in Turkey is obliged to follow the regulations set up by this council. According to one of the regulations regarding the curriculum, every university must follow the `same` curriculum designed by HEC. However, since there is no inspection system to establish whether tutors follow the curriculum or not, the design of the "Distance Education" course is to some extent flexible. The tutor of the course and I had several in person meetings to discuss the design of the learning community. We also considered the previous year's experience (pilot study) in terms of what worked and what did not work. While deciding the content, in addition to the content given by HEC, we examined the primary resources such as handbooks, as well as how this course is delivered within the country and world wide.

2. Since members are unfamiliar with 3D settings, although they know the theoretical background of 3D settings, they do not have considerable experience, and since the time is limited, we decided to reduce the activities and time for 3D settings. Therefore, Second Life could not be used as envisaged at the beginning of the design process.

3. Some members do not have any ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) facilities. Therefore, at the beginning of the course, we decided to allocate a computer lab to them outside of course hours. Thus, even though the duration of the course is shown as three hours, members would have enough time, as much as one week, for their learning activities.

Please see Appendix 1 for a detailed review of the design of the course.

In terms of designing the instruction, in contrast to many other instruction models, the flow of the learning process changes since the VLC is a growing entity. Learners, in other words student members, are in the leading roles: they make decisions and mainly direct the process; they are at the same time researchers doing action research.

Phases of the VLC
According to Lewis and Allan's (2005) model, the community is regarded as a dynamic, living and growing entity within a life cycle. This lifecycle consists of the following six phases: (pg 53-54)

Phase one - Foundation of Learning Community
Phase two – Induction
Phase three – Incubation
Phase four – Improving Performance
Phase five – Implementation
Phase six – Closure or Change

Below are the phases and design principles of the VLC in the field work based on the Lewis & Allan's (2005) model.

Phase 1 - Foundation of Learning Community

The purpose of the community is to be knowledgeable about distance education practices and be able to find solutions to distance education problems. Below is the plan designed for this phase.

In the pilot study, first of all, students are given information about virtual learning communities at one session of the course. The place of VLC as a new formation in distance education, its historical basis, theoretical and practical background and life cycles are mentioned. Before the course, some references are suggested to the student members to read.

After discussions regarding a VLC, they are considered to have sufficient knowledge about the next phases of their participation as members of the community to understand the learning community holistically. At the end of the session, a research problem is given to students and then groups are assigned randomly to find an answer to this research problem.

In the main study, in the first place, as a guest tutor, I attend a face-to-face session in the first week and present the concept of the virtual learning community as an example of distance education applications (the place of VLC as a new formation in distance education, its historical basis, theoretical and practical background and life cycles, etc.) Subsequently, I introduce the students with their participation as members of the community. They are informed about the relatively new pedagogic approach, democratic pedagogy, and their right to administer their own learning process in the loosely structured course; they are given a course handbook to guide them about the method of the course (Please see Appendix 2).

In the scope of the community model in the course, I explain the different roles in the community; thus student members are introduced to other members of the community as follows:

A. Tutor
The tutor is a facilitator. He initiates discussions, activities and tasks, namely all aspects of learning experience during the learning process and encourages members to take part.

B. Learner
Learners are in charge of their own learning. By actively doing the research for the design of the next steps, students are, in a way, researchers.

C. Researcher
As a researcher, I am responsible for building a virtual learning community with the course tutor and putting forward democratic education design principles and theoretical backgrounds in the designed VLC model.

D. Guest tutors
There are two experts on subject matters in the VLC, whom student members can question whenever they need, in order to perform the tasks and learn from the different perspectives.

In the following sessions, I introduce the learning tools and some basic knowledge about Moodle and Second Life, and allow the learners to become familiar with the learning settings by providing hands-on experience in using the environments.

Basically, asynchronous and synchronous learning tools embedded in Moodle and Second Life are used in the virtual settings. An asynchronous tool is assigned to the learners in order to provide them with collaborative social modes of interaction.

Second Life is used in order to:

- Introduce the students to 3D learning settings as a Distance Education practice
- Perform hands-on collaborative tasks
- Observe worldwide distance education activities through islands of different institutions
- Form a base for discussions

Phase 2 - Induction

At this stage, the tutor, namely facilitator, takes over control by introducing the student members to the learning process, learning environment, tasks, ground rules and roles of all participants in general. His initial presence is regarded as an ice – breaker by bringing to the surface hopes and fears of the community members.

To make it more meaningful, the importance of the study and students' participation as members of VLC is discussed in this phase.

Members are encouraged to express their learning needs, expectations and fears (time, work load, accessing internet, working together etc.) concerning this implementation. Their feelings are taken into account in designing the learning environment and the rest of the learning phases.

At this stage, students are informed about ground rules such as confidentiality, minimum level of their required online participation, using meaningful titles for threads, respect for others' ideas, thoughts and so forth.

In the pilot study, a designed web page is introduced, their groups are set and their log in information is given. As an example of the virtual platform where the learning process takes place, the screen shot from the home page is:

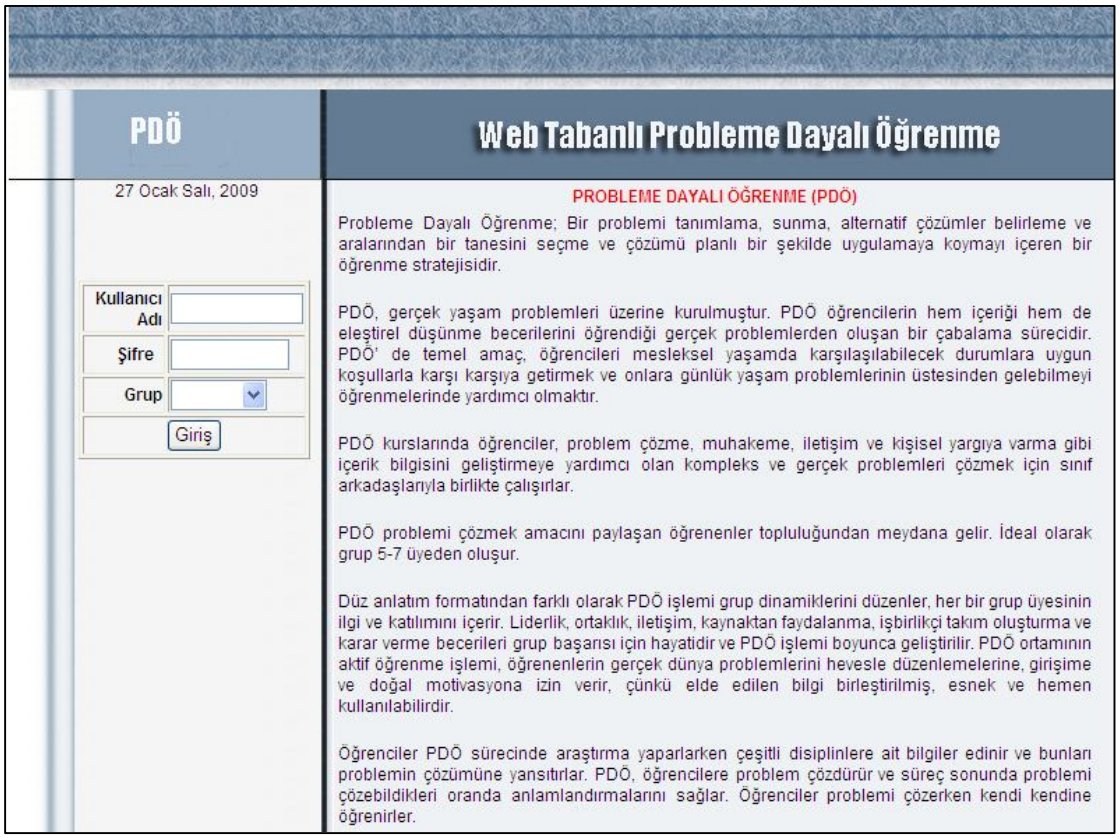


Figure 2: An interface from the pilot study

Basically, in the home page, there is a log in section as well as introductory and explanatory information regarding how the members should perform their task, general information about the research question, roles of the tutor and student members; and how to use the web page.

In the main study, as in the pilot study, student members practise with the learning settings and get actively involved in the Second Life with their avatar identities. They also learn how to use Moodle and create discussion threads in order to create a social construction of knowledge via Moodle.

In addition, the tutors introduce the student members to the foundation of DE, such as the basic definition of DE, technologies used in DE, economics of DE, etc. It is essentially aimed at teaching the student members basic information about subject matters so that in the following stages, they can perform learning activities and conduct their own learning without the need for any external input.

Phase 3 – Incubation

This phase is mainly about growth and development of a VLC. In Lewis and Allan's (2005: 72) words:

"Members start to communicate, develop confidence in their online voice and they start to work together. The group begins to develop trust and often disclose and discuss their concerns".

The facilitator pays attention to the community's sustainability which is about (Lewis and Allan, 2005: 74)

1. Supporting those lacking in
    - Social confidence
    - Technical confidence
    - Practitioner confidence
2. Suggesting references, offering knowledge and intervening when it is necessary
3. Monitoring individual access rates
4. Checking if ground rules are working

Some conditions of growing communities are also taken into account. Some of these conditions are (Lewis & Allan, 2005: 75)

a. Commitment and trust: Members feel that their open and honest contributions are valued and accepted.
b. Comfort zones: Successful communities offer members a comfort zone yet also enable members to take risks and follow learning trajectories that lead them beyond the security of their comfort zone.
c. Collective responsibility and co-dependency

Drawing on the principles above, the tutors help VLC's growth by supporting the student members, suggesting references, giving guidance when needed and placing emphasis on community based learning which is about trust, solidarity, collective responsibility and co-dependency.

At this stage, some of the students might want to change their groups, some of them to express their concerns on their insufficient technical knowledge of distance education

such as videoconferencing equipment – how to get and use-. The tutor arranges a meeting with them in order to sort out their particular problems.

In the field work, in order to support members' involvement and engagement in the learning process, some links are provided to students such as: "email to experts", "synchronous chat", "search on the web" and "leave a message to group members".

In the pilot study, in this phase, students perform a project by working collaboratively in groups. The project is about finding a solution to a university's staff employment problem. The problem statement is given as a scenario:

> The President of Bahcesaray University is faced with a problem that there is an insufficient number of academic staff to assign to the colleges located in Bahcesaray (it is located in an urban area, not a college on the main campus in the city center). As a solution, the President asks for scholars to travel from the main campus to Bahcesaray for a day.
>
> However, especially because of the transportation problems due to the severe weather conditions in winter, academic staff can not always travel to Bahcesaray, and that impedes the educational activities.
>
> In order to find a solution to this problem, a team is formed at the President's office and the necessary financial support is allocated to the project. The team decides to conduct a survey among academic staff, administrative staff and students, aiming to consult and implement the project.
>
> In this context, as students at the Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology department in the Education Faculty, you are asked to participate in this project. You are expected to offer a proposal, especially based upon distance education to find a solution to this problem.

The tutor helps the students understand the problem, suggests resources and explains technical questions related to both distance education and internet use. The tutor as a facilitator also helps members develop trust and discuss their concerns.

In the main study, after the tutor provides the student members with basic knowledge of DE in the previous phase, in this phase, student members perform their own learning activities on Moodle without tutor intervention. As a concrete example, they construct their own definitions of DE terminologies on Moodle. In order to reach this

shared purpose, student members firstly research different resources and then discuss their different points of view. Finally, they negotiate on a definition for each terminology among different perspectives and finally form a wiki about terminologies based on the negotiated definitions.

As this stage is regarded as the student members' first learning experiences as community members, the tutor guides them when needed. Also, he reminds them of ground rules such as respecting each other.

Phase 4 – Improving Performance

In this phase, essential learning activities take part. Members begin to work collaboratively.

As for the roles, while the students perform their learning activities, the facilitator reviews all of the activities and gives feedback or supports them but never interrupts in a particular way. A domain expert also guides the students when necessary.

As an example of the virtual platform from this phase, (after they log in) the screen shot is presented below and English translation of the page is as follows:

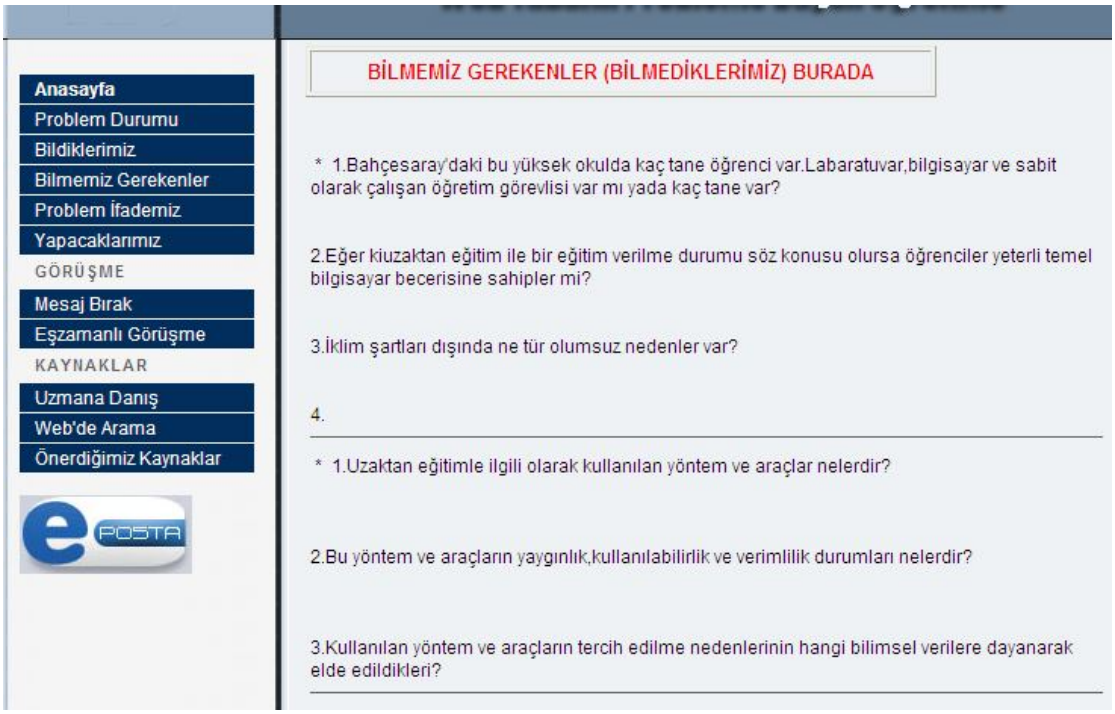


Figure 3: An interface from the pilot study as an example of how student members use the virtual setting

1. *Research Problem:* The problem given is stated in the "Problem" link.
2. *What we know:* In order to find a solution to the problem, members can firstly clarify their knowledge of the problem. This part is built collaboratively as each member writes about what s/he knows. For instance, members collaboratively write that

> There is an insufficient number of academic staff in Bahcesaray. In order to fulfil this deficiency, members of the academic staff have to travel from the main campus to Bahcesaray for a day.
>
> However, it is not always possible due to the severe whether conditions and transportation problems. This impedes educational activities. We are expected to find a solution as g participant students in this project

3. What should we know?: This part is about decision making to find a solution to the given research problem. Members discuss what to do next. For instance, they collaboratively write that:

> How many students are there in Bahcesaray? Is there a computer lab? How many academic members of staff are currently working at Bahcesaray and how many academic staff do we need?

In the case that distance education could be a solution, do the students and academic staff have the required computing skills?

What are the other negative conditions apart from the weather conditions?

Which methodology and tools should be employed in distance education?

4. Our Problem statement: Members create their own problem statement based on the given scenario in the "Problem" link. For instance, they define their understanding from the scenario based problem by stating:

> "In Bahcesaray, some problems are being experienced such as lack of academic staff, transportation from the main campus to the Bahcesaray College, communication, etc., which impede education there. Distance education was found to be a solution to this problem."

In the main study, in this phase, the main learning activities take part. Members begin to work collaboratively.

Basically, in the first weeks, the tutor teaches some basic concepts about distance education in accordance with the curriculum, and then members perform the learning activities on Moodle, Second Life or both.

The figures below are examples from Moodle and Second Life in this phase (after they log in).

Figure 4: An example of Second Life interface

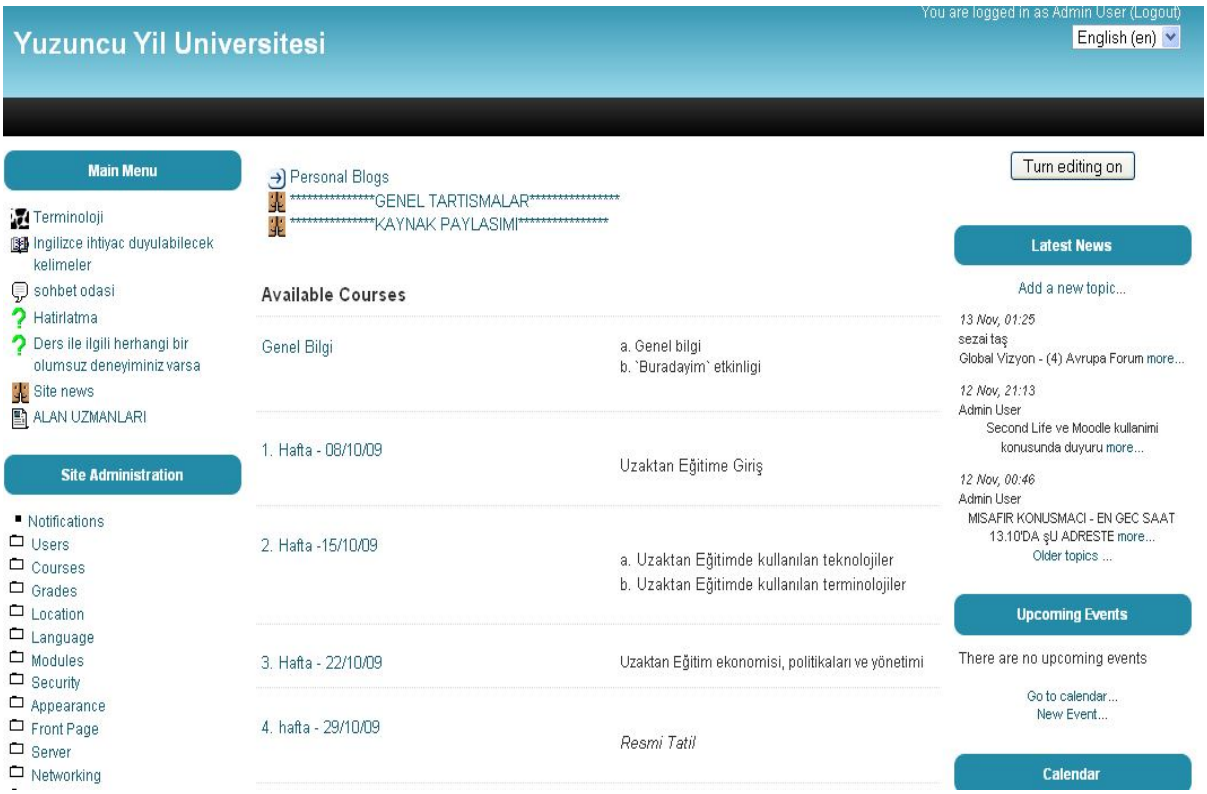


Figure 5: An example of Moodle interface

On the Moodle, there are forum (asynchronous communication tool), calendar, chat, glossaries, resources and wikis.

As for the Second Life, members teleport the islands related to the topics they learn. If members need to consult on subject matters or technical problems, they are able to find the relevant experts on Moodle.

Phase 5 – Implementation

The implementation phase consists of finalising the learning activities which have continued to that stage. This can be in the form of a product or outcome (Lewis & Allan, 2005: 105). Learners should decide upon:

- Identifying how the project will be managed and supported
- Planning the implementation process (who does what, when and how)
- Identifying the resources (people, financial and other resources)
- Developing and implementing a communication strategy
- Implementing the plan
- Reviewing and evaluating the change and also the process of change.

Here it is aimed at forming a virtual learning community which can meet their needs based on their own strength, and reduce the dependence on outside powers.

In the pilot study, in this phase, members decide the next steps after identifying their understanding of the problem and possible solutions. Through the *Action* page, they decide on task allocations and how to conduct their project and submit the outcome. For instance, they write on this page that:

> In order to continue education in Bahcesaray, Distance Education conducted from the main campus is found as a solution and more specifically, web based education will be offered to the students there.
>
> (Students found out technical details on how to design a distance education project including tools, equipments and the people to take part in a distance education project)

At the end of this phase, learners hand in their project reports.

In the main study, in this stage, student members have total responsibility for their own learning. The tutors initiate the discussions, activities and so on, but the rest of the process depends on the student members. For instance, in the Global Vision week which deals with DE with worldwide implications, student members in groups research each continent's DE practices, give presentations and report their findings. In this process, the tutors provide the student members with resources so that the tutors are no longer the knowledge authority; student members can learn from the resources and themselves by discussion. In addition to the tutor, there is also a Domain expert accessible via Moodle, so that student members ask for guidance when they need to and learn from different perspectives.

Phase 6 – Closure or Change

At this stage, the life cycle of a VLC either ends or continues for a different purpose. In this study, the life cycle of the VLC finishes with the members submitting their reports on the pilot study and, at the end of the term, on the main study.

Ethical considerations

I followed the existing Ethical Guideline of Lancaster University when I conducted this research in 2009. I submitted an Ethical Approval Form for Post Graduate Research (PGR) Students to the Department of Educational Research, Lancaster University. This form is designed to protect both the PGR student and the research

participant during the course of fieldwork and any other research ventures. I also followed the ethical rules of the university where I conducted this thesis, and informed the vice dean as well as head of department about my research.

In this research, all of the participants were asked for permission to use their materials, assignments, entries in the discussion forums, and statements in the interviews; with informed consent, answers to the questions would be used in the research. These informed consents involve details of my research, the reason why I ask their participation, their rights to withdraw from the research anytime they wish, confidentiality and/or anonymity, how I will use the data obtained from their course participation and my contact details (Please see Appendices 3 & 4).

Also, I informed the student members about my different roles and my relationship with them. Since I take the peripheral researcher role in this research, I also investigate my biases, as shown in the Methodology Chapter.

Finally, as the members use the internet for Moodle during the course, as the site administrator, I did not allow any other user to enter the site without my permission in order to protect the privacy of the students.

PART II

CHAPTER 4: Methodology
CHAPTER 5: Developing Thematic Framework

Preamble

In the next two chapters, respectively, I present the methodology in this research and demonstrate how I develop the thematic framework drawing on the data.

The method I adopted in this research is very influential in shaping the structure of the thesis. Accordingly, as I use a grounded theory approach; once I have analysed the data based on very general research questions, drawing on the themes which emerged from the data, I revised the first chapters. Therefore, there was constant interplay between these two chapters and rest of the thesis. In that sense, the next two chapters, which constitute Part II, are crucial in framing the thesis.

Chapter 5 (Developing thematic framework) represents an example of the outcome of the methodology that I adopted. Furthermore, this chapter is a transition gate between the previous and the following chapters in the sense that it presents not only initial discussions which emerged from the data, based on my point of departure (regarding previous chapters), but also a brief summary of the next chapters in which I expand the discussions in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

1. METHODOLOGY

1.1 A brief introduction to my epistemological and ontological stance

My expectation in conducting this research is to seek and construct an image of reality rather than the reality itself (Charmaz, 2010). Realities are multiple, intangible mental constructions and also situational (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Knowledge of reality is mediated and constructed with social negotiations and individual perceptions.

In the light of this epistemological and ontological stance, this research is informed by a constructivist grounded theory, according to which `discovered` reality is produced through the interactive process between researcher and subjects; and the aim is to report interpretive renderings of reality(Charmaz, 2005; Charmaz, 2010). In accordance with this qualitative research inquiry, I adopted an interpretive approach to conflict, after considering the orientation of this research.

Qualitative research methods are used in this research, as this facilitates the investigation into "the quality of relationships, activities, situations, or materials" and "there is a greater emphasis on holistic description in these researches – that is, on describing in detail all of what goes on in a particular activity or situation rather than on comparing the effects of a particular treatment" (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006: 430).

2. Method

I adopted a case study approach in this research. Case study allows the researcher to explore an event, an activity, a process or one or more individuals in depth (Creswell, 1998).

Stake (2000) identifies intrinsic and instrumental case studies. According to this, former case study is helpful in better understanding a particular case; whilst in the latter case study, a particular case is examined in order to gain an insight. This research is aligned with instrumental case studies since I aim to examine a case to facilitate my understanding of the learning community.

2.1. Case Selection

I mentioned the reasons why I preferred to work on the case in this research in the Choosing a Research Site section (Chapter 3). Briefly, I chose a research site from an ongoing third-year undergraduate programme in Turkey. I gained permission to conduct the research by contacting the tutor in charge of the course. With the tutor's consent, I contacted students in order to invite them to participate in the research.

Secondly, I identified the case. The tutor allowed me to work on one of his courses (titled `Distance Education`) during an academic term (14 weeks). The tutor and students, as well as a designer, represent members of the virtual learning community, and they followed VLC principles during this project. This case was also helpful in experiencing the VLCs in undergraduate programmes in terms of forming communities and examining their existence in a structured programme.

My intention to carry out research on this site is not to generalise to a wider population, but rather to examine my research questions in depth, in other words, to generalise analytically (Yin, 2003) and it was also convenient for me to gather data from this research group.

2.2. My involvement in this research

My involvement in the field work is aligned with a convert researcher role (Adler & Adler, 1987). Accordingly, I had not previously been involved in this research setting, but while conducting the research I become converted to the community membership.

Briefly, I take different membership roles in my field work as a designer (along with the tutor), guest tutor (domain expert) and researcher. By adopting different roles, I got a chance to come closest to the members of the community. However, my degree of commitment was always at the advisory level, rather than one of interrupting the flow of the field work. In that sense, I employed a peripheral member researcher role as an insider in the activities of the community; and I refrained from engaging in the most central activities (Adler & Adler, 1987).

As a designer, at the beginning of the course, I helped the tutor design his course in accordance with the democratic pedagogy. As the course is loosely structured, the tutor and I held discussions at times when there was uncertainty about what to do next. However, I paid special attention not to actively interrupt the tutor's course, but rather to advise him about democratic pedagogies. I also helped the tutor in the use of virtual technologies (Moodle and Second Life). While fulfilling my designer role, I

took field notes which consisted of my observations as well as brief summaries of the conversations between the tutor and myself.

As a guest tutor, I attended the first three weeks of the course and helped student members understand the fundamental knowledge in Distance Education. I also took part on Moodle and Second Life sites. The student members could ask me questions through my virtual presence, whenever they needed.

As a researcher, I conducted focus group meetings, interviews, pre/post-course questionnaires and organised the data on virtual settings. Also, I took field notes during the times I was at the research site.

Although my peripheral researcher role enabled me to engage in different membership relationships and to access and gather the data which I might otherwise not have, yet there might be potentially deleterious effects on my committed standpoint as a researcher, guest tutor and designer in this research. Since I am a peripheral member researcher inside the community in this study; I also investigate my biases. While writing my experience as a member of the community, I used the interpretive biography method as described below.

2.3. Interpretive Biography

It was not my intention to write about my story in this thesis at the beginning of the research. My primary focus was student members. However, throughout the community's life cycle, I realized that other members must also be included in a community's story, as otherwise that would mean neglecting other members' experiences which are in fact inseparable from the student members' experiences. In the light of these thoughts, I decided to include the other members' experiences with conflict; subsequently, I found myself in the research although this was not my intention.

In this research, I write about my experience as a designer, largely in the Chapter on Conflict between Designer and Tutor. As Denzin (1989) remarks, lives have both objective and subjective markers and in order to write objectively, I primarily used written records such as interview transcripts or summaries of the written correspondences with the tutor. In each conflict case I dealt with, I included two parties' voices.

Also, when I wrote about my observations in the research site as a researcher, I utilised my field work notes. As a guest tutor (domain expert), the student members only asked my opinions, in particular when they were working on their group work. I included the student members' questions and my advice to them in Chapter 6 based on the data on Moodle.

In articulating my story, I use the Interpretive Biography method and try to follow standards of truth which are sincerity, subjective truth and historical truth (Denzin, 1989). Briefly, Denzin notes that sincerity refers to the willingness to tell personal subjective truths; and a historical truth in an autobiography signifies the statements consistent with existing empirical data on an event or experience. Therefore, in order to follow these standards, I referred to my subjective truths and utilised the aforementioned written data sets.

2.4. Data Collection

According to Creswell (1998), using different sources is beneficial in providing corroborative evidence for the research. I aimed to collect the same kind of data from different sources which should provide consistency in findings both in my pilot and main studies.

In my pilot study, I did interviews with the tutor, focus group meetings with the student members (at the end of the study) and I used data on the virtual learning environment as well as an essay written by a student member who wanted to drop the course.

Data sources in the main study are a/synchronous communications, transcripts from the focus groups and interviews, as well as pre & post-course questionnaires. On Moodle, I put a form (Appendix 11) for the student members who want to change their groups or drop the course. This form is available for the student members throughout the course and is envisaged to find out the reasons why a member wants to change his/her group or drop the course and to what extent conflict can play a role in his/her request to change the group or drop the course. I also included the emails sent to me in the analysis process when necessary; however in order to protect the privacy of the senders, I did not use direct quotations, rather I summarized the correspondence or I coded the sender's name.

I conducted two focus groups with the student members to explore essentially the interpersonal site of conflict and socio-cultural conflict. At the focus group meeting, I

aimed to capture interaction among members and heated discussions emerged from this social interaction, which in turn enabled me to examine interpersonal sites of conflict. In these meetings, student members also raised issues about socio-cultural matters.

In order to explore hidden conflict, the existing written data may not be sufficient. For that reason, I looked for hidden conflict in emergent situations during the course which held the possibility of bringing conflict to the surface. For this purpose, I did an interview with a student who wanted to change her group. Also, I included a student's email in the analysing process in which he demanded to change his group.

In addition, I used pre & post-course questionnaires in order to collect data about intrapersonal sites of conflict by addressing individual questions. In the pre-course questionnaire, a student member stated that he `never` prefers to work in a group. He used similar discourses in the focus group meeting as well. In order to investigate the conflict from an individual point of view, I also interviewed him. Some of the data collection tools in this research can be seen in Appendices 6-13.

2.5. Researching online

Community members used a/synchronous communication tools in the virtual learning environment for knowledge construction as well as for communication purposes. However, it is important to note that as the course is also run with face-to-face (FTF) sessions and members also communicate/learn in these sessions, I have been unable to capture the data in FTF sessions, except for my field notes which consist of my observations. As a result of this, in the analysis process, I occasionally came across missing data, because one of my primary resources is the virtual setting. In these cases, I used different data sources and cross referenced them in order to complete the picture.

I also included emoticons (virtual expressions such as a smiling face, angry face etc) in the scope of the study, as members tend to use these icons as a way of communication and therefore, they have a meaning in members' interactions. In addition to emoticons, I also included `silence` as another signifier of a message in communication. In particular, when examining hidden conflict, silence may indicate oppression or a way of dealing with conflict. As a concrete example of silence in online settings, as part of an ongoing conversation between two members, if one of them asks a question by specifically addressing the other member, and if this member does not reply to his/her enquiry, even though s/he is in the system and reads his/her

peer's message, I regarded this silence as `a possible conflict-related case` for further investigation in the interaction of both parties.

Researching online gave me an opportunity to obtain privileged knowledge through user logs. I could examine each member's activities (posts, views, edits, etc) along with the time. Although it may not be possible to capture these latent activities in face-to-face settings, I regarded them as data through Moodle logs and reports and focus on these incidences as possible conflict cases. In particular, when there were incidences in which I could not make sense of their relation to conflict, I utilised these data sets. The following is a brief description of data sources I have used for this study:

Table 1: Data Sources

DATA SOURCES	DESCRIPTION
A. Data Collection Tools	
Pre-course questionnaire questions	29 students returned the questionnaires.
An essay of a member who wants to change his group	1 student requested to change his group and stated this with an essay (email).
An essay of a member who wants to drop the course	1 student wanted to quit her group work and drop the course.
Interviews with the tutor	18.25 minutes, done after the first session. 1.05.12 minutes done after the focus group with students
Focus group meetings at the end of the study	28 students participated in the focus group meetings. Post-course focus groups were conducted in 2 groups. First group consists of 15 students + second group consists of 13 students. The duration of the focus groups: First group is 41.31 (minutes) length. Second focus group is in 48.33 (minutes) length.
Post-course questionnaire questions	33 students returned the questionnaires.
My field notes first 3 weeks and towards last weeks	3.150 words
B. Learning Environments	
Moodle and a Web Based Learning Environment	- Asynchronous communication - Synchronous communication - Moodle logs and reports - Project reports, presentations (power point)
Second Life	- Chat logs
C. Other	
Summaries of emails from students	
Summaries of emails from tutor	

3. DATA ANALYSIS

In the analysis process, I deal with the data at group, individual and community level within the dimensions of intra/interpersonal and socio-cultural conflict. Then, I explore the situatedness of internal dynamics of conflict and influence of conflict on the members' learning experiences within these dimensions and levels.

3.1. Units of Analysis

3.1.A Group and individual clusters

In presenting the student members' learning experience, I examine their stories at both individual and group level.

In terms of the individual level of the learning community, I emphasise the individual's involvement with conflict within the groups by presenting each individual student's characteristics at the beginning of the group stories, as well as in the discussions regarding the intrapersonal site of conflict. I also refer to individual perspectives when presenting the whole community's story in Chapter 8.

An advantage of focusing on the group studies is that, as the volume of the posts on Moodle is large (over a thousand), examining group work enabled me to work on a certain topic (Distance Education practices of different continents) from different dimensions (how conflict is evolved, when conflict is seen most, etc in a specific context); thus, I could examine the conflict in-depth. In addition, I could deal with *individual* interactions at the *group level*.

The aim of the group project is to provide students with an insight into global issues in Distance Education. As a method of achieving this aim, students are provided with resources, as well as guidance when they need, and they are independent in the matters of getting, using and constructing knowledge and presenting their findings to the whole community. A very general aim is introduced to students, within the scope of this project: to get an insight into how different continents deal with distance education theories and practices and furthermore to examine how globally distance education has brought about changes in education.

Since the topic is about Global perspective and practices, each group picks one continent and then presents their findings about the continent to the community. Activities, such as choosing which continent to focus on and task allocation within the group, take place on Moodle.

Groups are formed weeks in advance and approximately one week of the course is allocated for 2 groups to share their knowledge with the whole community. Group members are asked to use Moodle to discuss their tasks and build knowledge.

In order to present each group's learning experience with conflict, I start their stories with a brief introduction of the members of the groups (Appendix 15), conflict patterns and conflict types (inter/intrapersonal conflict). I embedded the internal dynamics of the conflict into each group's story, so that the story's flow is not interrupted with sub-titles regarding each dynamic.

As data sources for the group cluster, I used the data on Moodle as well as questionnaires, focus group meetings and individual interviews.

3.1.B. Community Cluster

As socio-cultural conflict concerns all the community members regardless of the roles (tutor, designer, student) or levels (individual or group), I present socio-cultural conflict in a community level in a different chapter.

Also, in order to get the big picture, I examine the conflict at a community level as proposed by this research. In this chapter, I summarize the overall discussions and make conclusions about conflict in the virtual learning communities.

3.2. Coding Analysis

The coding process in this research is informed by constructivist grounded theory and includes two phases: coding the data obtained from A) pilot study and then B) main study; and three stages as suggested by Charmaz (2010):

1) Line by line coding,
2) Constant comparison as Charmaz (2010: 188) suggests
   "a) Comparing different people (such as their views, situations, actions, accounts, and experiences)
   b) Comparing data from the same individuals with themselves at different points in time,
   c) Comparing incident by incident,
   d) Comparing data with category, and
   e) Comparing a category with other categories"

In the pilot study, I formed a draft coding schema drawing on literature and the data from the study. Then, I conducted the main study and developed my existent coding schema with the data that emerged from this main study.

3.2.A Rigour and clarity

In order to present defensible arguments and establish confidence in the discussions, as well as to demonstrate to what extent this research has been systematically worked through, is coherent and is clearly described (Finlay, 2006) I added appendices, essentially about data sources and the data analysis process (Please see Appendices 5-13).

3.2.B Validation

In this research, in terms of construct validity, I utilised literature in order to provide consistency between the concepts I used, while interpreting the data and the concepts of well-established knowledge in the field. Prior to coding, I formed my initial coding schema based on the literature; however, I did not impose the coding schema, but used it to ensure the emerging concepts in the data were well-founded, both empirically and conceptually (Dey, 2007).

Also, during focus group meetings which were conducted at the end of the field work, I asked the student members some validation questions. These questions concerned the validity of my observations in the field (whether my observations about them and the field in general were accurate from their point of view) as well as whether I had been able to faithfully interpret the comments which they had given me during the focus group meetings (As can be seen in Appendix 6, in the focus group protocols, I envisaged asking confirmation questions to ensure I would be able to interpret the student members' comments with the meaning they intended). In doing this, I aimed to "look for a match between their experiences and the emerging theoretical model" (Morse, 2007: 241).

Finally, while interpreting the data, I utilised my field notes in order to examine the consistency between the data resources and the observations I made at the research site. As can be seen in Appendix 12, while referring to my reflections concerning the sociocultural background of the student members, in particular their regional characteristics, I could verify my observations by comparing my observations with their statements in the data sources.

3.2.C. Sense Making

Prior to reviewing the data with coding analysis, I organised the data sources: I made a list of all my data sources, with the number of participants, for future reference; created a narrative summary profile for each of the student members in the study; created a profile for the course tutor and a summary of the interviews I carried out with him; wrote up a summary of the focus group discussions, highlighting the issues raised in them, and the roles of the different participants so that I can cross-reference from these to other data about individuals and made a report of the student members' submitted reports and discussions on virtual settings in order to analyse the role of conflict in learning. Subsequently, I organised each data set in accordance with my research questions and crossed referenced. This was helpful in terms of making the connections between my research questions, data collection tools and the data gathered through them.

In order to make sense of the findings from the data, I also compared pre-course and post-course questions results and scrutinized the changes over the time.

The database that came out of the field work is very complex to analyse; therefore, I organized these databases at several interconnected levels: at the level of the individual; at the level of the project group and at the community level.

Also, student members referred to the same issues in different data sources and from a different perspective. For instance, some students referred to the same conflict they experienced in the post-course questionnaire and in the focus group meeting separately. Therefore, I needed to form a coherent story of individuals in each member's profile page that I created to analyse analytically. An example of data cross referencing with regard to interpersonal conflict (group roles as a possible indicator of power relationships and working preference) in Group 3 can be seen in the Appendix 5. Also, data collection tools used in this research can be seen in Appendices 6-13.

Detailed data review indicates that each group has its own characteristic and own story of conflict. For instance, two of the groups worked harmoniously, and socially constructed knowledge; whereas the other group faced severe conflict, could not reconcile and individually produced the collaborative outcome. In addition to subgroups in the community, some individual members also deserve attention for elaborating on the conflict at an individual level. As members of the learning community, conflict between designer and tutor is also explored in this research. Finally, conflict is investigated in the story of the whole community.

4. Limitations

There are four limitations in this study about data sources, translation, word limit and time, and concept of learning.

In regard to the data sources, unfortunately, a few of the student members did not return either their pre-or post-questionnaires or both. This limited my research specifically on these members. Similarly, a few student members never participated in the course, possibly because they failed the course in the previous year and in the academic term in which this research was carried out, they were not obligated to fully attend the course, but merely sit the exams in order to pass. Therefore, I could not include their stories of conflict.

In regard to translation, all data sources in this research are not in English and I needed to translate these resources. Although I took the advice of speakers of both languages' and discussed the English translation of some terminologies with my supervisors, there might still be a few incidences in which the original meaning might have been lost in translation. However, I regard this as a natural process as Favretti et al (1999:4) aptly put it: "…identification of a common lexicon and grammar presupposes the exclusion of certain happenings from the space of admissible grammatical `denominations` and the exclusion of certain `words` (or combination of words) from the admissible grammatical constructions. As a result, the introduction of linguistic standards often brings about incommensurable patterns of language utilization…" consequently, the translation may be naturally constrained.

Also, due to the word limit and time, I could not include a detailed presentation of some chapters, as for instance, democratic education in Chapter 1.

Finally, while dealing with the concept of learning, I primarily focused on the learning processes rather than learning outcomes. In this research, learning occurs through interactions and negotiations. Therefore, the key issue here is the process. In addition, conflict emerges during the interactions of the community members in the learning process, and it is a dynamic process rather than simply an outcome. Hence, the nature of conflict also led me to focus primarily on the process of learning, rather than the outcome. However, this does not mean that I excluded the outcomes; on the contrary, I examined the project results and group presentations; yet my focus on the concept of learning is not limited to the outcomes in this research.

CHAPTER 5

Developing Thematic Framework

This chapter consists of a descriptive presentation and introductory analysis of my data through which I developed the thematic framework. Firstly, I present conflict-related characteristics of the subjects, based on the pre-course questionnaires (e.g. expectations, aims, prior knowledge of members) in order to give a general picture of the subjects in this research. Secondly, I present my coding process and the themes which emerged from the data as a result of this coding process. In doing this, I try to produce an account of the connections that I make between these themes, and the values ascribed to them, providing a basis for making the knowledge claims that constitute the contribution to knowledge of this thesis. This stage of analysis is supported by a diagrammatic display of analytic themes.

It is important to note that, as this chapter aims to introduce the reader to the theoretical aspects of this research drawing on the data, I try to demonstrate succinct examples from the data to provide evidence of the types of conflict and dynamics of conflict that I am interested in, rather than supporting my arguments with a full range of data extracts. However, whilst this chapter deals with the thematic development, the following chapter is concerned with making sense of the thematic framework in the context of the members' experience with conflict, in which I present a wider variety of examples from the data. In other words, I use the thematic framework which is presented in this chapter in the individuals', groups' and community's stories in the learning process in the following chapter.

Descriptive Presentation of Data

Here I seek to explore individual characteristics which relate to the emergence of conflict. I gathered demographic and conflict-related information about the community members through pre-course questionnaires. Because I had conducted the pre-course questionnaires immediately prior to the start of the course, findings which come out of these questionnaires enable me to review members' prior conditions (e.g. prior knowledge, expectation, and working preferences) which later on have the potential to lead to conflict in the learning process and thus would allow me to capture the conflict based on these individual characteristics.

However, it is important to note that some of these individual properties may have changed during the course (e.g. aims and expectations of the students may have changed) while others remain substantially the same across the whole learning process (e.g. ethnographic characteristics and working preference). Therefore, here, I only aim to present a general review of the community members. The table below demonstrates the findings based on the pre-course questionnaires. 29 student members returned the pre-course questionnaires; however, in this table *Total* values represent the number of total answers given to the questions in the specified *category,* and *N (frequencies)* represents the number of answers given to *each individual question* within this category. In some questions, student members ticked more than one option and therefore, in some categories the number of the *Total answers* may be more than the *number of student members* returning post-course questionnaires.

Table 2: Conflict-related characteristics of the student members [frequencies (N) and total number of the answers returned]

		N	Total
Learning characteristics	I am usually self motivated person	21	25
	I am usually externally motivated person	4	
	I usually look for a tutor or guidance in the courses to learn the subject	11	23
	I usually prefer to work without any interference	12	
Working preferences:	Working Individually	19	31
	Working in Group	3	
	Both	2	
	Depends on (e.g. group members, course etc)	7	
Role taking, workload and decision taking at group work	**Role**		37
	I participate in equally	16	
	I take the lead	9	
	Depends ("if I like the topic I take significant responsibilities, otherwise, I might not even participate in group work")	1	
	Workload		
	I work a lot	3	
	I pull my weight	1	
	Decision Taking		
	I accept what majority accepts	3	
	I take decisions together with other friends	4	
Prior knowledge	I have some understanding	18	27
	I have not explored this area	7	
	Very little	2	
	I have a strong understanding	0	
Expectation	**Method**		32
	Student centred education	4	
	Assignments should be given	3	
	Assignments should not be given	3	
	Project based education	1	
	Working with students from other universities	2	
	Learning by myself	1	
	Learning settings (LS)		
	Learning settings are important [these students do not specify what sort of LS they expect to have]	5	
	Internet based	4	
	Other		
	Learn about subject matters	5	
	Enjoy	2	
	No comment	2	
Aim	Learn about distance education practices and theories	14	30
	Pass with a good grade	7	
	Just to pass	4	
	Other (Enjoy, Improve my skills to work as a team, Participate in projects)	5	

With regard to the student members' learning characteristics, I asked them to choose one of the options which best describes their learning characteristics either as self motivated or externally motivated learners. The majority of the members (84%) described themselves as self-motivated learners. This gives me an insight into whether the students can administer their learning process as independent learners in accordance with the learning community model for this research. It is because the learning model applied in this research requires students to determine their own learning process rather than taking leadership from the tutor. As Brook and Oliver (2007) remark the strong leadership role undertaken by the tutor represents a didactic approach and to promote passive behaviour among learners. I also asked students whether they usually look for tutor guidance in the courses to learn the subject. Almost half of the students (42.83%) answered this question by saying `yes`. Although at first sight, compared to the previous answers of students, this situation stands contradictory to their learning characteristics in terms of whether they are independent learners or not, in fact as I elaborate in the next chapter based on the focus group meetings, students look for guidance by the tutor probably because of the education system they had had prior to this course in which teachers always had a central role in the learning process. Having said that, it is remarkable that a large proportion of the students (57.17%) usually prefer to work without any interference. This leads me to think that students have the potential to learn without interruption by any authoritative figure, although a need for tutor guidance can be seen in a considerable number of the students' learning characteristics. In order to elaborate on this contradiction, I focus on socio-cultural conflict in the following section as well as in the next chapter. Since in this chapter I only aim to introduce the reader to my data analysis, I present brief descriptive information on which I will later elaborate.

On examining student members' working preferences, it can be seen that the majority of the students (61.29%) prefer to work individually. This situation has significant potential to raise conflict among members' preference to work in the community. Due to the learning community principles, which rely heavily on members' learning from each other (e.g. via collaborative work), a preference to work individually has the potential to raise an intrapersonal site of conflict.

Similarly, it can be seen that students' characteristics on role taking, workload and decision taking in group work significantly vary and this situation leads me to think that there is a potential for interpersonal sites of conflict.

As for the other characteristics of the learners, almost half of the members (46.66 %) share the same aim towards the course, which is to learn about distance education practices and theories. Also, many of them (66.6%) described their prior knowledge as having some understanding of the subject. Therefore, it appears that the majority of the students share the same aim and have a similar level of prior knowledge. These individual characteristics help me to obtain an insight into intrapersonal conflict, which I discuss in the next chapter.

I have left this section very brief and open for further investigation in the next chapter. To sum up, I intend to briefly present the whole picture of the conflict characteristic of the student members. In the next chapter, I make reference to these characteristics when conflict emerges, by giving more detailed and individual or group level information.

In the following sections, I present the thematic framework which I initially developed, based on the literature and then my field work (pilot and main studies).

Developing Thematic Framework

Pilot Study and initial coding schema.
I carried out a pilot study to get an insight into conflict in virtual learning communities and provide some practical basis for my main study. In order to analyse the data that emerged from the pilot study, I first reviewed the literature and formed a draft coding schema, drawing on literature, but I did not force this coding schema on the data. As I examined the data, I improved and enhanced my coding schema for the main study. The theme about the conflict types below emerged from the data in my pilot study.

1. Theme I: Conflict Types

As discussed in Chapter 2, the conflict types in the literature can be summarised as a.) interpersonal sites of conflict (in power relationships and argument/counter argument) and b.) intrapersonal sites of conflict (ethnographic characteristics such as a priori experience-knowledge, working preferences, wish and interest).

In this field work, I explored more conflict types in the data, which were different from the aforementioned types. For instance, in my pilot study, *affiliation* as an interpersonal conflict emerged from the data. Accordingly, learning community principles in this research require the members to work collaboratively towards the

same goal. However, every member might not necessarily feel that community spirit to get involved in the same learning process with others and consequently might not have a feeling of belonging to the group/community that s/he is a member of. For instance, in the focus group meeting, a group member says: “In the other group of which I was a member, I stumbled. It is because in the group work, it is not clear whether you are actually an individual or a part of a group. To some extent, you are a part of the group as an individual but when you are in the group individually, it does not make sense to call this `a group`”. (Focus group meeting, line: 860)

Conversely, affiliation may also lead to positive learning experiences. In the main study, most of the members (4 out of 6 members) in group 5 were happy when they were involved in the same work with their group mates (affiliated) in the learning process (based on the post-course questionnaire). In terms of the influence of affiliation on their learning experiences, when I examined the group’s outcome for this course, I noticed that, although individuals in the group worked independently, once they had allocated the tasks, in their presentations each member used the same dimensions for their own work, and this leads me to think that they negotiated to work on the same outline and then finalize their projects in harmony (a sign of affiliation) as a group.

In terms of intrapersonal conflict, in the pilot study a new conflict type emerges between the tutor and student members which I identified as conflict in expectation. Accordingly, the student members’ expectations from the tutor are different from those of the tutor, and this becomes a matter of concern for students, because their learning experience is impeded, as they cannot meet their expectations. Accordingly, the student members expect a more didactic course and ask the tutor to make some (didactic) arrangements. However, according to the democratic learning principles, the tutor expects students to administer their own learning process without any authoritarian power and this in turn leads to the emergence of conflict in expectations.

2. Improving Theme I through the main study: Socio-cultural Conflict

In the second phase of data analysis, I improved my coding schema for the analysis of data in my main study by using the outcomes from my pilot study. Because the existing revised coding schema was not sufficient to interpret some of the data in the main study, as a next step, firstly I identified these incidences in the data and then generated further categories. The analytical review of these emerging categories led me to take steps towards a theoretical conceptualizing process. The following sub-

sections are the examples of the emergent themes in my main study, drawing on my research questions.

Socio-cultural Conflict

As I discussed in Chapter 1, as learning communities are a part of the educational system and therefore connected to the entire educational system, it is inevitable for learning communities to be embodied with the social and political practices of the general educational system. From this macro perspective, it can be argued that the underpinning design principles of learning communities could be in conflict with the socio-culturally situated values embedded in general educational systems. By saying socio-cultural conflict, I refer to the *societal values* which constitute members' biographies as an important element in socially constructivist learning environments and the educational system of a society. Socio-cultural conflict in this research also refers to *educational* paradigms which constitute the foundations of the education system; thus, it influences the learning community's formation within this educational system and consequently community members' learning experience. Briefly, this is a two fold discussion 1) the educational system which influences the values of the learning community as an element of society 2) the members of the community who bring their societal identity into the learning community that they belong to.

I discuss these arguments, drawing on the data through the following subthemes which come out of the research. In a narrowing hierarchical sequence, conflict with the educational system includes at the highest level: the educational philosophy of the society; second level institutional conflict and, third level conflict between designer and tutor; whilst the dilemma of the individuals as members of the community versus society represents the societal aspect of the socio-cultural conflict.

2.1 Conflict with educational system

It is important to note that learning communities are not separable from the education system in which they are embedded. In order to see the socio-cultural context of the conflict, it is worthwhile to examine the interplay between the educational system and learning communities under the titles of educational philosophy of the society, institutional conflict, and conflict between designer and tutor.

a.) Educational philosophy of the society

The theorised social nature of learning communities lies within emancipated values such as independent learners and more shared responsibility. However, this may not always align with the educational philosophy of the society, as happened in this

research. During my main study, student members frequently stated their concern about their lack of confidence to acquire and construct knowledge without a tutor's help, due to their educational background. Accordingly, they always had a tutor-centred education and after a long period of this, when they are suddenly asked to learn by themselves, they stumbled. A student (Subject 17) in the focus group says: "They [the tutors] should not leave us free so much". (Focus group meeting, line: 264).

Taking a closer look at the educational system in which they are involved, the student members need to finish their degree (The programme of Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology) in four years and during these years, in the curriculum, they are expected to learn about Physics (3 hours per week during 2 terms), Mathematics (4 hours per week during 2 terms) and Principles of Ataturk and History (2 hours during 2 terms) as determined by the Higher Education Council in the curriculum. Although the programme in which students enrolled mainly aims to train teachers for primary schools, students are still obligated to undertake these courses which are not directly related to their future professions. Here, curriculum itself signifies a didactic and structured education unlike the principles of learning communities. Furthermore, in the focus group meetings, the students indicated that they find it contradictory that whilst they have an emancipated education in one of the course, in other parts of their university lives they are not free:

> SUBJECT 6: One more thing, as you said, ok we are running this course by ourselves, by students, however, the tutors run the other courses. There is a dilemma like that, we have problems but even for the same place, same problems could be raised. Let me say, I am a member of a community at the university, we are asked to run an activity as a community and the person who is in charge of the community says that `OK, from now on the members will administer this group, let's jazz up the university, run a festival, screen movies, so on`. But at the same time, the same person bans the movie that we would like to screen. Normally, this is not a movie that is forbidden. This movie is screened everywhere. If the same person says that, how come we can trust this, believe in this? On the one hand, s/he says you are free, you administer the things, jazz up the university; on the other hand, he bans a thing which is normally not forbidden. (Focus group meeting, lines: 1187)

To sum up, as this example demonstrates, learning communities should not be regarded as independent formations, without considering the philosophical values of the educational system in which they are embedded. As Collis (1999: 212) puts it, "While the individual instructor can re-design his or her course for more cultural flexibility, institutional leadership and investment is needed before students can experience a consistent and system-wide flexibility".

b. Institutional Conflict

Institutional conflict involves the regulations of the educational institution, academic culture and specifically the academic staff (e.g. tutor and designer) in this research.

While the tutor and I were designing the course, issues about institutional policy were often raised, and this influenced the formation of the virtual learning community. As concrete examples, the institution (in this study, the Faculty of Education and University administration) overloads the tutor with commitments. For instance, he needs to run approximately three undergraduate courses per week (the duration of each course is about 3 hours per week and he runs the course without any assistance e.g. there is not a guest tutor on the courses) and each class consists of approximately 30 students. In addition to the number of students and workload he needs to deal with, he is also asked to fulfil his commitments to rigid deadlines. For instance, he needs to mark the exams and submit the results within a set number of weeks after the course. However, virtual learning community principles are based on a student-centered and autonomous learning process which requires the tutors to spend considerable additional time and effort, whereas the institutional policy may be more appropriate for the traditional way of education (e.g. tutor didactically teaches and students are passive; thus the tutor may not need to spend time and effort dealing with a number of the students and their commitments as much as emancipated learning requires).

A further institutional rule which stood out in the designing process concerns the use of the internet. Accordingly, the university administration adopted a prohibitive approach towards using the web and these regulations constrained web use. For instance, the university administration does not allow staff and students to access some of the web applications in the computer laboratories, including virtual environments (e.g. Second Life) or instant messaging applications (eg. MSN, Skype). This regulation to some extent influences the way students can make use of information and collaboratively construct knowledge using virtual settings. So here, the institution takes a teaching-learning perspective which is not suitable for student-centered, autonomous learning or essentially community based learning; in other

words, this perspective embodies the regulations and policies which are in conflict with the learning community values.

In line with that, drawing on my field work, I have come to the conclusion that the academic culture in which the learning community is embedded affects the teaching and learning practices of the members and therefore, members' experience with conflict. In the chapter where I present my reflections about the overall functioning of the learning communities, I include more theoretical and practical aspects of the place of academic culture in experiencing conflict. However, in order to briefly introduce my thematic framework, I would like to give a student member's (Subject 17) quotation as an example of institutional culture, in particular the tutors' educational stance in this member's words:

> "In fact, it is impossible to manage to do something like that [apply the principles of learning communities] for all of the coursers. Every tutor has his/her own way. As you said there are also some authoritarian tutors, or some tutors like you who value the student-centred approach. Of course, this is impossible to do this with all coursers".

Here, the student points out a conflict between the institution's and the learning community's academic culture, which is reflected on the tutors' pedagogic stances, and this in turn makes the idea of learning communities unrealistic for him. As a result, during the course this student always sought tutor guidance and said: "They [the tutors] should not leave us free so much" (focus group meeting).

Collis (1999) illustrates this situation by describing the teachers as individuals belonging to multiple cultures: a culture which is determined by their own personal characteristics, the disciplines in which they work, and the cultures of their local workplaces, in these research institutions. So, I arrived at the conclusion that the academic culture of both the teaching member's pedagogic stance and also that of the other academic staff outside of the community, academic culture is important in understanding the conflict within their own `cultural ecologies` (Collis, 1999).

c. Conflict between tutor and designer

In this main study, in accordance with the learning community principles, the course is designed with a flexible structure to allow students to administer their own learning by modifying course content and activities. However, this did not bring about

convenient results for the designer and tutor as stakeholders in the course, along with the students.

From the practical point of view, the responsibilities of tutor and designer are sometimes in conflict when deciding on what to do next. For instance, while the designer is in charge of adopting learning community principles into the course, the tutor is responsible for the success of the student. As a concrete example, during the course, the tutor stated his concern about students' learning and wanted to examine students (so that they can learn while preparing for the exam), whereas this is not in the established outline of the course and, more importantly not consistent with design principles, as, according to the designer, the subjective assessment, collaborative end product and student participation are essential for the virtual learning community. The results of the discussions favoured the tutor, as he wielded the power in the conduct of this course. The issue of the *distribution of power* in practice sometimes intensified (triggered) tensions and directly influenced the learning process. As a result of this conflict, during the course, students were assessed based on their participation, collective group work, the quality of the discussions they led on virtual settings and two written exams.

Also, in this main study, it emerged that the pedagogical stance of designer and tutor can be conflictive in designing the course. For instance, in an interview with the tutor, he regarded his role as a very passive one [in the interview he says: "I considered my role to be very passive. I was very passive"], whereas the pedagogy that the designer supports proposes non-hierarchical power relationships among members and regards the tutor as a facilitator.

Campbell at al (in press) touch on this issue within the context of a learning community. According to them, the designer's practice as an individual with his or her values and belief structures, understanding and prior experiences are reflected in the construction of knowledge through social interaction and negotiation within professional communities of practice, in this case, with the tutor as a member of community. Thus, intrapersonal conflict for designer and tutor is likely to occur throughout the interaction and negotiation process in the scope of Educational System as they reflect their educational values into the learning community design principles.

I included a detailed review of conflict between tutor and designer from the tutor's and designer's perspective in Chapter 7.

2.2. Dilemma of the individuals as members of the community versus society

In relation to the socio-cultural type of conflict, the dilemma of individuals as members of the community versus society represents the societal aspect of the socio-cultural conflict.

In addition to conflict in the Educational System, a further contextual issue was raised during my main study. After the interview with the tutor, I arrived at the conclusion that it is not always possible for learners to be independent with the education and the societal values that also shape the individuals' learning characteristics. During our conversation, the tutor helped me understand the society that the students belong to:

[I asked the tutor about the learning culture of the students based on his experience as he had been working there for 2 years]

> Tutor: Not good. Obtaining knowledge is very limited. […]. There is a library but that is not enough. In particular for my courses, I cannot generalize for other courses. I can say that I do not suggest concrete resources. I overly deliver the course within its frame. Besides, it is not easy to finish the topics with 1-2-3 resources within this frame. If I am to suggest a resource, this [the list of the resources] would be a very long one. Therefore, I refrain from suggesting resources; especially given the students' socioeconomic status. The students usually use Google except the ones who regularly go to the library.

The tutor stresses a very important aspect of the learning characteristic of the students. Accordingly, the students' economic situation is not enough to buy the resources they need and the library does not provide them with sufficient resources. However, for a learning community, it is very important to have the necessary resources, in order to do research and obtain information as independent learners. In traditional pedagogies, the tutor is the main resource for knowledge and therefore represents an authority for students; whereas this is not the case for learning communities. The power of members relies on both learning from each other and from resources provided for them. Also, according to the tutor, the students are not socially ready to obtain knowledge on their own, as they usually Google to get the information they need, perhaps without even critically thinking about the information they get.

Not only the tutor, but also student members, stated in the focus group meeting that social factors are very influential for them on becoming members of the learning

community. Below is an extract from the focus group meeting with students about the social conditions surrounding the students and their identities as free learners:

[Firstly, the discussion revolves around conflict within the educational philosophy of the society]

> SUBJECT 24: Your question about our background, we were always passive in the courses. Tutors came, taught and they did not care whether we learnt or not. We could manage to enrol in the university by our own struggles and suddenly it is like everything is foisted on us, we are supposed to do everything, ok, if a tutor is in the class, this is helpful in terms of discipline, this avoids disrespectful situations. We always used to be passive [students], and we cannot suddenly say "Let's be active".
>
> Researcher: But in group work it seems to me that you managed very well. So, how did your group work?
>
> SUBJECT 24: I do not think it worked well.
>
> SUBJECT 21: It might not be because of the education, but the factors derived from his family. There are some families who discuss even little issues together. But you cannot see this in some other families. For example, he is the father, what he says is accepted. When you come from a family like that and when we are not educated in a system like that at high school, when we are suddenly told to learn by ourselves, we think of whether we will be able to meet our tutor's expectations. This creates a problem. Besides, we think of that like `I am mentioning about this but is this really what our tutor expects us to do`. [Focus group, lines: 969 – 989]

As a result of this conflict that the students face, they have a fear of an emancipated education, as they may not meet the expectations of their tutor, who possibly replaces their fathers in an authoritarian hierarchy, which they learn from society and they develop a prejudice towards the course. A student in the focus group says:

> SUBJECT 23: when we face this situation [freedom], we have a fear of failure. We have prejudice towards the course. [Focus group: lines 945 - 946]

To sum up, drawing on field work, it is possible to mention that the socio-economic conditions of the society should be in line with learning community principles.

3. Theme II: Hidden Conflict

I discuss the theoretical dimensions of hidden conflict in Chapter 2. In terms of practical instances, non-participation, data-cross referencing and silence may indicate hidden conflict in the learning process as happened in my pilot study. However, it is important to note that the following instances are not types of hidden conflict; rather they are examples of how to bring to the surface and identify the hidden conflict as this conflict type may not be explicitly captured in the community's learning process. Briefly, hidden conflict can be any type of conflict that I classify in the conflict type category. For instance, a student may be experiencing `conflict in power relationship` (a type of conflict) but this may be hidden. Therefore, below I explain how I identified something hidden rather than the hidden conflict as a type.

A. Non-Participation. Sometimes, when members are faced with conflict, they do not necessarily react explicitly in the community and prefer to leave the group by not actively participating in the group work. For instance, in the second phase of the group work in my pilot study, a member had had a conflict with other members and then left her group without informing them. She preferred to talk to the tutor about her wish to leave her group rather than discussing this with her group mates.

B. Silence. Very similar to the Non-participation indicator, parties who experience conflict may suddenly end up their ongoing conversation with silence. However, it may be difficult to identify silence in face-to-face settings compared to virtual settings. In an online environment, conversations can be recorded in detail and with time. Therefore, these characteristics of virtual settings make it easier to examine hidden conflict. As an example, in the pilot study, members of a group were working together online while their conversation was recorded on the system. Members had had a discussion about their group project. A student member logged on to the system and joined her group mates' discussion. She stated that she has not yet grasped the issues about distance education [She wrote: "Dear all, I will gather some information, I still could not get the point about distance education]. However, none of her friends answered her and they resumed their conversation as if nothing has been said. She then logged off from the environment (Virtual Environment enabled me to examine the flow of the discussions via system logs). I focused on this incident and asked her to write an essay for me about her group participation. In her essay, she explicitly

referred to a conflict with her group mates [e.g. she refers to conflict in aims and says: "They [her group mates] were just considering passing this course, not to learn"]. As this incidence demonstrates, although silence may not always signify a conflict, nevertheless, it is worthy of further investigation.

C. Data cross-referencing. Conflict may not be explicit in a single data set and requires an in-depth review of cross referencing. In the main study, when members of the Group 1 discussing about their group task on Moodle, a member of Group 1, Subject 1, demonstrated a positive attitude towards her group mates. However, in the post-course questionnaire, she writes: "[..] some of my group mates preferred to do something just for the sake of doing something. My interest is mainly in visual materials but I do not know my friends well. I really utilized some of my friends' [ideas] but I simply got bored while working with some [of the members]". The reason why she did not explicitly state her feelings on Moodle might be about confidentiality. On Moodle every one of her posts can be read by any community member and she might have refrained from sharing her opinions publicity, whereas in the post-course questionnaire, as a researcher, I am the only person to read her opinions. In the next chapter, I paraphrase her experience with conflict with giving more examples from the data, but here, in terms of identifying hidden conflict, it may be helpful to track an individual's experience with conflict in different data sets.

4. Exploring the Internal Dynamics of conflict (a. Trigger b. Avoidance)

Dynamics of conflict

The concept of the dynamics of conflict signifies the situations which are prone to trigger or avoid the emergence of conflict. It is very important to note that dynamics have a crucial role in members' experience with conflict. Accordingly, the differences that I stated within/beyond the community (please see Chapter 2) may become an issue for the members, depending on the dynamics. For instance, individual differences may not have a significant place in they community's learning experience and members do not recognize these differences as a matter of conflict (no perception of conflict- e.g. Subject 4 says: "I think that we had the same goals and expectations while working together. […]We benefited from learning from different points of view" (individual narratives. lines: 1855 – 1859). Thus, in his group, dynamics work in a way in which conflict is avoided. On the contrary, these differences may heavily influence the way members work together; as a result of that, the members recognize the situation that they are in as conflict. If a member perceives the differences as an

important element in his/her learning experience, I identified this situation as a conflict in the data.

In the field work, I identified instances which trigger or avoid conflict. Below is a brief summary of these incidences and extracts from the data:

a. Ontological security, Ontological security refers to existential feelings of an individual in relation to his/her experiences concerning a sense of social order and continuity (Giddens, 1991). In this research, it is a parameter in triggering or avoiding conflict. In the literature, some ontological security related feelings are referred to as dynamics, as I presented in Chapter 2. In this section, I paraphrase this concept with further examples from the data.

In line with McConnell's (2005) research, in this study, students talk about being 'happy' and 'anxious' as well as `trusting` others. As an example, in the pilot study, a student member who experienced conflict with her group mates stated in her essay: "I did not trust them and I never felt I belonged to the group" (a student essay, line: 36). At the beginning of her group work, this student joined the group discussions to work collaboratively with her group mates on the virtual setting. However, when her group mates were fulfilling their task, she experienced conflict and left her group. She wrote an essay regarding her experience with conflict and she stated: "I tried to participate in discussions but I somehow could not manage to and withdrew" (a student essay, line: 12). She then elaborates on this problem as conflict in aims as her aim is to learn something from the course, whereas her group mates` aim to pass the course. I understand from her group experience that, although she had different aims from her group mates, she initially tried to participate in group work; however, as she did not trust her group mates, this triggered the differences and led to emergence of conflict. In that sense, I noticed that lack of `trust` and `differences` feed off each other, and this triggers the conflict.

As the issue of trust is a very complicated and broad topic, as well as essentially being about the discipline of psychology, I limited my discussions within the themes to what came out of the data. As an example of this, the issue of historical relationships in relation to trust in the others was raised by the student members. Accordingly, learning communities have a life cycle in the education system in which they have been established. However, community members' familiarity with each other may exist before the life cycle begins. Members' attitude to, and opinion about, each other is important with regard to working together. In this context, during the field work

historical relationships were often mentioned in the focus group meeting, questionnaires, essays and interviews. As an example, Subject 6 stated at the focus group meeting (Focus group meeting, line: 626):

> Usually, people used to form their own groups when working as a group. …However, in this course, groups were assigned, according to the list in the attendance sheet. And we were in groups in which we in fact do not get on well with [some of the] members, and this impeded the process of interaction within the group.

This sort of historical relationships can be interpreted in two ways; both as a trigger of conflict and an avoidance of [interpersonal] conflict. As another student member in the focus group emphasised, if she had known her group mates beforehand, she would not have had a problem. I presented her story in the next Chapter.

Finally, the competitiveness which was brought about by the lack of resources is an element of the ontological security as a dynamic of conflict. Accordingly, students found the resources which were provided for them insufficient, and they very frequently stated their fear of failing to fulfil their tasks. As democratic pedagogy advocates autonomous learning, this process must be supported with sufficient resources, so that learners acquire and construct knowledge independently. However, if conditions for autonomous learning are not provided for student members, this situation has the potential to intensify conflict. In the main study, because of the lack of resources, members competed with each other in order to choose the tasks which were easy to fulfil with the available resources. Subsequently, social interactions and the learning process were dominated by competitiveness. In week 4, a thread titled `task allocation` was allocated to student members, so that they could discuss and collaboratively work on Moodle. Under this thread, groups competed to take the continent for which it was easy to find resources [as part of their project, students work on one continent's distance education theories and practices]. For instance, there was significant interest in the European and American continents, and when two groups chose the same continent; this situation triggered a conflict of interest between the two groups.

b. Individuals' learning culture has an important role in engaging in or avoiding conflict. The learning culture of a group/community signifies the attitudes and customs of learners and the ways that the learners construct knowledge. As Yavroov (1996: 34) remarks, "Denying the necessity for making any decision at all, deciding

coercively what everyone must do, or inviting all relevant parties to participate in making a decision" could be examples of learning culture. Conflict can be triggered or avoided, whether in a group or with the interaction of the community members, depending on how their learning culture takes place. The following extract is an example of coercive decision-making from the data which demonstrates a non-dialogical process and triggers the interpersonal sites of conflict: (in the pilot study, a member says, addressing the other member) "You just allocate the tasks to us!!! What about you?" On the contrary, groups may follow a democratic learning culture which has the potential to avoid the emergence of conflict. As Subject 4 says "I think that we had the same goals and expectations while working together. […]We benefited from learning from different points of view" (individual narratives. lines: 1855).

c. Group size

In the focus group meetings (in the main study), the number of the members in a group (group size) was frequently mentioned by the students in the context of dependency. According to them, as the number of the members in the group increases, it gets harder to get together and act in harmony. For instance, Subject 9 remarks:

> "In the group work, the number of people in a group is also important. 3-4 people would be more suitable. We, five of us, got together but the other two could not make it. However, if we had been 3 people [in the group], that would have been more convenient to get [together on] the common points".

A limit on the number of members in a group (such as less than five members in a group) is a necessary condition, in order to minimize the burden of dependency on members and to stimulate positive interdependence, in particular if the uncertainty is the case for members, as could happen in a loosely structured learning process. This situation is important in terms of triggering or avoiding interpersonal conflict.

d. Distribution of power

Distribution of power (holding the a/symmetrical power to administer the process, resources, persons etc.) has the potential to either trigger or avoid conflict.

In virtual learning communities, all community members are regarded to hold equal power. No members are assumed to have more powerful position because of their roles in the community. It was revealed in this study that sustaining an equal

distribution of power among the members is not always feasible and asymmetrical distribution of power can lead to conflict. Below are examples from the data.

In this study, throughout the designing process, the tutor and designer were in conflict, and this conflict was triggered by one party's asymmetrical power, as demonstrated in Chapter 7. Although at the outset of the main study, differences between the pedagogical stance of the tutor and designer were not perceived as conflict, as the tutor used his power over the running of the course to promote his ideas over those of the designer, these differences were brought out, and the situation turned into a conflictive one.

On the other hand, distribution of power can play a role in also leading to the non-perception of conflict. On Moodle (under the General Discussions thread), student members demanded to cancel the course for a week, because the timing of the course coincided with the week of a bank holiday, and student members wished to take this week off. The discussions were started off by a student member and then spread to the other community members. As the majority of the members wanted to cancel the course, their power to put this into effect, combined with the two tutors` decision to accept or reject their demand, signified distribution of the power to administer the learning process. The equal distribution of the power was shared among the stakeholders; as a result, no conflict was seen in this process.

e. Technological factors

In Chapter 2, I referred to the literature concerning the role of technological factors in triggering conflict (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999). In the same vein, in this research, I found out that when technology functions as a way of facilitating communication among the members or, on the contrary, impeding communication, generally for technical reasons, it plays a role in the emergence of conflict by either triggering or avoiding conflict. For instance, in the main study, Subject 3 was faced with a technological difficulty and could not locate where his group mates were discussing their topics on Moodle. He posted his arguments under a different thread from the one he should have done. This impeded his participation in the group work and therefore communication with other group members. This resulted in a conflict of interest with his group mates, as they misinterpreted his nonparticipation, thinking that his nonparticipation was arbitrary and that he was not interested in their group work (I discussed this case in detail in Chapter 6). Possibly drawing on his experience with conflict with his friends and the role of technology in experiencing this, in the focus

group meeting, Subject 3 remarked that the internet individualizes the learning process and in his case, technology had not helped in promoting dialogue.

On the contrary, by providing a communication medium, technology can facilitate dialogue among members and thus avoid the possible emergence of conflict. For instance, in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 15 referred to how technology had brought together the learners who had previously been dispersed and helped them reach their goals by working together. He stated: "Coming together with the individuals from different locations and sharing knowledge was very fruitful and made a difference". In a similar way, Subject 13 states in the post-course questionnaire that the virtual learning environment (Moodle) contributed to their work by providing a basis for their communication and sharing.

A further point concerns the way student members show their emotions in online settings prior to being faced with conflict. In virtual settings, as a way of communication, body language is replaced by emoticons (emotion icons e.g. a smiling/angry face icon). In the context of conflict, I observed that emoticons are frequently used when the differences which provide a base for conflict are seen. For instance, smiling faces are used on Moodle, probably with the aim of not escalating conflict and softening the atmosphere. Subject 28 uses an emoticon to avoid argumentative conflict (conflict in argument/counterargument) on Moodle under the thread of `online universities`. Her friend supports the idea of online universities, whereas Subject 28 is more concerned with their productivity, because the education is run online. After supporting her arguments about why she thinks that way, as a final sentence she says: "To me, the only advantage of this implementation [she refers to online universities] is that it is nice to both work and study at the same time. Or I am very pessimistic as usual [☹]"

In the sections above, I tried to demonstrate how dynamics of conflict can trigger or avoid emergence of conflict with the extracts from the data. In relation to this, the figure below summarizes my argument:

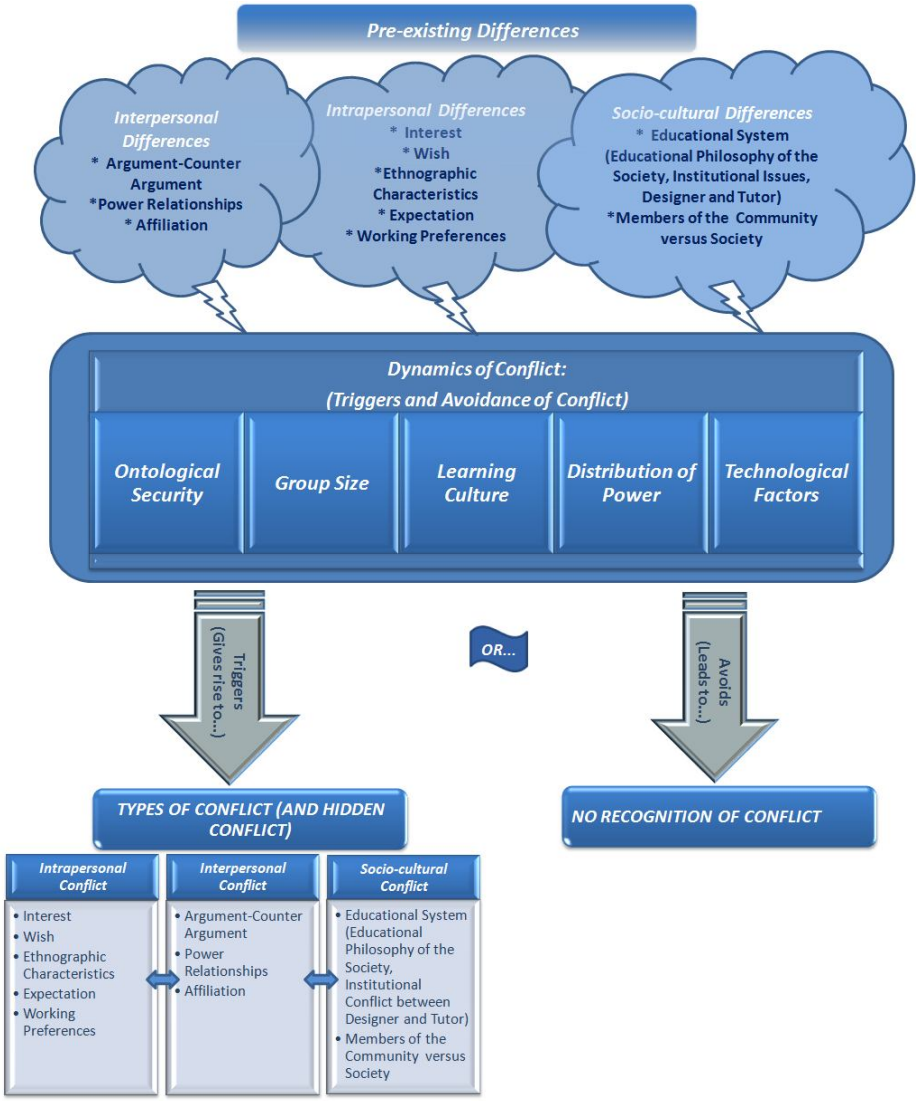


Figure 6: Dynamics of conflict

5. Theme III: Potential results of conflict

My main study enabled me to capture relationships as well as historical sequences in experiencing conflict. Thus, I could examine the results of conflict types/dynamics on learning experiences of the members as seen in Figure 7, which is an evolved version of Figure 6 in the sections below.

Briefly, I noticed that some of the instances of conflict followed a pattern in the manner of historical sequences and with various tendencies. It is very important to note that, as the name implies, the dynamics of the conflict consist of changeable situations and the figure that I inserted below is more about a snapshot of conflict instances which surfaced in my data, and I do not aim to assert that the flow of the elements of conflict is the same for all situations during the life cycle of a community.

As a concrete example, Subject 15 mentions the changeable flow of the conflict that he experienced in his group work (Individual narratives: 2496 - 2499)

> "Sometimes, there were disagreements in the group about having the same goal and expectation. Because of this, we were aware of different expectations and worked more comprehensively. And this contributed richness to the educational process".

According to his group's experience with conflict, initially individual differences became an issue of conflict, because of the dynamics by which his group was influenced. As a result, they recognised this as conflict and took steps accordingly, which led them to resolve the conflict and led to positive learning outcomes. Therefore, it is possible to state that conflict is a dynamic situation which in time may be changed by the flow of the elements (Please see Figure 7: pg 99).

As discussed earlier, the data provide evidence that parameters which avoid and trigger conflict can be summarised as ontological security, distribution of power, learning culture and group size. As a result of these parameters, if conflict is to be avoided, then the community members live with the differences and do not perceive these differences as a matter of conflict (No perception of conflict). If conflict is triggered and emerges, then the scenario has two possible outcomes: Conflict is resolved or Conflict is unresolved.

Reaching consensus, or in other words conflict resolution, is one of these situations. Briefly, conflict can be resolved via a) a mediator b) an authoritative figure c) dialogue.

I have observed that, if there is anyone involved in the conflict situations as a mediator, the process has the potential to end up with resolution. In a post-course questionnaire, as a response to the question concerning conflict they experienced as a group, Subject 25 states: `I usually suggest some different ideas. I am a mediator when there is conflict`.

In my field work, I noticed that an authoritative figure is very influential in ending the conflict. I remember an incident in which two groups took the same task on Moodle (under the task allocation thread) and a member of these groups (Subject 10) used my name (as a tutor) as an authoritative figure to influence the result of the conflict to her group's advantage. She wrote on Moodle that: "Subject 13 [her group mate] informed

[the tutor] that we have already chosen this topic". I replied to her by email, and ended the conflict by letting her know that the task had been chosen by the other group earlier than her group, and nobody in her group had informed me that they themselves had picked this task [unlike the situation she had assumed].

Dialogue is the other situation among members as a way of dealing with conflict. Subject 12 states in his post-course questionnaire that: "on the times there was no consensus, we were discussing and took decisions together". In the literature, Agerback (1996) touches on parallel issues about dialogue when conflict is seen. She remarks that: "So long as the social and political processes provide channels for dialogue, participation and negotiation, conflict plays a constructive role. Where such channels are blocked, and yet basic needs go unmet, then resentment and desperation build up" (1996: 27).

The second situation that I captured in the data is seen when conflict is not resolved. In the situations in which conflict is not resolved, community members may a). comply with conflict (oppression or acceptance) b). fragmentations may emerge and 3). drop-outs may occur.

Community members may not necessarily resolve conflict in favour of either party and consequently they sometimes accept conflict as their reality and learn to comply with it until the end of learning process. For instance, in the focus group meeting, Subject 6 says: "[conflict in our group] could not be resolved and is left like that" (Focus group meeting, line: 649). Taking a closer look, in the situations where the members need to comply with it, oppression may emerge or members accept the things as they are (acceptance).

A community member's experience with conflict very well demonstrates how conflict results in oppression for individuals when they are faced with it. In the interview with Subject 17, he mentioned to me about his presence in the group as a different person, as he needed to disguise himself in order to reach his aims and at the same time sustain his existence in the group. Accordingly, he aims to get productive outcomes as a result of his efforts in the group but his aims are usually in conflict with other members' aims in the learning process. So, as his experience demonstrates, he lives with conflict and encounters opposition, so he needs to disguise himself.

A further instance of complying with conflict is that when there is conflict and members need to resolve it, if they cannot reach a consensus to resolve, members tend

to accept the majority's view although minority does not concur with the solution. In the post-course questionnaire, I asked the members whether they have experienced conflict in their group. Frequently, students who faced conflict stated that in order to achieve conflict resolution, they accepted the majority view; in other words, they complied with the group decision. For instance, Subject 4 says: "Yes, there was [conflict]. In these situations we did what the majority accepts".

The third situation is that the parties can neither resolve the conflict nor comply with it, and as a result of this, fragmentations (e.g. subgroups) emerge. As an example of this, Subject 21 refers to the conflict they experienced and how it results. He says: "While allocating the tasks, some different sub-groups emerged. However, we reconciled in the end" (Individual narratives, line: 1045). In the final paragraph of this section, I tried to address the transitivity of the conflict situations. As happened in Subject 21's group, conflict may result in the emergence of sub-groups, and then as a dynamic process, members can reconcile and resolve the conflict to achieve unity in their groups.

The final situation is one in which a `drop out` takes place in the learning process if conflict intensifies, but cannot be resolved. Although I did not come across this situation in my main study, in the pilot study a student member dropped out of the course, because of the severe conflict that she was experiencing with her group mates.

It is very important to note that interactions within these situations may be transitional. For instance, if conflict ends with oppression, then some of the members may come together and work as sub-groups in the same group. In a similar way, interaction within conflict types may also be transitional. For instance, an intrapersonal conflict may turn into an interpersonal conflict, depending on the trigger for the conflict, as the learning process progresses (e.g. conflict in wishes, which is an intrapersonal conflict, may, depending upon the triggers, turn into a conflict in power relationships, which is a type of interpersonal conflict). In this sense, Figure 7 (Conflict in the learning process) provides a snapshot of a conflict situation (including how it evolves and ends), rather than all the possible scenarios in which the conflict happened in the main study.

A further point is that all of these situations tend to influence the members' learning experience in various ways, which is discussed in the next section.

6. Theme IV: Influence of conflict in learning (Outcomes of Conflict)

It was revealed in this research that, depending on how conflict evolves in the community, the learning experience of the members mainly tends to be influenced in four ways: *Learning* o*rientation, intended knowledge production, participation in cooperative/collaborative learning and chaos*. Although these learning situations can be regarded as interconnected, yet, as a result of the conflict which community members encounter, encountered, they were likely to experience these learning situations more than others.

a. Learning orientation

Learning orientation signifies an individual's desire, belief and interest in learning. Depending on the conflict type, the members tend to have different levels of orientation. These tendencies vary for each individual after s/he experiences conflict. For example, after experiencing a conflict, s/he may lose his/her interest in the course, may not desire to work with the same learning group, or on the contrary, s/he may be more interested in working with the same group members as s/he experiences conflict in argument/counter arguments and believes that s/he is having a productive learning experience. Below are some extracts from the data (from my main study) as examples of learning orientation when conflict is seen.

In the post-course questionnaire, Subject 10 refers to her learning orientation when she experienced intrapersonal conflict, she says: "[…] whilst I was working on my topic with remarkable attention and wanted to improve myself, my friend in the same group could take the risk of even not attending the class on the day of our presentation. And that, perhaps to some extent, was putting me off the group". In her statement, she implies that her interest in the course is in conflict with a/some of her group mate(s). Her interest in the course requires a considerable work (as she says, it requires to have remarkable attention in the course or effort to improve oneself etc.). However, she encounters conflict with a member in her group as this member does not have the same interest as she has and s/he prefers to not to attend the course. As a result of this conflict, she loses her orientation towards group work and she loses her desire to work with the same member(s) (she says: "And that, perhaps to some extent, was putting me off the group").

In a similar way, Subject 14 encounters conflict in his expectation. He expects to have a practical course, whereas he finds the course theoretical. This is reflected his learning experience, in a similar way to Subject 10, he loses his interest towards the course and becomes less committed in his orientation towards the course. In the post-

course questionnaire, he says that: “I would suggest a more practical lecture. Then, I would like to join [the course] more. Cause I would like to utilise my other friends' ideas`”.

In the post-course questionnaire, Subject 3 refers to his learning orientation towards the course when his group resolved the conflicts by discussing and sharing [their ideas and resources]. He also says: “We reached the same conclusions”. I understand from these statements that his group experienced conflicts over counter arguments, and through discussions, they reached at the common point. After the conflict resolution, he articulates his learning orientation as: “I have not come across with a better one [course] up to now”. So, in his case, after conflicts are resolved in a productive way (reaching common conclusions), he had a course as he desired (he says: “I have not come across with a better one up to now”).

b. Intended knowledge production

Intended knowledge production refers to the process in which community members actively work on social knowledge construction. Below, I presented examples of this process in relation to conflict.

Drawing on the data from my main study, I observed that if the individuals do not recognize any conflict, they tend to have productive learning outcomes. For instance, in the main study, most of the Group 1 members (4 out of 6) do not recognize any intrapersonal conflict in their learning process (e.g. When I ask about conflict in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 5 in this group says: “There were many things in common. Differences did not influence [us] very much”). So, how does non-perception of conflict play a role in their learning? On examining the report they submitted at the end of the group work, I could see coherent sections: sub topics are handled with almost the same dimensions and they submitted consistent findings. This leads me to think that they worked in harmony to get this result and they could allocate more time on intended knowledge production and present a coherent outcome at the end of their group work. (I present more detailed discussions in regard to the influence of no-perception of conflict in the learning process in Chapter 6).

If conflict derived from power relationships ends in favour of the more those perceived to have greater authority/power can dominate experience of the learning process leaving others passively accepting a dominant groups’ interpretation.
In the final outcome, the ideas, thoughts and knowledge of the powerful side can be widely observed while the oppressed side passively accepts the dominant side’s

version of knowledge. In the main study, one of the groups' (Group 2) asynchronous discussions, which took place on Moodle, is a good example of this. In these asynchronous discussions, a group member dominated the group work and experienced conflict with another member in his group. This conflict resulted in the dominant student winning. When I review the end product of this group work (a power point presentation), I noticed the strong influence of this group member's ideas on the presentation.

A further example of influence of conflict in knowledge production can be seen in conflict in arguments. In the focus group meeting, Subject 25 refers to conflicts in argument and counterargument and says: "[...] This might have been reflected to [our] learning positively, because different ideas, although different ideas lengthen the process, in the end, different ideas emerge and this is important for learning" (Individual narratives, line: 3063).

In the same vein, I noticed that when conflict is resolved particularly by means of dialogue, this had an influence on the members' learning. Subject 12 responds in his post-course questionnaire: [after conflict is reconciled through talking and negotiations] "Because discussions took place, this positively impacted on my obtaining knowledge" (Individual narratives, lines: 2328). He refers to mediation of meaning through dialogue, which promotes conflict resolution and thus knowledge negotiation. Again, in line with these instances in my data, in the literature, Jones et al. (2008:90) put forward the idea that "knowledge is negotiated and the marks of its personal and situated origin are essential parts of the exchange through dialogue".

c. Participation in collaborative or cooperative learning
Dillenbourg (1999) differentiates between collaborative and cooperative learning as "In cooperation, partners split the work, solve sub-tasks individually and then assemble the partial results into the final output. In collaboration, partners do the work `together`"(pg 11) ; "Collaborative activity requires more than the effective division of labour that constitutes cooperative work" (pg 21).

In a practical sense, this differentiation is important when conflict is seen as members tend to produce more individual work, or on the other hand, more collective work depending on the conflict they experience. As an example, in the main study, members of Group III experienced intrapersonal conflict and this led them to individualize the learning process, thereby giving full expression to individual differences (individual differences which result in intrapersonal conflict)..

Consequently, the end product changed and more individual values were seen in the outcome of group work, highlighting a situation of conflict and its role on learning. Accordingly, some group members changed their way of working from collaborative learning to co-operative learning in order to resolve the problem.

d. Chaos

Chaos signifies lack of order which emerges after uncertainty. If conflict is not resolved, subsequently it may result in chaotic situations in particular for the student members.

For instance, in the main study, the tutor and designer experienced severe conflict over the decision on what to do when an unforeseen situation happens. As both sides could not reach consensus, this is reflected in the student members' learning experience in the way they face chaotic uncertainty regarding what to do in their course, and for a period of time they feel anxious about their success in the course.

A further example concerns Group 4's learning experience. This group experienced severe interpersonal conflict and the members of the group could not resolve this severe conflict. In the end, they faced with chaos as they could not reach consensus because of the severe conflicts, and uncertainty prevailed in group discussions regarding how to finish their group project.

In the overall review of the influence of conflict in learning, drawing on the field work, variations may be seen in the learning experiences of community members, depending on how conflict is perceived. Essentially, in this research four themes emerged from the data with regard to the learning situations:

1. Learning orientation
2. Intended knowledge production
3. Participation in collaborative and co-operative learning.
4. Chaos (Lack of order which emerges after uncertainty)

Below is the figure which summarises the aforementioned arguments.

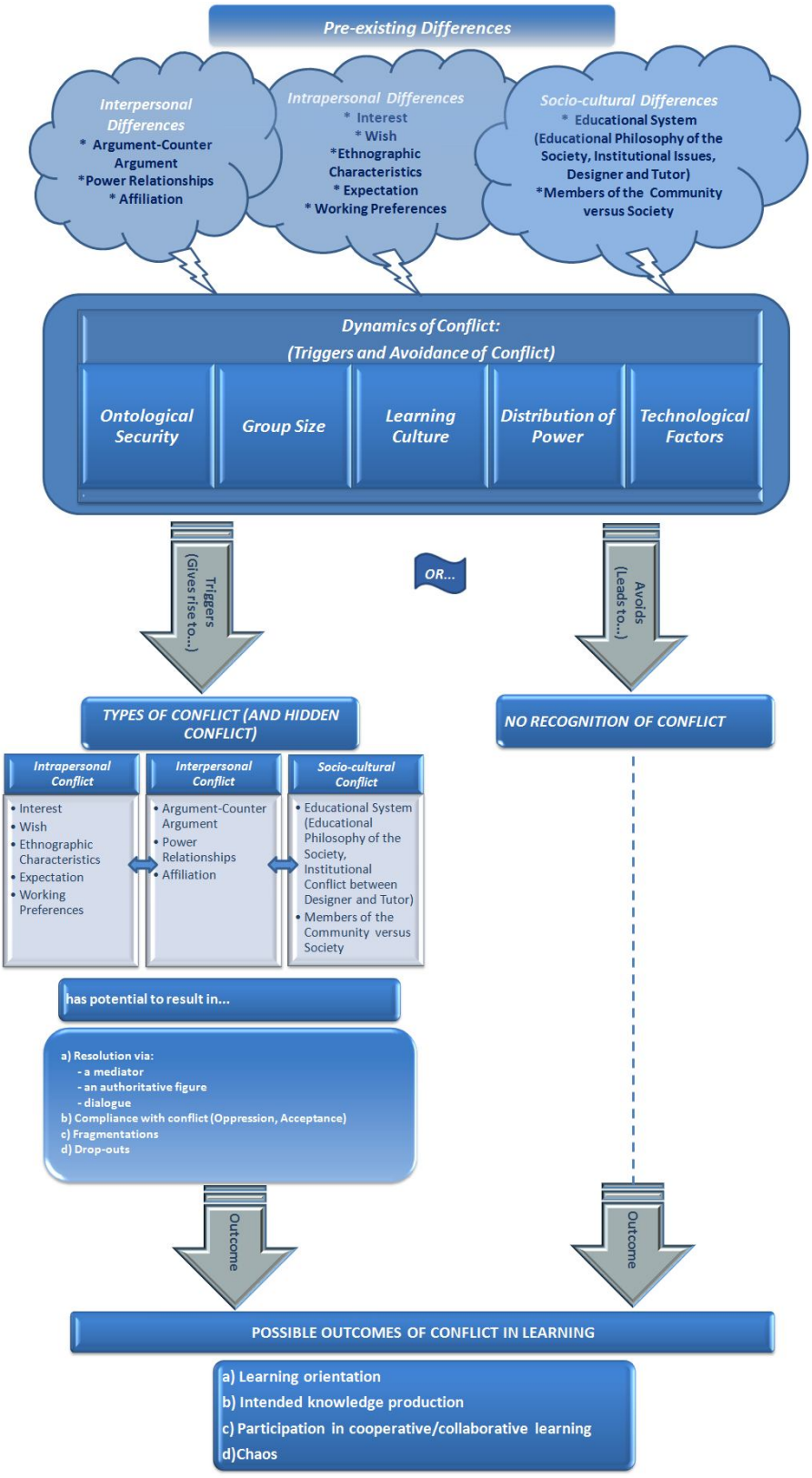


Figure 7: Conflict in the learning process

[4]A detailed review of the figure as well as examples from the data extracts in relation to Conflict in the Learning Process can be seen in the table in Appendix 14

PART III

CHAPTER 4: Exploring intra/interpersonal conflict through the student members' learning community experience

CHAPTER 5: Exploring intra/interpersonal conflict through the tutor's and designer's learning community experience

CHAPTER 6: Socio-cultural Conflict

Preamble

While in the previous chapter I presented the theoretical aspect of the study drawing on the data, I elaborate on my arguments with the community members' (students', the tutor's and designer's) stories of conflict in Chapters 6, 7 &8. I aim to articulate their stories throughout the life cycle of the learning community, using the thematic framework demonstrated in the previous chapter by presenting examples from the data (based on Moodle, focus group meetings, interviews, questionnaires and the reports/presentations student members submitted at the end of their group work).

In order to depict the whole picture, I focus on all community members' experience with intra/inter personal conflicts in Chapter 6 (group's conflict) and Chapter 7 (the tutor's and designer's conflict). Finally, as socio-cultural conflict concerns all the community members, I deal with this conflict type in a separate chapter, Chapter 8.

Briefly, in these three chapters, I seek to find answers to the following of my research questions in the context of the learning community's learning experience:

1. What is the role of conflict in the social learning process?
a. To what extent might an intrapersonal site of conflict have a role in learning? (Chapter 6 &7)
b. To what extent might an interpersonal site of conflict have a role in learning? (Chapter 6&7)
c. To what extent might socio-cultural conflict have a role in learning (Chapter 8)?

2. What is the internal dynamic of conflict? (Chapter 6&7&8)
a. What triggers the conflict?
b. How is the conflict avoided?

3. What is the result of these conflicts? (Chapter 6&7&8)

While presenting the members' stories of conflict with regard to *research question 1*, I use each sub-research question as the title of the related section. However, for the internal dynamics of conflict (*research question 2*), it is not possible to use the sub-research questions as titles of the related sections because dynamics are not separable from type of conflict; they cannot be treated as independent elements, as dynamics are highly associated with the occurrences of the conflict types. Finally, as the socio-

cultural conflict (*Research Question 1C*) is seen in all groups within the learning community, I examine this conflict type in the whole community's learning experience.

CHAPTER 6

Exploring inter/intrapersonal conflict through the student members' learning community experience

In this chapter, I present five groups' conflict stories which were formed during the course as group level conflict. Each group exhibits different patterns of conflict and different pathways in their learning process. The density of the grounded categories in each group's data enabled me to capture the conflict patterns, and as a result of these patterns, I could examine how these five groups experience different conflict processes (a. conflict type (intra/interpersonal conflict)[1], b. dynamics of conflict and c. influence of conflict in their learning).

In the sections below, I focus on the work of each group which takes place towards the middle of the course. As discussed in Chapter 3- Designing the Research Site section, this group work consists of examining a continent's distance education practices, presenting these practices to the whole community in face-to-face sessions and reporting the findings to the tutors (Please see Appendix 2). This group work is very loosely structured in the sense that student members can approach the given topic from any angle they like; they can work with any resources and structure their report as they wish. In the weeks prior to this group work, the tutor presents basic fundamental knowledge about Distance Education theories and practices. Therefore, essentially, the student members are expected to know basic issues about DE and be able to examine the continents' DE practices and thus review the DE from a global perspective. Approximately one week was allocated for each group to present their findings in face-to-face sessions and groups discuss their topics during 4 weeks in the course. In the first weeks of the course, before these groups were formed, in addition to teaching the student members the basic level of subject matter, it was also proposed to guide them with learning community principles in these weeks, so that they could work together in groups as members of the learning community. In that sense, examining the student members' learning experience towards the middle of the course when the group work took place, allowed me to scrutinize how a learning *community* experiences conflict in the learning process.

[1] I present socio-cultural type of conflict in Chapter 6

In presenting each individual's conflict-related characteristics in Appendix 15, as a writing style, I address the individuals as "characters" in their own stories of conflict.

Groups' experiences with conflict
In the following sections, I include 5 different groups learning experience with conflict. I include conflict patterns, a very brief summary of each group's story with conflict and intra/interpersonal conflicts in each group.

Due to the word limit, I include each person's characteristics which might be related to conflict in Appendix 15. In the sections where I introduce each group in general, I also show the group members' working preference before and after the course. Essentially, before the course, I asked the members whether they would like to work in a group or individually. I asked the same question after the course, but adding a condition `drawing on your group experience in this course`. I compare the answers of these two questions in a table as the change in working preference might signify a conflict or vice versa.

1. GROUP I

1. 1. Conflict Patterns

No perception of conflict
Dynamics of conflict (Learning culture)
Learning experience (Intended knowledge production, Orientation)

1. 2. An introduction to the group

This group deals with the topic of Distance Education in Europe and finalizes their project on the 8th week of the course. The group consists of 3 male and 3 female students. Only two of the group members mainly experience interpersonal conflict. Historical relationships trigger the emergence of their conflict. The members' learning orientation in the group work is influenced by the conflict/differences in the group. However, when examining the group's conflict in general, the rest of the group members (4) do not perceive any conflict. Although some of them accept that there are differences, they do not identify this as conflict. The group's democratic learning culture may be a possible reason why they do not perceive the conflict. In particular, two of the members indicate togetherness in taking the group decisions and one of them points out the democratic decision-making process in their group by saying "We accepted what the majority accepts". Finally, with regard to the influence of conflict

in their learning experience, members consider that the differences enriched their learning process.

In the pre-course questionnaire, working preference of the members varies: 2 of the group members (Subject 1 and Subject 2) refer to their working preferences as individual working, one member (Subject 4) prefers to work both individually and in a group, 2 members (Subject 3 and Subject 6) refer to a variance, depending on circumstances, in their preference and one member does not specify her working preference. However, by the end of the course four of them (Subject 2, Subject 3, Subject 4 and Subject 5) had changed their minds and preferred to work in a group, following their group experience in this course (based on their answer to a post-course questionnaire which addresses their experience from the group work they had during the course).

The table below demonstrates each individual's answer regarding their working preferences in the pre- and post-course questionnaire.

I have coded the group members as Subject 1, Subject 2, Subject 3, Subject 4, Subject 5 and Subject 6.

Table 3: Working preference of the group (I) members before and after the course

Group I	**Working Preferences**	
	[2]Pre-Course Questionnaire	**[3]Post-Course Questionnaire**
Subject 1	Individual	Individual
Subject 2	Individual	Group
Subject 3	Sometimes individual sometimes in a group	Group
Subject 4	Individual and group	Group
Subject 5	-	Group
Subject 6	Depends	Depends (in the post-course ques.) Individual (in focus group)

Please see Appendix 15a for more information about group members.

1.3. Intrapersonal Conflict

Intrapersonal conflict does not play an important part in the group's learning experience. At the post-course questionnaires, most of the students (4 out of 6) refer

[2] How do you usually prefer to work for your courses?
[3] Based on your experience of this course, would you have preferred to work individually or as a group?

to the commonality of their individual values, as can be seen from the quotations below:

Subject 2: “Because we are studying in the same department, I do not believe that we have different aims and expectations”. “We did not have too big differences.”

Subject 3: “I can say we had the same [expectation, aim, interest]. Even if there are differences, this should be very little; because the topics are the same”.

Subject 4: “I think we had the same goals and expectations while working together.” “We benefited from learning from different points of view”

Subject 5: “There were many things in common. Differences did not influence [us] very much”

These quotations also give me a clue about the group’s accommodating learning culture, which might have avoided the generation of conflict. For instance, Subject 4 says, “We benefited from the differences”. Also, the other members (e.g. Subject 3 and 5) do not perceive these differences as a matter for conflict which means that for the majority of the group the differences did not turn out as conflict for them.

However, the other two members (Subject 1 and Subject 6) encountered intrapersonal conflict. First of all, Subject 1’s working preference is in conflict, as in both the pre-course and post-course questionnaires she prefers to work individually, whereas she needs to get involved in group work during the course. In regard to this, she states in the post-course questionnaire that: “Some of our friends preferred to not to join the discussions and sneak away” and she adds: “I don't like group works, working individually is for me”. I understand both from her persistent choice in the pre & post-course questionnaire concerning her preference for individual work and her comment about her group experience in the post-course questionnaire, that she experienced conflict in her working preference.

Secondly, in the post-course questionnaire, although Subject 1 admits that there had been many individual values in common, she points out that this is not the case for all group members, and she experiences a conflict of interests:

> “I can say yes [common individual values] for many of the people in the group, but some of my group mates preferred to do something just for the

> sake of doing something. My interest is mainly in visual materials but I do not know my friends well. I really utilized some of my friends' [ideas] but I simply got bored while working with some [of the members]".

As for Subject 6, she writes in the post-course questionnaire:

> "If I choose my group mates, then we have something in common. If the tutors choose [the group members that I am supposed to work with] in accordance with the attendance sheet, then I never find anything in common, because I am with the students that I never get on with very well. And this situation definitely impacts my learning process"

It is very interesting to see these members referring to the intrapersonal conflict in the post-course questionnaires, as I did not capture any trace of this type of conflict on Moodle. Furthermore, Subject 1 and Subject 6 appear to be happy with their friends' work and use very polite language towards them on Moodle. For instance, Subject 1 confirms her friends in her posts by saying "yes, you are right" on Moodle or during the task allocation. She uses polite language such as "Dear friends, please can I work on DE in France", and her group mate finds her request acceptable, and Subject 1 subsequently works on the topic she wants to. Also, I did not observe any incidence of intrapersonal conflict during the time I helped this group's learning engagement as a guest tutor on Moodle. Therefore, I concluded that these two members experience hidden conflict with one/some of their group mates.

Having looked at these two members' quotations, I understand from Subject 1's statement that conflict of interest impeded some members' participation in the group work as it was in their interest to do something different from the group work. After closely examining each member's post, I found out that Subject 1 may have referred to Subject 3 in her statement, as he was the only person who did not participate in Moodle discussions as much as his group mates. In fact, Subject 6 also specifies this in one of her posts by addressing Subject 1's enquiry on Moodle (Under the thread of Task Allocation in the Global Vision weeks):

Subject 1 We need to give a big picture of the [DE in] Europe. I can do this if you like or help yourself. […]

Subject 6
Yes, we were already going to do that. However, nobody picked that topic [of Introduction to DE in Europe]. Subject 3 is the only member who has not chosen anything yet. So, automatically this topic is Subject 3's. However, he has never logged on to Moodle, I think he is not interested in it at all. Therefore, we will need to deal with it.

However, when I examined Subject 3's logs on Moodle, I noticed that he did log on to Moodle and posted messages regarding the group work; however, he confused his group's forum and posted messages on a different forum which these two members possibly did not notice. Here, technological factors trigger the conflict. As Subject 1 and 6 imply, he does not participate in as much as his group mates. However, he does post messages on Moodle. In his posts, he explains that he had a problem with his computer (therefore, he could not participate in the discussions on time) and he would work on the Introduction to the European Continent as his group mates suggest. He also shares his findings with his group mates at the end of their group work.

Furthermore, I attended this group's presentation in the face-to-face session and I observed that each member did present the sub-topics for which they were responsible.

So, what makes the members perceive an intrapersonal conflict; for instance, what makes either of them say "I prefer to work with suitable friends" in the post-course questionnaire, whilst there is no concrete evidence of conflict? Why do only these two members refer to conflict; whereas the rest of the group members are happy with their group work, as I presented at the beginning of this section? What is this blind spot that, as a researcher, I cannot capture?

At that point, Subject 6 explains by pointing out the historicity of the relationship. She says in the focus group: "Because we had not previously been able to get on well, we just cannot agree on [anything]" (Focus group meeting, line: 642).

Therefore, I concluded that the historicity element might have triggered this intrapersonal conflict among these members, as otherwise there is no incidence of conflict on Moodle. These members also experience interpersonal conflict, as I present in the next sections.

1. 4. The role of intrapersonal conflict in learning experience

In this group's case, intrapersonal conflict influenced in particular Subject 1 and Subject 6's learning experiences. In their words (respectively):

> "Because I do not speak with him/her anymore (because of the things in the past) we could not resolve the problem. We tried to speak once. But because our expectation and perspective about the course were completely different, we could not bear each other." "I would prefer to work individually and I would be more successful" (Focus group meeting, line: 1041).

> "I simply got bored while working with some [of the group members]" (Individual narratives, line: 1176).

Drawing on their statements, I concluded that the conflict they experienced essentially influenced their learning orientation in the group work. However, having looked at their report, I could see coherent sections: each member deals with a country in the continent. In the presentation they submitted to the tutor, the countries are handled with almost the same dimensions, such as DE institutions, methods etc. This leads me to think that they worked in harmony to get this result. So, I have come to the conclusion that, although these members experienced intrapersonal conflict, nevertheless they were involved in the intended knowledge production process, though with their own low motivation.

1.5. Interpersonal Conflict

Most of the members in Group I do not exhibit any incidence of interpersonal conflict except for Subject 1 and Subject 6.

Although I examined each individual log on Moodle, as well as the group's informal synchronous communication while they were doing task allocation, I could not detect any incidence of conflict. With regard to that, Subject 4, in the post-course questionnaire, refers to his role as a mediator when conflict emerged, whereas there is no log on Moodle that he was the mediator. Therefore, I understand that when the group had face-to-face meetings, conflict emerged, possibly when they were doing the task allocations (e.g. Subject 1 says in the post-course questionnaire: "While allocating the topics [for the group work], we could not reach consensus"). However, as this conflict takes place in the face-to-face sessions, I am unable to determine what exactly they had conflict about and what triggered this conflict. I only have a sense of

the conflict resolution and influence of the conflict on their learning experience, based on the post-course questionnaires and focus group meeting.

So, did Group I members resolve the conflict? If so, how did they resolve it? According to Subject 4, his role as a mediator resolved the conflict. He achieved this by paying special attention, when listening to the different responses given and finding a common way between the two parties. He also says that sometimes they reached consensus by accepting what the majority accepts, whereas according to Subject 1, when they could not reconcile, they took the tutor's suggestion as a third party and thus they could reach a consensus.

However, reaching a consensus does not mean that conflict was resolved by negotiation, as according to Subject 6, she complied with the group's solution although she does not agree with it. She says in the focus group meeting: "The things are left without resolution" (Focus group meeting, line: 643). In fact, Subject 4's statement in the post-course questionnaire confirms Subject 6's situation. He says that when the group could not be reconciled, the parties accepted what the majority accepts. Although this way of conflict resolution signifies a democratic solution, in Subject 6's case, this means acceptance by her, as she is not convinced by the proposed solution, but has to follow as this is the majority's decision. This finding is consistent with Tindale's (1993:122) suggestion about the group's consensus-reaching process; he remarks that "if the correct solution is low in demonstrability, groups tend to reach consensus through some type of majority process". In fact, this is true for most of the groups' reality in this research. Essentially, in case the members cannot reach consensus, they tend to accept what the majority accepts, and this may result in either consensus or compliance, as happens in Subject 6's case.

1. 6 The role of interpersonal conflict in learning experience

In this group case, there are two patterns discernible in the influence of conflict on learning experience. These patterns vary in the different sub groups: 1. The members who do not perceive any conflict but realize the differences 2. The members who perceive the conflict.

In the former sub-group of members, with regard to the differences they had, these members demonstrate a positive or indifferent learning experience in their statements in the post-course questionnaires. For instance, Subject 4 says: "We benefited from learning from different point of views". In a similar way, Subject 3 replies to a question which concerns his feedback about the course by saying, "I have not come

across a better course up to now". Subject 5 remains impartial, and she thinks that the differences did not significantly influence their learning experience.

However, there is then another sub-group which perceives the differences as a matter for conflict. Generally, in this sub-group, conflict impedes their learning in such a way that the process of social interaction within the group weakens and they cannot discuss the topics in depth (Subject 6).

2. GROUP II

2. 1 Conflict Patterns

Conflict type (Interpersonal conflict)
Dynamics of conflict (Ontological security, Learning culture)
Result of conflict (Complying with conflict)
Learning Experience (Intended knowledge production)

2. 2 An introduction to the group

This group deals with the topic of Distance Education in Australia and finalizes their project on the 7th week of the course. The group consists of 6 male and 1 female students. This group is the most active group on Moodle. Subject 10 is the leader of the group and the rest of the group members go along with her suggestions (according to the focus group meeting and the group's interactions on Moodle).

In the pre-course questionnaire, 4/7 of the group members (Subject 8, Subject 10, Subject 12 and Subject 13) refer to their working preferences as individual working. However, by the end of the course three of them (Subject 8, Subject 12 and Subject 13) had changed their minds and preferred to work in the group, following their group experience in this course (based on their answer to a post-course questionnaire which addresses their experience from the group work they had during the course). One of them, who identifies herself as the group leader at the focus group meeting, remains unchanged in her preference to work individually (Subject 10). Subject 7 did not return any of the questionnaires. Finally, Subject 9 and Subject 11 remain unchanged in his preference to work in group. The table below demonstrates each individual's answer regarding their working preferences in the pre and post-course questionnaire.

I have coded the group members as Subject 7, Subject 8, Subject 9, Subject 10, Subject 11, Subject 12 and Subject 13.

Table 4: Working preference of the group (II) members before and after the course

Group II	Working Preferences	
	Pre-Course Questionnaire	**Post-Course Questionnaire**
Subject 7	-	-
Subject 8	Individual	Group : `I prefer to work individually. But working as a group is my preference`
Subject 9	Both	Both
Subject 10 (Group leader)	Individual	Individual
Subject 11	Group	Group
Subject 12	Individual	Group
Subject 13	Individual	Group

Please see Appendix 15b for more information about group members.

2. 3 Intrapersonal conflict

Group members exhibit quite similar individual characteristics and share similar expectations and aims towards the course. For instance, a priori knowledge of the members is stated as "I have some understanding of Distance Education" by 5 out of 7 members (Subjects 8, 9, 10, 12 13). In a same way, 3 of the members (Subject 8, Subject 10 and Subject 12) aim to learn Distance Education theories and practices: 3 out of 6 students expect to have a course environment which is suitable with distance education learning settings and entertaining (Subject 8, Subject 10, Subject 12 and Subject 13).

So, how do these commonalities influence members' experience with conflict? In this group's case, none of the members remarks upon an incidence of intrapersonal conflict at the beginning of the learning process. Therefore, I concluded that, because of individual commonalities, the group members did not perceive any conflict. Regarding intrapersonal conflict, in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 8 remarks upon some differences in his group concerning their interest; but, he does not recognise this as conflict because these differences did not take an important place in their learning process.

> "Although I think that our expectations and aims were the same as a group, we had some disagreement over which was necessarily beneficial for us. However, this did not negatively influence our work <at least my own work>".

In a similar way, Subject 9 says:

> "Broadly speaking, although we shared common view points in the group work, [nevertheless] there were some differences. I regard this as a natural and necessary process".

As these two members point out, sharing common individual values does not necessarily end up with a smooth learning process, yet there might be some developments which trigger the occurrences of conflict during group interactions. I discuss these incidences of interpersonal conflict in the next section.

2. 4 The role of intrapersonal conflict in learning experience

As intrapersonal conflict does not have any significant place in Group II`s learning process, it is not feasible to discuss the influence of intrapersonal conflict on their learning experience. However, the group members' learning experience is remarkable in terms of uncovering the learning process when (intrapersonal) conflict is not perceived. In order to discover this, I examined each individual's posts on Moodle as well as their comments at the focus group meeting and questionnaires. I found out that the consensus building process went smoothly for this group as there were not many conflicting interests, wishes or expectations among members. In parallel with this, when I examined the timing of the posts and the decisions taken by the members, I noticed that the task allocations were done quickly and this might have allowed members to save some time on their task.

2. 5 Interpersonal Conflict

In terms of power relationships, the group members face interpersonal conflict. Although in the post-course questionnaires all the members describes their role in the group work as followers of the group's decisions, one of the members, Subject 10, regards herself as the leader of the group.

Their story begins with group members' empowering Subject 10 as group leader to do task allocations among members (on Moodle). However, she does not fulfil her own task even when the deadline approached. Some group members post messages on Moodle in which they refer to their concern [e.g. Subject 12 creates a thread titled "Task allocation!" and refers to his concern about the delayed task allocations. Right after him (about 2 hours later), Subject 11 also creates a similar thread titled "Subject 10, we are waiting for you to do the task allocation" and Subject 9 replies to his thread by sharing Subject 11's concern.].

Here, ontological security related feelings influence the group members' interactions. Accordingly, as the leader had not fulfilled her task when the deadline approached, anxiety prevailed among members. First a post is sent within the group and this spreads to other members. As they empowered their peer to do the task allocation, no one has taken over her role yet.

In response to these enquiries, the next day she creates a new thread on Moodle titled "I finished the task allocation :-)" and writes:

> Good Morning everyone;
>
> Firstly, I apologize to everybody. I could not fulfil my duty as ambassador, I am sorry. But I did my best to log in to the site (Moodle). Anyway, I hope you did not get too angry with me.
>
> 1. General information about the Australian Continent and why education in Australia? (Subject 12)
> 2. Education system in Australia (Subject 11)
> 3. Distance Education in Australia (Subject 10 [herself], Subject 7)
> 4. Online learning in Australia (Subject 9)
> 5. Australian Universities which deliver [course via] Distance Education (Subject 8)
> 6. Learning objects used in Australian Distance Education (Subject 13)
> …

In response to the task allocation done by the leader, because of the lack of resources, Subject 13 could not find anything about the task he needs to fulfil and asks her whether she has any resource regarding the topic she allocated to him (Moodle, under the same thread with the previous quotation). She does not reply to his enquiry. As could be seen from the examples in the next section, she prefers to keep silent when she is faced with conflict. In her group's case, this solution works as no one presses her about his claim. However, from my point of view, hidden conflict then emerges in the power relationship, as no one opposes her decisions, although they may think differently and this results in compliance among group members, because the leader disregards the others' decisions.

In the focus group meeting, Subject 10 refers to historicity in the emergence of conflict. She explains the possible triggers in the occurrences of conflict in her group

by pointing out the unfamiliarity of group members. Accordingly, she does not have a common past with the group members, and therefore, she can not predict her peers' behaviour and does not sufficiently trust the others to fully carry out the task given by her. She says:

> "As I said to you before, I had not previously worked with the same members. As we usually determine our own groups , you [tutor] did something like, you assign the groups, me for instance, as I did not know how my friends [group mates] prefer to work, I mean, how they prepare, how they do their research , as I did not know how they do these, I had problems. Because, for instance, I need to allocate the tasks, for instance a hard topic `the foundations of distance education`, `the foundations of distance education in Australia`, I mean, I was contemplating on whether my friends can find these, work on these… We can think about these issues. In terms of that, I had problems with these" (Focus group meeting, line: 869).

When I looked at the group interactions, apart from their group leader, I noticed that the group has a very supportive and participatory learning culture. This leads me to think that the learning culture of the group might have avoided the emergence of conflict. For instance, after the task allocation, Subject 8 could not share his work with the other group members. On Moodle (under the thread of Global Vision-Australia) he apologized to the other group members. Subject 7 responded to him in a supportive way by saying "Do not worry; enjoy [the group work]". I find this approach very supportive, because otherwise the members could have had conflict in their interest as a delay in sharing the work of an individual would be a matter which affects group work in this type of collaborative endeavour. In a similar way, I find their learning culture very participatory: Some of the group members shared their findings on Moodle, asked each other's opinion and suggested some resources to their group mates. This is important because lack of resources caused competitiveness and led to conflict within some of the groups. However, in this group's case, possibly because of the group's participatory learning culture, they enriched their existing resources by sharing, eased the burden of the time required to obtain resources and this may have avoided interpersonal conflict among the members. With regard to this, when Subject 7 shared some information which is helpful for his group mates, Subject 11 writes on Moodle: "Thank you very much. I have been looking for this information since the crack of the dawn. I had not found sufficient information [before you shared this]".

A further point about this group is that when members were experiencing conflict on Moodle, I noticed that they frequently used Emoticons, probably in order to ease the conflict. For instance, below are the two examples from Moodle:

> Subject 9 (addresses the group leader, Subject 10): Subject 10, why cannot I see my name in the slides…(smile) 
>
> Subject 10: I did the task allocation :) [When she was late for doing task allocations]

In this context, Tryon and Bishop (2009) refer to the emoticons as nonverbal strategies in online learning settings where fewer sensory communication channels are used by the members. By using emoticons, the members appeared to clarify the ambiguity of their feelings; thus they mitigate any likely conflict.

After the task allocation had finished in the group, as a next step, the group members collaboratively worked on intended knowledge production. On examining the group interactions between the leader and the other members in the knowledge production process, I did capture some occasions of conflict, which derived from power relationships. Towards the end of the group work, members send their individual findings to the group leader and she integrates the different perspectives as editor into one report. Below, I explain the role of this interpersonal conflict in the group's learning experience.

2. 6 The role of interpersonal conflict in learning experience

This group submitted a report about their work which seems very appropriate in terms of an academic paper. There is an introductory part, related references, consistent information and a satisfying level of research. Group members usually preferred to work individually to deal with a continent with its different countries. However, they shared their individual findings on Moodle and submitted one report. I find their report to be one coherent whole, rather than a combination of `pieces`. Below, I try to present how interpersonal conflict may influence the production of this `one-piece report`.

The leader of the Group II is a dominant member who significantly influences the group work, as I was able to capture on Moodle interactions. Drawing on the conflict in power relationships that can be seen in their discussions on Moodle, I can say that on many occasions, most of the group members tended to comply with the conflict,

rather than resolving it with their leader. As a result, the ideas, thoughts and knowledge of the group leader are reflected both in the group's learning process and in the end product. As a concrete example, Group II shared their individual findings on Moodle (under the thread of Global Vision – Australia). The leader of the group did not like Subject 9's individual report and wrote:

> "Subject 9, sorry, but I did not like your report. I asked all of you to send me a revised report but you did not do that. Anyway, I will revise it in the evening and I will send it back to you tomorrow. Thnx anyway... Get ready [for the group presentation] in the evening please…"

And Subject 9 replies to her post (under the same thread)

> "Subject 10, how do you think a report should be?…is it something like the more pages, the better?… shall I simply copy paste, as other groups do?… this is not the final version of my report… I will make the necessary amendments and combine them with the other presentations. I will be on campus very early tomorrow. In the meantime, I think that it may be better if we can use video clips about distance education"

Subject 10 did not reply to his post as she always prefers to keep silent in cases of conflict (as she kept silent when she experienced conflict with Subject 13 in the previous section). As a result, instead of resolving the conflict, the members lived with it and the group leader's decisions, ideas, thoughts and knowledge can be seen to be dominating their learning outcomes. For instance, I reviewed both of the reports sent by Subject 9 (his individual report) and by the leader (final group report). I noticed that in the group's final report, some of the parts by Subject 9 had been removed by the leader (as she is responsible for working on the main document) and the name of Subject 9 was not included in the presentation, whereas all other members` names were included. In line with that, as I said earlier, the group's final report has consistent chapters and is like one coherent piece of report rather than a combination of pieces. However, this does not always necessarily mean that group members worked harmoniously on their collaborative task. As happened in this group's case, given the discussions that took place on Moodle, the reason for producing a consistent report may also be due to the `acceptance` (accepting the group leader's decisions by not sufficiently defending their own ideas/thoughts/decisions) as a result of complying with conflict.

Going back to these two members` discussions, based on the group leader's quotation ("I did not like your report. I asked all of you to send me a revised report but you did not do that. I will revise it in the evening and I will send it back to you tomorrow"), I understand that she franchises herself to edit her peers` report without confirming these changes. This may have been reflected in their report as `one coherent piece of report`.

As I referred to the trigger of this conflict in the previous section, the group leader stresses the element of historical relationships in the focus group meeting. She says:

> "[…] Because, for instance, when other friends, when every friend does some research, I know about them. I would be able to say `this friend works well. Therefore, s/he can take the topic, a topic which is difficult. I can give him/her the difficult topic.` Or for example, if my friend works less than the others, then, I would think that s/he could have done much better at preparing the topic that I have given out. But, for instance, this works better of course" (Focus group meeting, line: 881).

In her case, as leader of the group, because she does not know how the group members work, she cannot predict how the task she allocated will be performed by the others, and because of this uncertainty, conflict is likely to occur, whereas, if she knows what the results of her leadership are likely to be, she allocates the tasks accordingly; thus her group will not face any conflict.

Conflict resolution

As I discuss above, on Moodle interactions, I observe that the conflict is mostly derived from power relationships between the group leader and other members. On the occasions that these parties experience conflict, the leader keeps silent, does not take any action, as the other party wishes, and as a result the group complies with conflict.

However, many of Group II members very interestingly point to dialogue as a way of conflict resolution in the post-course questionnaires. Here are the statements from post-course questionnaires:

Subject 8 says:
"We did not have any problem on that [that refers to conflict]. Besides, we did not allow this to rise. While working together, when there were minor problems, we overcame with them by saying nice words, and finding suitable resolutions and mutual understanding".

Subject 9 says:
"We had disagreements. But thanks to both sides' common sense and respecting the other's thoughts, we could find a common way".

Subject 11 says:
"Of course, there were situations that we could not reconcile. We usually prefer to talk and reach a conclusion".

Subject 12 says:
"On the occasions when there was no consensus, we discussed and took decisions together. Because discussions occurred, this positively impacted on my obtaining knowledge".

Subject 13:
"In fact, as we acted together to have the same values and same aims, it was fruitful".

Having compared the different perceptions of conflict resolution between my interpretation (complying with conflict) and the student members' interpretation (dialogue), I have come to the conclusion that conflict may be perceived at different levels and it is a very relative concept. Therefore, I present both the subjects' and my own interpretation of the conflict stories. By presenting two different perspectives, I also aim to show that it is quite likely that interactions on virtual settings may be perceived differently from face-to-face settings. In this study, in the virtual learning environment (Moodle), the interactions are visible to the public. Tutors also actively follow the group discussions and interrupt when necessary (e.g. suggest a resource or guide them when the student members need). Therefore, patterns of interaction may differ in virtual environments. Overall, my interpretations as a researcher are based on the virtual setting, as this is the main platform where I can examine the conflict, unless the student members do not give different statements in the focus group

meetings and the questionnaire. However, the student members also discuss in person which I am unable to document. For instance, as I presented above, Subject 9 and Subject 10 experienced conflict in their expectation about writing the final report (The group leader did not like the Subject 9's report and they debated over their expectations in writing the report, and the group leader kept silent by not responding to him). However, in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 9 says: "We had disagreements. But thanks to both sides' common senses and respecting the other's thoughts, we could find a common way". He refers to a dialogue which I could not detect on Moodle. This leads me to think that perhaps the group leader preferred to negotiate with him in person in the days following this disagreement and in this face-to-face meeting, which I am unable to document, they resolved the conflict via dialogue as Subject 9 suggests. Therefore, I concluded that, in order to bring the conflict to the surface in technology enhanced learning settings, as in this research, it may be useful to consider face-to-face interactions as well.

3. Group III

3.1 Conflict Patterns

Conflict type (Intrapersonal conflict)
Dynamics of conflict (Ontological security, Learning culture)
Result of conflict (Conflict resolution)
Learning experience (Participation in cooperative/collaborative learning)

3. 2 An introduction to the group

Group III deals with the topic of Distance Education in Asia and finalizes their project on the 7th week of the course. The group consists of 7 male students.

This group is a good example of positively resolving the conflict. The type of conflict they experience is essentially derived from intrapersonal differences. Accordingly, some members have different aims and expectations from the others. Also, as could be seen from an individual story presented below, a member who heads up the group in fact does not like collaborative work at all and uses harsh comments such as `never work in a group`.

It is very important to note that 6 of the group members (out of 7) do not have internet access at home and this situation inevitably impedes their online studies. Possibly because of that, this group did not actively become involved in the discussions on Moodle, and I was unable to capture their experience with conflict on Moodle; this

prevented me from examining how conflict evolved in their group work. However, I utilized the pre-post questionnaires, focus group meetings and an individual interview in order to make sense of their experience.

At the pre-course questionnaire, 5/7 of the group members (Subject 15, Subject 17, Subject 18, Subject 19 and Subject 20) refer to their working preferences as individual working. However, by the end of the course four of them (Subject 15, Subject 18, Subject 19 and Subject 20) had changed their minds and preferred to work in the group, following their group experience in this course. One of the members, Subject 17, is very adamant about his working preference and he says in the pre-course questionnaire: "I would like to work individually in all cases". Interestingly, although he is not keen on working in a group, yet, drawing on the interview with him and the questionnaires, he takes the lead in the group work and he is the leader of Group III. I discuss this contradiction in the following sections; however, because he is adamant about his working style, it is difficult for me to interpret the reason why he does not change his opinion about group work in this course. I present each member's working preference in the table below.

I have coded the group members as Subject 14, Subject 15, Subject 16, Subject 17, Subject 18, Subject 19 and Subject 20.

Table 5: Working preference of the group (III) members before and after the course

Group III	**Working Preferences**	
	Pre-Course Questionnaire	**Post-Course Questionnaire**
Subject 14	Group	Group
Subject 15	Individual	Group
Subject 16	Individual but depends on the group members	-
Subject 17 (Group leader)	Individual in all cases	Individual
Subject 18	Individual	Group
Subject 19	Individual	Group
Subject 20	Individual	Group

Please see Appendix 15c for more information about group members.

3. 3 Intrapersonal conflict

When looking at the pre-course questionnaires, it can be seen that, although 3 of the group members (Subject 14, Subject 18 and Subject 19) share the same aim which is to learn about subject matter, some others (Subject 15, Subject 16, Subject 17 and Subject 20) have relatively higher aims such as to pass the course with a good grade. Expectations of the members from the course also vary: Subject 14 does not have any

expectation. Subject 15 expects a practical course, Subject 16 and 20 suggest assignments and Subject 17 expects to have a course underpinned with constructivist learning. These diversities raise the question of the possibility of accommodating all individual values in limited time, and hence, sustaining each individual's biography, and group coherence. For instance, if a person in the group is not able to meet his/her expectation or aim, then the anxiety would become a main concern of this person, as long as the negotiation process ends up in his/her favour or the individual values of the member alter with time. This has an important role in experiencing and managing conflict, owing to the fact that the people would be likely to secure their existence in the group or community, contend with colliding values and seek ontological security.

Also, the heterogeneity of the group requires a different level of effort and action. In the life cycle of this sort of subgroups in a community, diversities catalyse a dynamic process in which conflict is likely to emerge. Subject 15 refers to this situation in his post-course questionnaire by saying ` Sometimes, there were disagreements in the group about not having the same goal and expectation`.

There is one particular student member (Subject 17) who experiences severe conflict in this group. He basically does not like working in a group. He presents forthright discourses against group work. In his reply to the question whether working as a group is his preference or not he states `individual [work] in all cases`. However, interestingly, he positions himself as leader of the group in the pre-course questionnaire, and in fact he takes the lead for the group work in the course [drawing on post-course questionnaire and Moodle interactions]. Therefore, this situation appeared to me contradictory and attracted my attention to delve into the experiences he had and to get a better understanding of the internal dynamics of conflict.

I found it important to focus on this, because learning communities rely on collective work which requires members to work together towards the same goal, and thus desire to work collaboratively. Hence, by interviewing him I was looking for an answer to whether members are forced to work together regardless of their wish to work individually. If so, how does this situation influence social interaction and the learning process? To address these issues, I carried out an interview with him at the end of the course. Below are the extracts from our conversation:

* R = R, the researcher
* B = Subject 17, a student member

R: Subject 17, in your pre-course questionnaire you stated that you prefer to work individually in all cases. Could you tell me why?
B: Because this is my personal choice. I have been successful in my life thanks to my own work. Actually, it does not mean that I have not tried at all, I tried but each time something has been left incomplete, I suppose. This is a metaphor like: there are apples and I am choosing the best apples into crates but when you do this job with someone else, some rotten apples are necessarily put into the crates. Therefore, I always find individual work more suitable for me.
R: Do you think that this rotten apple rots the other apples?
B: No, not mine! But they still remain in this work!
R: Right. Do you not trust its power? [I referred to the other apples put into the crates by someone else]
B: Necessarily, in this community there is something rotten no matter how well it is. Therefore, in order to get perfect results, you need to do it by yourself.
R: Is it necessarily something "fruitful" that you are looking for or what sort of…?
B: It is not about the sort of the work…
R: I mean, not kind of work but… Okay, then, I will ask you what about conflict?
B: There are all sorts of conflict but I somehow get used to it, I somehow manage to do it but a problem necessarily rises. Because of that, in all cases, I would like to work individually, it seems to me.

Subject 17 perceives conflict as deriving from individual differences (different apples) something to `fight for` to overcome and it has a negative impact on his learning. Therefore, he prefers to work individually but this brings about conflict on his working preferences.

Conflict in an a priori experience is another dimension in the case of Subject 17's. In the interview, he states that he tried to work with the other people before; however, his success had come from his own struggles, rather than collaborative work. Therefore, when Subject 17 becomes a member of the community, he is concerned about his productivity, based on his a priori situation which points to intrapersonal conflict due to the a priori experience.

On paraphrasing his preference over working individually, he raises the issue of productivity in the interview, and according to him individual differences in the group have the potential to impair his aim of achieving a productive outcome. Accordingly, each individual necessarily imports his/her own characteristics into the group work, bringing out his concern about reaching his aim (productive work). At this point, the intrapersonal site of conflict is transformed into interpersonal conflict in the intended social knowledge construction process. As a result, the group produces more individual work rather than collaborative work.

A further point coming out of the conversation concerns the trust element. Taking for granted others' failure to achieve his aim leads me to think about ontological security related issues such as `trust`. As Schwier and Dykes (2004) point out the effectiveness in promoting learning in a learning community happens over time and is founded to some degree on social engagement and the development of trust. Therefore, trust is the social glue for the members to work together towards the common aim.

3. 4 The role of intrapersonal conflict in learning experience

Although in the overall evaluation the group managed to benefit from the conflict they experienced, at the individual level, in addition to Subject 17, Subject 14's learning experience was also influenced by the intrapersonal site of conflict in such a way as to reduce his learning orientation towards the course and group work. As a result of that, he did not participate in the group work. He says:

> "I would suggest a more practical course. Then, I would like to join in more. Cause I would like to utilise my other friends' ideas".

Also, when I ask him about his role in the group and conflict/resolution, he says that:

> "Because I could not hang out, I accepted what the majority said. As I could not join the group very often, I cannot make a comment about this. But I agree with the proverb the more the merrier".

So, it can be seen that, as a result of the conflict he experienced, he did not attend the group meetings and work; consequently, he accepted what the majority accepted rather than constructing knowledge by exchanging and negotiating on knowledge, as opposed to the social learning principles of learning communities.

In terms of their learning outcome, having reviewed their report on the given task, I noticed that the end product is simply the integration of separately formed documents. This leads me to think that group members worked on different individual tasks and one of them (possibly the leader of the group) integrated these individual works into the group's project report. Therefore, the intrapersonal conflict may have resulted in cooperative work in this group's case. In fact, with regard to this, Subject 17 says in the interview that he did not learn anything from his group mates' task, as they all work individually once the task is allocated among group members.

3. 5 Interpersonal Conflict

The group members have demonstrated positive attitudes towards group work in the pre-course questionnaires. Accordingly, five of the members refer to their equal participation in the group work (Subject 14, Subject 15, Subject 18, Subject 19 and Subject 20). Subject 14 and Subject 15 exhibit collaborative attitudes towards group work. Respectively, in the pre-course questionnaires they state "In case a problem occurs, I like helping others and taking advice from others"; "We (I) take the decisions together with other members". One of them prefers to lead the group (Subject 17) and the other one (Subject 16) takes the role of either leading or accepting what the majority says, depending on the group.

Given the attitudes of members and the roles they play in the group work or in other words, the group's learning culture in general, it could be considered that conflict derived from power relationships is not an issue for this group, and perhaps their learning culture might have avoided this conflict. The reason, as discussed in the sections below, is that when there is more than one member who wants to take the lead or does not have any faith in collective work, conflict derived from power relationships is likely to happen, as social interaction occurs in the group development process. However, in the case of this group, only Subject 17 describes himself as a leader in the pre-course questionnaire and indeed he takes the lead, but a further important point concerns how he heads up the group. According to him, as leader, he takes a democratic attitude towards his group mates (He says "I asked people's opinion democratically"- Individual narratives, line: 2589). The other group members' characteristics complete their leader's democratic attitude. For instance, most of the members take decisions together, and like their leader, value the others' opinions. Here are the statements of the members in the questionnaires which help me identify the group's learning culture:

Subjects 15, 19, and 20
I preferred to take decision together with the others.

Subject 18
I never preferred to be a dominant person in the group work. Therefore, I always took a back seat. Yet, I contributed to group unity and decided on the tasks and time allocation.

Subject 14
In case a problem occurs, I like helping others and taking advice from others.

A further point for this group is that the perception of conflict they experienced varies between members. For instance, Subject 15 states: "we had sorts of discussions in which it was usually easy to reach consensus. Therefore, I can say that there was not any irresolvable conflict"; whereas Subject 20 indicates that "There was not any case where we would need to reach consensus with both my tutors and my friends". Therefore, it could be concluded that rather than interpersonal conflict, the group essentially experienced intrapersonal conflict, due to the diversity in the individual values which depends on the individual to perceive at different levels. This situation also gives me a clue that members have not been faced with severe conflict.

Having compared the pre- and post-questionnaires, 3 of the members indicated their working preference as `individual work` in the pre-course questionnaire, whereas in the post questionnaire they alter their working preference to `group work`. In the interview with Subject 17, who insists on individual work, it comes out that in fact his preference is not about the group that he worked with, rather this is more about his stance towards group work. Subject 17 clarifies his position by saying: "I suppose, even if the world's most effective group materials and environments are offered to me, yet again I prefer to work individually. This is not about the courses; this is about my interest in working individually".

A further point for this group is that dialogue takes an important role in resolving conflict. As Subject 19 says: "We resolved the conflict by discussing our points of disagreement and interacting with each other". Another member, Subject 15, shares the same view as Subject 19 and remarks: "We were aware of different expectations

and worked more comprehensively. And this contributed richness to the educational process". With regard to dialogue, the group leader, Subject 17, indicates that dialogue took place in the group work which may have resolved the conflict.

3. 6 The role of interpersonal conflict in learning experience

In the focus group meeting, Subject 18 informed me that, although they benefited from the differences, the main problem was the issue of time for them. In other words, dialogic learning required time for this group to focus deeply on the issues, argue and socially construct the knowledge. The time to meet the deadline was insufficient for them to finalise their group work, which in turn put pressure on them and consequently possibly triggered anxiety among the group. On Moodle (under the thread of General Discussions), Subject 17 creates a new thread and suggests they should extend the bank holiday, which coincides with the week that they will share their findings with the whole community in the face-to-face session, thereby asking the tutors to delay their group presentation. Subsequently, his group mates (Subject 15, Subject 16, Subject 18 and Subject 19) support his suggestion. For instance, Subject 15 posts a message to the whole community as a response to his group mate by subtly addressing the tutors (Subject 17):

> "Yes, we do not want the course run right after the bank holiday. It is because we cannot give presentations as soon as we are back [from their journey]. We need to get ready and [in order to get ready] we need time".

Their request to postpone the course after the bank holiday spreads to all the community members and almost all of them request the tutors to delay the course. Because the majority of members demand a delay in the course, the course is postponed for a week.

However, the members still needed to find practical solutions for their collaborative group work, as they will be away during the bank holiday, and may not manage to work together. On the other hand, I observed that the student members were happy in this process. In the questionnaires, the majority of the group members (4 out of 7) stated that they benefited from the differences they had.

4. GROUP IV

4.1. Patterns of themes about conflict

Conflict type (Interpersonal conflict)
Dynamics of conflict (Group size, Technological factors)

Result of conflict (Fragmentation)
Learning Experience (Chaos)

4.2. An introduction to the group

This group deals with the topic of Distance Education in America and finalizes their project on the 9th week of the course. The group consists of 6 male and 1 female students. When tutor and I provisionally formed this group, a member wanted to change it. She did not specify any reason for changing it, but she referred to her historical relationship with one/some of the group members. In order to follow VLC principles, which proposes members' freedom of choice, she was moved to another group which she wants to work with. Subject 27 had also demanded to change his previous group and with regard to his demand, he was appointed to this group.

During the course, some of the group members experience severe interpersonal conflict on Moodle and resolve this conflict by means of authority. The conflict they encountered influences the way group members fragmented into subgroups.

In group IV, 5/7 members (Subjects 22, 23, 25, 26 and 27) refer to their working preferences as individual working before the course. By the end of the course one of them (Subject 23) had changed her mind and preferred to work in a group, following her group experience in this course. As a reason for preferring individual work, Subject 25 responds in the post-course questionnaire, "I prefer to work individually as there might be conflict and disagreements in group work". In parallel with his statement, Subject 27 responds "[I prefer to work individually] It is because in case consensus is not reached among group members, then that brings about a loss of time and some problems" and Subject 24 says "The reason why I do not prefer to work individually is that many of the members are uncontrollable". I present each member's working preference in the table below.

I have coded the group members as Subject 21, Subject 22, Subject 23, Subject 24, Subject 25, Subject 26 and Subject 27.

Table 6: Working preference of the group (IV) members before and after the course

GROUP IV	Working Preferences	
	Pre-Course Questionnaire	**Post-Course Questionnaire**
Subject 21	-	Individual
Subject 22	Individual	-
Subject 23	Individual	Group
Subject 24	-	Individual
Subject 25	Individual	Individual
Subject 26	Individual	-
Subject 27	Individual	Individual

Please see Appendix 15d for more information about group members.

4.3. Intrapersonal conflict

Drawing on the pre-course questionnaires, I could not discover any significant differences in the members' individual values.

In a detailed review, members appear to be motivated towards the course. In response to a question regarding their aims for this course, four members aim to learn about distance education theories and practices (Subject 22, Subject 23, Subject 25 and Subject 27). The members also share similar expectations from the course. Subject 22, Subject 23 and Subject 27 expect to gain general knowledge about DE and Subject 25 & Subject 26 do not even specify any expectation from the course. So, I initially concluded that the members do not have significant differences in their individual values which would lead to intrapersonal conflict, and in fact on Moodle, I could not detect any incidence of intrapersonal conflict. However, this group did experience very severe conflicts on Moodle but these conflicts concern interpersonal conflict as I discuss in the next section.

As for the roles that members usually take in group work, while 4/5 members participate equally (Subject 22, Subject 23, Subject 25 and Subject 26), one student member (Subject 27) says: "I usually put in much more effort than the other members". In fact, on Moodle, he is one of the members in Group IV who actively participates most in the discussions. Possibly because he has a higher level of interest in group work, this student member refers to his disappointment in the post-course questionnaire by saying: "Different from my group mates, while I was expecting more interaction and research, this did not happen sufficiently". During the task allocation process, although he frequently posts messages, shares his findings and suggestions, almost none of his group mates replies to his posts, even though Moodle logs show

they had viewed his posts. In one of his posts, he explicitly talks about his disappointment and says (in response to Subject 24):

> "[…] most of our friends hang around on the system [Moodle], they may be seeing the comments [posts] but unless they do not share their opinions how can we know what they think [about the task allocation]? As you said, there are seven people in our group, but nobody replied to my post, except Subject 23 and you [Subject 24]".

As happens in Subject 27's case, with regard to the nonparticipation in the group work, in particular in the computer supported collaborative settings, conflict is triggered by a technological factor which brings about disconnection in the discussions. In Group 4, the members participated in the task allocations at different times and places (possibly due to the number of group members which impeded their gathering together at the same time and place) and this led to conflict between them.

In the section below, I discuss how the intrapersonal conflict may have played a role, especially in Subject 27's learning experience.

4. 4 The role of intrapersonal conflict on learning experience

Although all the group members do not experience severe intrapersonal conflict, in particular Subject 27 encounters this type of conflict in interest and expectation and this leads to disappointment with his group mates. However, he continues his active participations on Moodle and fulfils his task.

Apart from Subject 27, as they have (initial) individual values in common, their learning process starts smoothly, though later on some dynamics change members' interactions with each other and trigger interpersonal conflict.

4.5. Interpersonal conflict

Before I start discussing interpersonal conflict, I would like to state that this group attracted my attention from the beginning of the course. Firstly, when I informed all the community members on the course about the provisional groups, a member in this group wanted me to change her group, and she justified her position by saying that she was concerned about passing with a good grade, if she worked with these group members. She also mentioned her historical relationships with one/some of the member(s) in this group, which she believes would negatively influence the collaborative working process. Secondly, unlike other groups, this group publicly

experienced very severe conflict on Moodle. For the first time, I witnessed members accusing each other over a task allocation, while all of the members in the community could read their disputes in their mailbox. Below, I have tried to paraphrase the interpersonal conflict in Group IV. One of the reasons why this group experienced severe conflict may be because of the number of group members (7) as this may make the process difficult to reach consensus among members. With regard to this, in the focus group meeting, a group member (Subject 21) says:

> "When the group is like 10 people, because it is very heterogeneous due to the diversities, our class is the same, chaos increases. And it gets harder to overcome this in a short time. For instance, the tasks [which we] need to finish in one week turn out an impossible task [to finish in one week]" (Focus group meeting, line: 672).

Subject 21 refers to the diverging individual differences which become a contentious matter for the group, leading to conflict, as incompatible tendencies cannot be reconciled in a limited time and it ends up in chaos. He remarks that, by reason of this situation, the group size triggers the emergence of conflict, as more people results in more incompatible differences facing the group's learning experience.
Taking a closer look to the group's experience with conflict, Subject 27 and Subject 24 become involved in severe conflict on Moodle over a task allocation. Accordingly, Subject 27 suggests a task allocation for the group members. However, Subject 24 does not support his idea, as according to him, the tasks had already been allocated and this situation inflames the conflict between two members, as could be seen from the quotation below:

Subject 24: (As a response to Subject 27's task allocation on Moodle)

Dear Subject 27, it is a must that there is bound to be someone impeding group work.
It was just yesterday, we agreed that 3 people will deal with America and Canada; 2 people [Central] America and 2 people South America.
I do not agree with what you are saying now…
It is because, do not disregard the number of the countries in the Americas, I spent my 6 hours only yesterday and could not find anything about distance education and now 30 countries!
Easier said than done…
A little conscientious … [Behave fairly]
There is still no unity in the group and definitely this is the only reason why I do not join in the group activities…
Everybody is acting arbitrarily and then they call this group work…
How a group can be like that…
I am not doing any research or so… [from now on]
No matter if I fail…

Subject 27 responds to him under the same thread:

Subject 24, yet again you approach the cases with prejudice, as in the first message. I dropped a note while allocating tasks. I think your prejudice and the difficulties you had during your research prevented you from seeing the note. Therefore, I am re-stating the note.

NOTE: IF ANYONE HAS OBJECTIONS OR SUGGESTIONS, PLEASE REMARK

Yes, I regard what you said as criticism, and I am trying to tell you that I sent an email to the tutor about the issue and got her comments when I posted this message [on Moodle]. Perhaps, you have not got her response to my email. I will also send you this email. Yes, as you said, it is not easy to [deal with] the countries [on the American continents] apart from the countries of Canada and United States. Therefore, you can have a look at the response from [the guest tutor] and research accordingly.

Secondly, you say that it is a must that there is bound to be someone impeding group work, but if you notice it is only me who creates threads, discusses and shares. This is the reason why I am on the spot. […]

Another thing is, yes, we are doing group work and we will be assessed based on group work and individual work. Therefore, I have a suggestion for you, if you believe that we are not doing anything as a group, then do something individually.

Do not get me wrong but you get angry very easily. You need to be patient. Remember, you are a teacher candidate...

I NEVERTHELESS BELIEVE THAT THE TASK ALLOCATION I DID ABOVE IS APPROPRIATE AND FIND IT SUITABLE TO PRESENT IN THAT WAY. IF THE OTHER GROUP MEMBERS STATE THEIR IDEAS THEN WE CAN FIND A COMMON WAY. PERHAPS, THEN WE CAN CALL THIS A GROUP WORK, WHAT DO YOU THINK?
FINALLY, I REQUEST YOU TO READ WHAT YOU WROTE UNDER THE THREAD WHICH YOU CREATED.

From my point of view, the quotations above demonstrate nothing more than misunderstanding. But then what makes Subject 24 and Subject 27 have a severe conflict like that?

On examining the evolvement of the conflict, I notice that, as Subject 27 initiates a discussion and makes suggestions about task allocations, Subject 24 opposes his thoughts. The sequence of the interactions always follows the same pattern (as I give examples in the section below): Subject 27 puts forward arguments whilst subsequently Subject 24 produces counter arguments. The evolvement of the discussions leads me to think that there may be a conflict in power relationships. When I looked at both members' questionnaires to examine the power relationships, Subject 27 says that "my ideas were discussed in the group work"; whereas Subject 24 says: "Only I could hear my voice, except for one member in the group". Based on these two statements, I concluded that as Subject 24 could not get his ideas accepted, he might have felt disadvantaged in the group and as a reaction to the person whose ideas are predominantly accepted; he publicly argues with him and generates conflict in power relationships. Consequently, conflict in power relationships was impeding the group's intended knowledge production through argument and counterargument. In their case, technological factors might have triggered the conflict among them. In his post, Subject 24 refers to the disconnection between the group decision which was taken the day before his post and Subject 27's post concerning his suggestion about group task which was sent prior to their conflicting arguments. Here, timing of the posts is the issue in their experience with conflict and this could be explained by the nature of asynchronous interaction (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999). In parallel with this, in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 27 refers to the place of technology in his learning experience as: "Sometimes, it contributed to my learning. But on the other hand, it also caused me to have some problems and brought about decreasing my interest".

A further point is that in the provisional group lists, Subject 27 had been a member of a different group from this one. He sent me an email and demanded a change of group. In his email, he says that "I want to change my group that you formed for the Distance Education Course because there are some people in this group I do not get on well with" I changed his group, as he wished, and assigned him to this group. It is interesting to observe him having conflict because of interpersonal relationships again. He is the most active member in the group and he puts in more effort than the others. In his posts, he shows that he is very keen on learning from the course.

In a similar way, in his response to a question in the post-course questionnaire, he regards himself as a person who is helpful towards his friends; he helps his friends to deal with the problem of lack of resource [and in fact he sends resources to his group mates on Moodle]. He says:

> "There were problems in task allocation, in literature review [he refers to a lack of resource], in the content and [finally] presentations. I helped my friends take decisions about a resource-based research. Content was up to the individuals".

On Moodle, only Subject 27 overtly worked hard. He initiated the discussions, gave feedback and sent posts about their group work. So, I am unable to uncover what triggers Subject 24 to come into conflict with him, rather than explain power relationships.

The conflict in power relationship then triggers another type of conflict: affiliation. As a result of the heated discussions and unresolved conflict, Subject 24 does not feel he belongs to the group and wants to leave it, even though this might cause him to get a poor mark from the course, as can be seen from his aforementioned Moodle post (He says: "There is still no unity in the group and definitely this is the only reason why I do not join in the group activities…No matter if I fail").

The conflict which emerged in the group's learning process results in fragmentation among members. In relation to this, Subject 21 refers to the group's solution to the conflict, which is to work in different sub-groups.

4.6 The role of interpersonal conflict on learning experience

Interpersonal conflict negatively influences Subject 27's social learning process. In the post-course questionnaire, he confirms his work preference as individual working, as he states in his pre-course questionnaire. He justifies his choice by saying: "Individually. Because in case consensus is not reached among group members, then that brings about a loss of time and some problems".

Apart from Subject 27's personal learning experience, it is very interesting to see how the structure of the topic changes through the exercise of power relationships. The topic that this group deals with is shaped in accordance with the prevailing party's comments. For instance, initially, Subject 27 proposes to deal with the American Continents' DE practices based on the countries on Moodle (under the thread of Task Allocation). Accordingly, in his post, he divides the continent into three parts (North

America, Central America and South America) and lists the countries in these parts. He is possibly concerned with the length of the list of countries in the Americas and asks my opinion as a guest tutor. I first advise him to make a decision together with his friends; subsequently, I share my ideas about dealing with the continents in terms of its regions rather than with each individual constituent country. He finds my ideas suitable and posts a message to his group, in which he suggests starting with the regions and changing the content when necessary. In his posts, he introduces my name as a knowledgeable authority, to convince his friends, and my ideas shape the outline of their project. In a response to him, Subject 23 approves his proposal on Moodle. At that stage, his ideas seem to be the only working proposals as no one else suggests anything else. However, then, Subject 24 comments about this proposal. Subject 25 responds that:

> Out of the 32 countries that you listed, I only have heard of 11 of them. To my mind, we should deal primarily with US and Canada; Brasil, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela in South America and some more countries. Do not give friends a headache by teaching them about countries that they have never heard of. […]

Right after this post, Subject 27 develops a counter argument and suggests that there might be some countries that his classmates have not heard of, but these countries may be good at DE and according to him, his group should refrain from not teaching about these countries because of their unfamiliarity.

At that stage, there are two conflicting arguments proposed by two members. I understand from other members' posts that the rest of the group members are confused by these contrasting proposals. Subject 26 says, "You are both saying something different, we have to start work as soon as possible"). Here, members feel anxious because of the uncertainty of their task allocation, with only one week left before their group presentation. The conflict in argument and counterargument leads to chaos for the rest of the group members, as they do not know which directions these arguments would take them.

A further point about this group's learning experience is that when the group members were in deadlock, they asked my advice as a guest tutor. It is interesting to observe that, as happened in Group 2, in order to terminate the conflict, parties tend to hide behind an authoritative figure. In this case, in his response to Subject 24, Subject 27 refers to me as a second tutor to resolve the conflict. He very often references my suggestions in order to defend his arguments. In the case of this group, a (perceived)

authority's opinions are influential in bringing the conflict to an end and shaping the group's end product, as in the presentation submitted to the tutor, I notice that the outline of the presentation is in line with my suggestion.

5. GROUP V

5.1. Conflict Patterns

Conflict type (Intrapersonal conflict)
Dynamics of conflict (Ontological security)
Result of conflict (Conflict resolution)
Learning experience (Intended knowledge production/Orientation)

5.2. An introduction to the group

This group deals with the topic of Distance Education in Africa and finalizes their project on the 6th week of the course. Members chose this topic, as the day when they give their face-to -face presentation falls one week before the departmental exams. So, group members prefer to finish their group work as soon as possible, in order to allocate themselves some time to prepare for their exams. Unfortunately, from time to time I was aware that the group was experiencing conflict on Moodle, however, as they usually preferred to have face-to-face meetings to accelerate the discussion process, rather than corresponding on Moodle, which takes more time, I could not detect very detailed data on Moodle.

The group consists of 4 male and 2 female students. One of the group members (Subject 33) neither returned the pre-post-course questionnaires nor attended the focus group meetings nor even the face-to-face sessions. The reason for his nonparticipation is possibly because he is a fourth year student (whereas this course is run for the third year students) and he had enrolled on this course because he failed in his third year. However, he also did not actively participate in Moodle discussions, although Moodle provides him with flexible times to engage in group work as a distant learner. It is also interesting that, according to the Moodle statistics, he viewed the topics 272 times but there is no log of his active participation (e.g. posting, editing and deleting a discussion). Therefore, I could not include him in my research and examined this group's experience with conflict based on the other five members.

According to Subject 28, with whom I did an interview, the members of this group have better a priori knowledge than the members of other groups, because they had education based on technical skills.

The group mainly experiences intrapersonal conflict, due to one member's different expectation of the course (he looks for a didactic teaching method) and another member's conflicting personal values. In the end, they manage to resolve the conflict and produce a very good group report.

In the pre-course questionnaire, 3/5 of the group members (Subject 28, Subject 30 and Subject 31) refer to their working preferences as individual working; one member (Subject 32) refers to working in a group, and the remaining member (Subject 29) says, `Depends on the group members`. However, by the end of the course, two of them who prefer to work individually (Subject 29 and Subject 31) had changed their minds and preferred to work in the group, following their group experience in this course. One member, who says "depending on the group member" (Subject 29), clarifies his working preference as being in a group. One member, who refers to her working preferences as individual working (Subject 28), changes her decision and says "Depends". If there is sufficient time, then I would prefer to work individually, otherwise in group". The remaining member (Subject 30) who did not change her decision to work individually, is in fact the only one who experiences conflict with the group, as discussed in the interpersonal conflict section.

I present each member's working preference in the table below.

I have coded the group members as Subject 28, Subject 29, Subject 30, Subject 31, and Subject 32.

Table 7: Working preference of the group (V) members before and after the course

Group V	**Working Preferences**	
	Pre-Course Questionnaire	**Post-Course Questionnaire**
Subject 28	Individual	Both (individual if there is sufficient time, otherwise group)
Subject 29	Depends on members	Group
Subject 30	Individual	Individual
Subject 31	Individual	Group
Subject 32	Group	Group

Please see Appendix 15e for more information about group members.

5.3. Intrapersonal conflict

In terms of individual differences, the group members do not have too many differences in their expectations from the course, a priori knowledge and aims (as can be seen in the Appendix 15e- information about the group members). As the number

of group members is five, this initially led me to think that this group might find it easier to reach a common position. However, as I examined the focus group meeting and questionnaires, I detected that Subject 30 in particular experiences severe intrapersonal conflict.

This group rarely uses Moodle in their group work, possibly because of the limited time which requires them to be ready for their presentations within weeks. Therefore, I am unable to examine how conflict evolves in this group. During the course, I deliberately sent a message to this group asking about their participation in Moodle, so that I could see their interactions and help them as guest tutor when necessary; despite this, the members preferred not to use Moodle.

On examining the focus group meeting and the post questionnaires in detail, only one member, Subject 30, refers to her expectation from the course as `having fun`; whereas the others demonstrate high motivation, expressing a wish to pass with a good grade. This situation raises the possibility of conflict in expectations among group members. In fact, in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 30 mentions the conflict she had with the group members. On explaining her reason why she does not prefer to work as a group, she says:

> "[I prefer to work] individually. My group mates' attitude towards the course is different from mine, or rather, different from each other. Of course diversity is good, but we could not reach consensus and come together".

Subject 32 also refers to conflict in expectations in his group. He says in the post-course questionnaire:

> "It could have brought more success if expectations and aims were the same and task allocations had been done in accordance with interests".

Because the group members emphasize task allocation when explaining the conflict they had in the questionnaires and focus group, I understand that they essentially encountered conflict while tasks were being allocated. With regard to this, Subject 28 posts a message on Moodle (under the thread of "Last change") and says that: "Due to the unfamiliarity of the topic, we had to do the task allocation again". According to the new task allocation, members are responsible for the different topics. As Subject 28 also mentions their unfamiliarity with the topic, I concluded that they had done an initial task allocation; however, because the members could not obtain sufficient

information regarding the task they need to fulfil, due to the lack of resources they need to complete their projects, they change the outline of their project, and therefore also the task allocations, in accordance with the new outline.

With regard to this, Subject 29 refers to lack of resources at the focus group meeting. He says:

> … Our [group's] topic was Africa [distance education in Africa]; some group had already taken the topic of America. For America, many resources could be found and there were different interesting topics to deal with. This influenced the way people work and also resources. There was a problem with finding resources in accordance with the continent. For instance, Africa could not find resources properly whilst America had plenty of resources. This might have raised the problem of chaos as well [when there were too many resources].
> …
> The resource…The thing is at the beginning we tried to get some advice from our tutors such as what they expect us to do, our presentations. At the beginning, we had some outlines to do but this did not work because of the lack of resources. Then, we launched a project, group work, among us. This was easier.

When I reflect on the quotation above, Subject 32's aforementioned statement ("It could have been more successful if expectations and aims were the same and task allocations had been done in accordance with interests") and Subject 30's emphasis on interest in the questionnaire, I understand that some of the group members disagreed with the tasks they were given, possibly because they could not find enough resources regarding the task which they are in charge of. They wanted to change their topics but then this raised the issue of conflict in their interests and as a solution, they needed to re-do the task allocations. This situation essentially disturbs Subject 30. I said `essentially` because I observed that while most of the group members to some extent have a positive learning experience (as I present in the next section), Subject 30 has negative thoughts about her group mates. In the section below, I present the role of intrapersonal conflict in her learning experience.

As for conflict resolution, based on the group members' statements in the post-course questionnaire, I understand that they could manage to resolve the conflict. Although most of the members find a way to avoid conflict, possibly because of the dialogue, they could reconcile in the end. (e.g. in the post-course questionnaires: Subject 31 says: "I valued what they say while working together. We allocated the tasks and

worked together and took decisions together. We took common decisions" and Subject 32 says: "we did not have too many situations where we could not reach consensus").

5. 4. The role of intrapersonal conflict in learning experience

The conflict which Subject 30 experienced influences her attitude and learning orientation towards the course. With regard to the conflict she encountered, she thinks that, instead of having a constructivist approach in the course, which requires the student to actively engage with the course and learn through social interaction, she prefers to have a didactic course. In the focus group meeting, she says: "This constructivist approach is like something frightening. At some point, we think that it is better if the tutor comes, teaches, answers our questions or even we not attend the courses" (Focus group meeting, line: 284). Also, she refers to a conflict in her expectation in the post-course questionnaire. She thinks that her expectation from the course was different; sharing what she finds with the group or examining the findings sent by other group members (she refers to collaborative work) was not what she expected from the course. As a result of this conflict, her orientation towards the course is weakened. She literally says "[this collaborative work] pissed me off".

Apart from her, how does intrapersonal conflict play a role in other group members' learning experiences? The conflict they encountered influences the way the members allocate the topics (who will work on what) and consequently the way they structure the topic [what dimensions of the topic (African Continent's Distance Education) should be worked on]. As a concrete example, Subject 28 posts a list of the topics that the group plans to deal with and three of the group members` names to work on the listed topics on Moodle (Under the thread of Task allocation – Distance Education Practices of African Continent). According to this list,

Subject 30
Introduction to the topic
DE technologies in Africa
Utopia » Guinea

Subject 28
Botswana » Ghana

Subject 32
Kenya » Zambia

Subject 28 also clarifies the reason why there are only three of the group members on the list, rather than the entire group, in her post by saying:

> […] three people attended today's meeting and therefore, for the time being we divided the topic [of African Distance Education] into three sub-sections.

With regard to her group mates' absence from the meeting, Subject 30 refers to their priorities in the focus group meeting and says:

> "Most of the times, we could not gather together due to some of our friends' other commitments. We all had different views on what to do. However, as we could not together with all the members, we could not reach a common decision; could not reach consensus" (Focus group meeting, line: 3367).

In her statement there is also an emphasis on interpersonal conflict, as I present in the following section, but in terms of intrapersonal conflict, I get a sense of conflict in interests. In this example, for the group members who did not attend their group's meeting, it may have been in their interest to commit to something other than the course work, but then this brought about conflict in group members' interest. Furthermore, Subject 31 points to a conflict in his expectation in the post-course questionnaire. He says:

> "If there is only little direction by the tutor, then this course would not be good for me. It is because the tutor shows me the road that I need to follow. If s/he is not didactic, then I cannot progress sufficiently. I stop at some point".

In consequence of these intrapersonal conflicts, two of the group members prefer not to attend their course-related group meeting; in other words, the conflict they experienced may have led to their non-participation in the group work.

After Subject 28 had posted this message on Moodle, I, as guest tutor, recommended to group members that South Africa should take the place of other African countries on their list [e.g. Botswana and Utopia] *in case* they cannot reach any resources regarding DE practices in these countries. Subsequently, I also sent them resources on Moodle and reminded them about doing their group work on Moodle, so that I, as a guest tutor, can help them when they need and also, together with the main tutor, assess the participation of the group members.

After this message, it should be because the members who had not participated in the group work may have thought that they have been monitored by the tutor, they decided to join the group work in the second task allocation. Another reason for this change could be because as a guest tutor, I helped the members by giving advice and thus meeting one of the members' expectation (who did not participate in the meeting) as he expects to see a tutor guidance in the course otherwise in his words "he stops [to work] at a point". My guidance might also have helped the student members re-consider how to structure the topic of DE in Africa.

Going back to the change in the task allocation, Subject 28 posts a second list of the group members and according to the new list, all group members are included in the task allocations and they re-structure the topic as can be seen from the Moodle quotation below:

> As we did not have any a priori knowledge about the topic, we changed the task allocations drawing on our research.
>
> <u>Distance Education Practices in Africa</u>
>
> Introduction to the topic (Subject 30)
> The country policies (Subject 29)
> Technologies in DE (Subject 32)
> What works and does not work in DE (Subject 31)
> Virtual Universities in Africa (Subject 33)
> Practices in South Africa (Subject 28)

To sum up, some of the Group 5 members encountered intrapersonal conflict derived from the differences in interests and expectations. This influenced the members' learning orientation towards the course and intended knowledge production.

5.5. Interpersonal conflict

In this section, I focus mainly on Subject 30, because she is the only member in the group who experiences and explicitly refers to interpersonal conflict in the questionnaires and focus group meeting while the rest of the group members do not perceive any significant interpersonal conflict [I present the quotations regarding each member's perception of conflict later in this section].

Subject 30's story

> "At the beginning we were very unfamiliar with the topic of distance education. We did not know what to do. Especially, this topic of the [African] continent. We did not know exactly what to do, what you are [as a tutor] looking for. In order to resolve this problem, we got together. Most of the times, we could not meet, due to some of our friends' other commitments. We all had different views on what to do. However, as we could not get together with all the members, we could not reach a common decision, could not reach consensus" (Focus group meeting, line: 136).

The freedom given to the student members, in order to enable them to fulfil their task as they wish, brought with it some uncertainty and students such as Subject 30 felt insecure towards the course, as they could not predict what their decisions would bring. As discussed in the Socio-cultural Conflict Chapter, the traditional way of dealing with uncertainty for student members is to consult a knowledgeable authority, so that they can take the decisions which will lead to success or, at least, finalize their project with the least problem possible. This way they can eliminate uncertainty. However, in this course, students were introduced to a new pedagogical approach. Consequently, they tried to adopt their traditional approach to the newly introduced pedagogy. In this group's case, in order to solve the issue of uncertainty about what to do to complete the task, they came together and discussed it as a group.

Subject 30 continues:

> "However, as we could not get together with all the members, we could not reach a common decision; we could not reach consensus. I mean diversity is good because everybody says something different and you find out the right thing to do. But we could not get together. We were sending messages to each other. But frankly, I cannot say that this was useful" (Focus group meeting, line: 141).

Here, according to Subject 30, members could not come together and, because of that, could not take decisions to reach common goals. Although she finds diversity as a way of reaching a common goal, in her case this diversity ends up in conflict. This situation, in other words being unable to having a common goal, along with the limited time (a deadline) leads students to seek ontological security. As a result of this, as the deadline approaches, students feel anxious and try to achieve something in order to free themselves from the pressure on them. Here, virtual learning community principles raise the issues of the freedom given to students, and of the students who do not know how to cope with the uncertainty that comes with freedom. As a result, anxiety triggers conflict among them. The following is the rest of her story: (Focus group meeting, line: 147)

Researcher: I wonder, you also had some face-to-face courses. Could you not discuss the events in between them?

Subject 30: "No, this was also something that did not work properly. It was only when there was one week left of the course, that we could say we need to do this and that, you should do that, s/he should do that. A few of us came together and did something, but we were forced to decide who will do what next. But I cannot say this was useful".

….

"Actually, this is the thing I mentioned before. As we were unwilling, we were doing everything at the last minute. We think that whatever happens, the only thing that we can work on is the thing we decided on at the last minute. Just passing the exam, or the thought that this is my commitment that I need to fulfil, is better than doing nothing".

However, interestingly, when I listen to the same story from other members and examine group interaction on Moodle, I come to the conclusion that Subject 30 experiences hidden conflict. This is because I could not detect any incidence in which

Subject 30 experienced conflict with her friends on Moodle. However, as this group has not frequently used Moodle in their group interactions, I tried to capture Subject 30's conflict experience using different data resources. As a result of this enquiry, I noticed that, unlike her, all other students were happy with their group work and did not mention interpersonal conflict.

In the post-course questionnaire, drawing on the group work they had for this course, most of the student members changed their work preference from individual work to group work, except for Subject 30. She remains unchanged in her preference to work individually. On examining the members' experience individually, I found out that, in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 28 says: "[Our] group work was fruitful, it should remain the same, I believe".

However, I further investigated the group's experience with conflict, because Subject 28 is always positive about her friends, and tends to hide her feelings from the tutors, as happened in the individual interview that I had with her. Below are the extracts from the post-course questionnaires and my interpretation of the other group members' experience with conflict. In the first place, I examined whether there was conflict in the group's learning experience and if there was, then whether it is because of individual differences, as Subject 30 implies.

Subject 29: Our expectations and interest were common. We had many things in common.

Subject 31: I believe we have things in common. Because [otherwise] it would be very hard to work if these are not in common. And there would not be fruitful [learning] outcome.

Subject 28: I think I had the same expectations as my group mates. I did not observe any irresponsibility throughout the group work. Just one thing, due to the disadvantage of being the first group to make a presentation, as well as presenting just before examination week, we could not exchange feedback.

Subject 32: We did not have too many situations where we could not reach consensus.

Subject 30: No, I do not think there is anything in common. It is because we focused on different fields; this brought about separations and difficulties in taking decisions.

As could be seen from the extracts above, Subject 30 did not achieve harmony with the other group members. I reflected on her experience on the basis of its relation to conflict. I noticed that she experiences interpersonal conflict, which is derived from power relationships. In the pre-course questionnaire, on describing her role in group work, she says "Leading the group is for me. I usually determine what is to be done and how. However, I am always open to new ideas. The important thing is determining what is to be done as a group". Interestingly, in the post-course questionnaire, she uses a more moderate discourse and says: "I participated equally". Apparently, Subject 28 was taking the lead, as I noticed on Moodle as well as in the post-course questionnaire. Subject 28 created many of the threads on Moodle (8 threads out of 13) and sent post to the members about task allocation and other related information such as notifications. In the post-course questionnaire, Subject 28 says: "I took the lead only in allocating the task such as when to meet, etc., and then we worked individually on our tasks". Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that, because of the conflict in power relationships, Subject 30 was uncomfortably divided between involvement and detachment in regard to group work.

However, it is because I do not have enough data on Moodle to capture the interpersonal conflict for this group (as I previously stated, because of the time limitation, this group preferred to have face-to-face meetings), and I could not discover any other dynamics which might have led Subject 30 to encounter hidden conflict with other group members. Therefore, I focused on other data resources such as post-course questionnaires. I examined different learning experiences for the same items. For instance, Subject 30 stresses `being unable to come together and therefore could not reach common goals`, whereas for the other members, they have different reasons for not getting the results they would like to achieve at the beginning of the process. The following are the related quotations:

Subject 29: The resource…The thing is, at the beginning we tried to get some advice from our tutors, such as what they expect us to do, our presentations. At the beginning, we had some outlines for doing it, but this did not work, because of the lack of resources. Then we launched a project, group work among ourselves. This was easier.

Subject 31: Because we were the first group, we were inexperienced. Because of this, we had difficulty getting ready.

Subject 28: Due to the disadvantage of being the first group to make a presentation, as well as presenting just before examination week, we could not exchange feedback. However, I believe it was a good presentation.

The other members' comments made me think that, while Subject 30 believes that there were differences among the members and there was nothing in common, to some extent irresponsibility has been demonstrated (as members did not come together), in the same group, and the other members emphasise the lack of resources. So, I come to the conclusion that each member has a different learning experience in relation to the conflict and although members might appear to be working in harmony, there might be some individuals experiencing hidden conflict.

A further point raised by the members in relation to the trigger for conflict is the issue of lack of resources. Students were given the freedom to achieve their own goals without tutor interruption. However, the essential support to achieve their goals without a knowledgeable authority could be resources. When sufficient resources are not provided for students, then they worry about their future work and consequently fear failing. This situation has the potential to trigger conflict among members.

5. 6. The role of interpersonal conflict in learning experience

Subject 30 and Subject 28 got involved in the group work more actively than the other members (based on Moodle logs). Although Subject 30 experiences conflict, the group's final report is one of the most elaborate reports among the 5 groups: This is the only group which deals with DE coherently and in depth. While some other groups left me with the impression that they disregarded their tasks, this group submitted an elaborate report. In particular, given that they were the first group to share their finding with a class presentation and they had examinations right after the presentation, I find their work very successful.

Summary and Reflections

In this Chapter, I presented five groups' stories of conflict and the role of conflict in their learning experience.

Each group exhibits different patterns of conflict and different pathways in their learning process. The figure below visualises these patterns/pathways for each group and summarizes the discussions above.

In taking the conflict patterns, I decided these, based on the number of the grounded codes in the groups' data resources and included the conflicts/dynamics/results/learning experiences which most stand out in each group's story. I would like to point out that within the groups, there are sometimes sub-groups who perceive the conflict differently from others. For instance, as happens in Group 1, while two of the members experience conflict, the remaining members do not perceive any incidences of conflict, although they recognize the differences. In a similar way, in Group 2, as a researcher my interpretation of conflict is different from what the group perceives. From my point of view, while some of the group members overtly demonstrate compliance on Moodle, for instance at the focus group meeting, the members refer to conflict resolution via dialogue. In these cases, as a researcher, I made the judgement, as I have privileged knowledge, above the subjects' perception, from a rich variety of data resources. For instance, in the questionnaires, there are personal information/experiences of the subjects that only the subject and I know, while the rest of the community is not aware of these. Likewise, I could access the Moodle logs, which would have enabled me to examine invisible records/logs via my administrative role on Moodle, or I could have examined the hidden conflict through individual interviews, while sometimes these individuals do not want to admit the conflict they experience in the focus group meeting in front of their friends. Therefore, in the cases in which perception of the conflict varies, I made the judgement, using the patterns based on the data resources. However, I informed the reader about the divergence between my judgement and the member's perception of conflict in the relevant sections.

In the figure below, I try to visualize these patterns and pathways. Drawing on the figure, I concluded that the differences either become a matter for conflict or remain a matter of indifference in the individuals' learning experience through the dynamics which trigger or avoid occurrences of conflict. These dynamics are important in the sense that individuals/groups experience different conflict patterns and pathways based on these parameters. These parameters lead individuals, for instance, to experience a pleasant or unpleasant learning experience. Below, I summarize these patterns and pathways illustrating the groups' learning experience.

The members in Group 1 mainly did not perceive any conflict due to the accommodating learning culture they developed (internal dynamics) and as a result, they took decisions smoothly and engaged in intended knowledge production. Group 2 mainly experienced interpersonal conflict as the intrapersonal differences they brought to the group were triggered by ontological insecurity and their learning

culture. The conflict they experienced resulted in compliance and as a result of this, the knowledge they produced was dominated by the dominant member's ideas. Group 3 mainly experienced intrapersonal conflict. As happened in Group 2, the conflict they experienced was triggered by ontological insecurity and their learning culture. However, unlike Group 2, they resolved the conflict via dialogue. As a result of the dialogue that took place, they reached a consensus concerning their collaborative involvement in the group work and consequently, they engaged in collaborative work. Group 4 mainly experienced interpersonal conflict due to the large number of the group members. This group could not resolve the conflict and as a result, they fragmented into small groups. Subsequently, the fragmentation brought about a contentious matter for the group and their learning experiences became chaotic. The final group, Group 5, mainly experienced intrapersonal conflict due to ontological insecurity. However, they managed to resolve the conflict. The conflict which this group experienced weakened some members' orientation toward the group work; nevertheless, the group was able to produce a very successful project report.

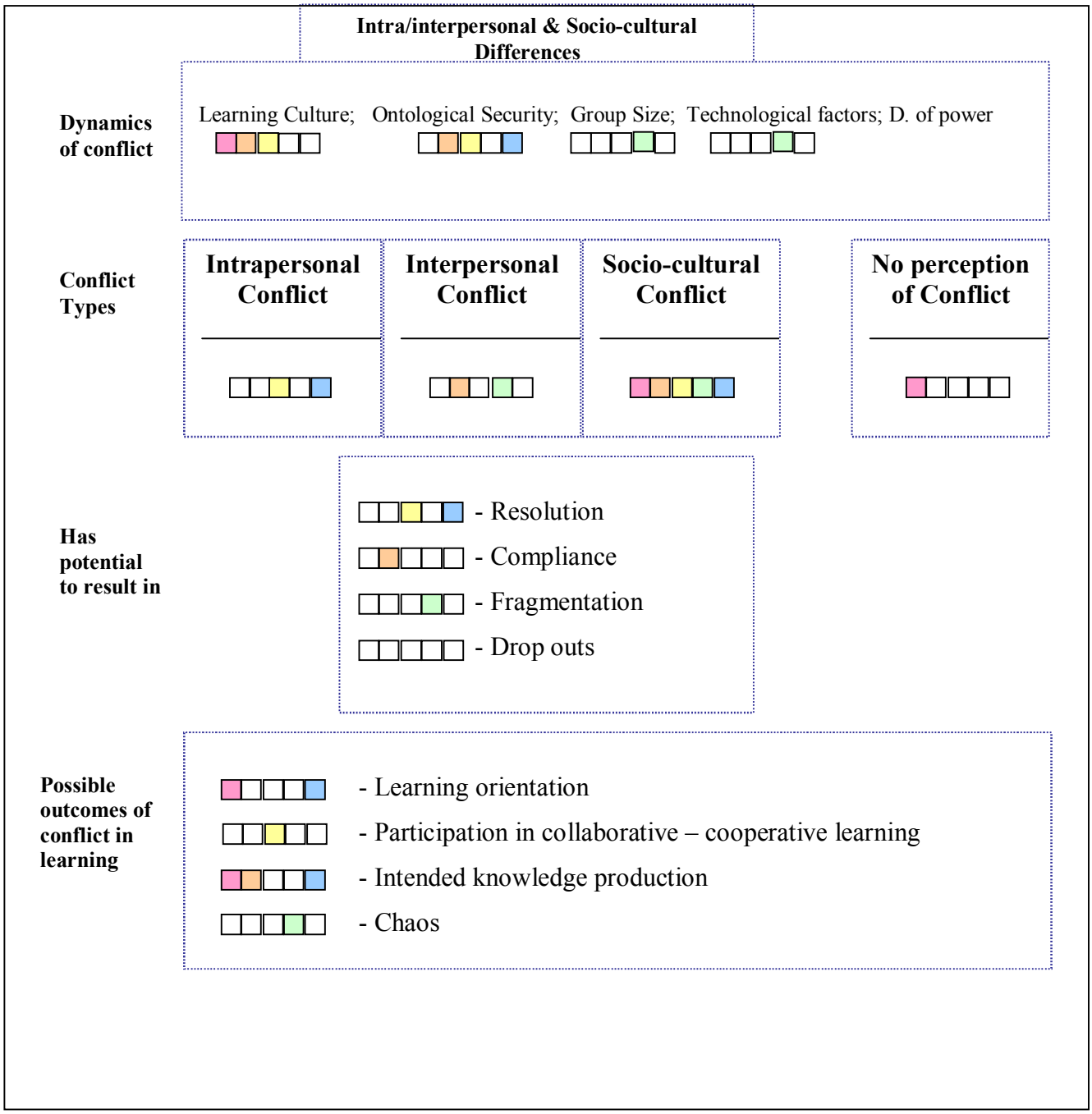
A further point is that a learning group can be regarded as a closed box and even in the emancipated learning context, the learning groups are left alone with their task. However, there are crucial dynamics of conflict in the group's learning process which influence the learning experience of the members and learning outcomes. Conflict comes out of this research, resulting in important learning outcomes and each group has its own story of conflict. In that sense, it is important to uncover the conflict in the group's learning experience.

Taking a closer look at the groups` experiences with conflict, in terms of dynamics, I have noticed that learning culture and ontological security are the most prominent in the groups' (3 out of 5) learning experience. Therefore, in particular these elements can be regarded as key parameters in avoiding or triggering conflicts. When conflict is avoided, the groups tend to have positive learning outcomes, as happens in Group 1's learning process. On the other hand, if conflict is not avoided and resolved, then as happens in Group 4, the groups may be confronted with fragmentation and enter into chaotic situations.

Drawing on these five groups' cases, I have also noticed that conflict is generated mainly in the task allocation process. Before discussing task allocation, it may be helpful to focus on the types of interaction patterns in the context of where intended social knowledge construction takes place. Dewiyanti (2005: 12) refers to two types of interactions which are essential in these contexts: (1) interaction to gain domain

knowledge or skills and (2) interaction to build and to maintain the group. Task allocations require community members to get involved in both interaction patterns, and it was mainly during these interactions that conflict emerged; consequently conflict leads to both gaining knowledge domain and building (and maintaining) a sense of group or vice versa. Therefore, uncovering the place of conflict in task allocations is important in the aforementioned learning contexts.

Moreover, it emerged from the research that members may experience chaotic situations, depending on how they deal with conflict. Chaos is a situation in particular for the pedagogies which propose emancipation and flexibility in a learning process, and thus individual differences lead to uncertainty. At this point, as Giddens (1991: 3) puts it "in circumstances of uncertainty and multiple choice, the notions of trust and risk have particular application" and trust along with risk signify that members seek ontological security, which has the potential to trigger (or avoid) conflict. In a similar way, as social construction of knowledge is essential in these pedagogies, the dependency may result in a social deficiency, if persons do not like social interactions. In these cases, as happens to Subject 17, these persons may need to suppress their feelings in order not to fail. In his interview, Subject 17 refers to the times he needs to `pretend to be someone different,` in order to be successful in the learning process. In that sense, the context of democratic pedagogies needs to be taken into account in considering conflicts in the VLCs.



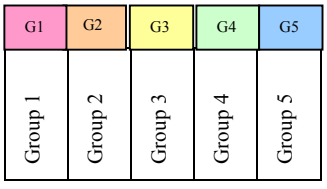


Figure 8: Visualization of conflict patterns and pathways of each individual group

CHAPTER 7

Exploring inter/intrapersonal conflict through the tutor's and designer's learning community experience

In this chapter, I present the tutor's and designer's story of conflict as members of the learning community. Similar to student members, the designer and tutor also have individual differences which result in conflict through some triggers.

In the sections below, I present their stories and the influence of their conflict on the community's learning. In doing this, I include both parties` perspectives and try to avoid bias. I utilised interview transcripts, field notes and a summary of written correspondences between the tutor and designer to examine both parties' conflict. Unlike in Chapter 6 (student members' learning experience), as I deal with two individuals in this Chapter, I could examine their stories closely and therefore discuss their experience in detail.

The conflict between the tutor and designer is presented as two-fold discussions in this research: 1) Conflict between the tutor and designer as members of the learning community in this Chapter and 2) The tutor and designer as the stakeholders in the education system in Chapter 8. Briefly, in this Chapter, I focus on these two individuals as members of the learning community by scrutinizing their experience within the community's life cycle, whilst in the next chapter, I widen my perspective and look at their stories within the context of the education system.

Conflict between the tutor and designer

Tutor's Background

The tutor has been working for the university in this research for 2 years. He had not lived in the region where this university is located before he got the teaching position at the university. He might be regarded as a foreigner in the region as well as in the university, as he has grown up in western cities and with western culture which in turn might have influenced his pedagogic stance. The reason why I chose to work with him is that I believed that he adheres to democratic learning pedagogies, and I based this view on the times we worked together before the research; I was confident that he and I could design a learning community in his course to examine the conflict in student members' learning experience for this PhD thesis. However, during the main study,

conflict emerged between the two of us as designer and tutor, and as members of the learning community.

Designer's Background

I, as the designer, had worked together with the tutor at the same university a couple of years before the field work was conducted. I had also been a student of the tutor before we worked together in the same department. I do not have any connection or familiarity with the university in which this field work was carried out and which the tutor works for.

Although my country of birth is the same as the country where the field work was carried out, my PhD studies are taking place in a different country (United Kingdom) where this research is conducted. I became involved in designing the course during my education in the United Kingdom, and was possibly influenced by the educational paradigms of the country in which I have studied throughout my doctoral education. Very briefly, I was inspired by the pedagogies which support emancipated and communal learning (e.g. collaborative learning) and in which learners critically construct their knowledge with very little external influence and with the help of learning technologies. These pedagogies drove me to conduct this research in the real world of my country of birth.

From this section onwards, as a writing style, I will refer to myself as the designer (replacing the Subject of `I` with `designer`) and refer to my experience in this research as the experience of a designer, since the focus in this chapter is the designer and the tutor.

Intrapersonal conflict

The tutor and designer essentially experience conflict in wishes and working preferences as both sides would like to run the course with different wishes and preferences. Although while designing the course before the academic term starts, they do not experience any explicit conflict in wishes and working preferences, after the course starts, they need to take a number of decisions in the context of the loose structure of the course and conflict largely takes place in this decision making process.

Below, I explain the conflicts they experience by focusing on two examples from the learning process.

Second Life example of conflict in wishes

First week of the course

The designer wishes to include Second Life (3D environment) in the course's syllabus in order to demonstrate to the student members a new (distance education) technology. However, she encounters technical difficulties in fulfilling this wish, as the university administration blocks the internet ports which Second Life (SL) uses. In order to unblock these ports, she needs to obtain official permission from the university to which she does not have any affiliation. As a solution, she asks the tutor to obtain the required permission, as he works for the university as a member of the academic staff. In the first week, the tutor treats her request positively and tries to find a solution by making phone calls to the required department. However, he cannot reach any solution in the first week.

Second week of the course

Although the tutor again tries to unblock the ports several hours before the course, this process takes longer than he expects, and because of the limited time which is left before the course starts, the second week of the course is run without Second Life. The tutor plans to overcome this problem before the third week starts.

Before the third week of the course

The designer persistently wishes to use SL, as the course design consists of using a new distance education technology. She strives to obtain permission from the university administration; however, her attempts fail because she does not exactly know whom to contact and how to get permission as an unaffiliated researcher in the university. Before the course, she asks the tutor to help her again, as she does not want to experience this technical obstacle again, causing the learning community members to fall behind schedule. Although a couple of days are left of the course, there is no development in the attempt to overcome this technical difficulty. Time puts pressure on the designer, she feels anxious and this triggers conflict between them. Time is a matter of anxiety for her as she thinks that, if the students are not taught how to work on SL in the third week, then the student members would no longer be able to use this technology in the following weeks of the course, and this impedes the implementation of the syllabus which had been designed. The tutor does not wish to handle this problem prior to the start of the course, as according to him, he can manage to unblock the internet ports immediately before the start of the course. However, the designer is concerned at the limited time allocated to sort out this problem, as happened in the second week of the course. Therefore, she asks the tutor to deal with the problem before the day on which the course starts, even though he does not wish

to do so; consequently conflict in wishes occurs and tension emerges between the tutor and designer. This conflict influences the timetable and therefore, the student members' learning experience, as I discuss in the next section. Furthermore, the tension which is generated, in turn triggers other conflicts between the tutor and designer.

A further example of conflict concerns the different working preferences of the tutor and designer.

An example of conflict in working preference in an unforeseen circumstance
In almost all stages of the course, the student members are informed of the virtual learning community principles, and that they can administer their learning process as they wish. Possibly for this reason, towards the middle of the course, one of them (Subject 17), initiates a discussion on Moodle to cancel the course which falls immediately after the bank holiday week. This proposal quickly spreads to the other student members and, except for one member, all of them (16 student members) ask the tutor to cancel the course on that week. According to the syllabus, the week which the student members wish to cancel is the one in which the groups are due to make their presentations, more specifically the Asian and Australian Continents' Distance Education Practices. The student members' excuse concerns their unavailability after the bank holiday, as most of them live in different parts of the country and they may not travel back to the city where the University is located. Moreover, they inform the tutors that this cancellation may also be of benefit to the groups who are to give presentations, as there will not be many students attending. One of them (Subject 7) is uncertain about this proposal and posts the following message:

Subject 7:

> "I would say OK to everybody's [common] decision. However, in the first place, the groups who will give presentations must say OK to this [cancellation]. But it is also equally important to listen to other friends and the tutor's decision".

In response, Subject 25 says:

> AS YOU WISH…
> WE WILL NOT ATTEND!!!

The tutor and designer face this unforeseen situation, as according to the syllabus, there is a course after the bank holiday, and they need to take the decision to either support or reject the student members' proposal. They discuss this situation via emails.

The tutor prefers to support the student members' proposal, as according to him, there will not be enough student members attending; with that in mind, there is no sense running the course, and he believes that he can compensate for this week later in the course.

The designer does not prefer to cancel the course, as according to her the student members will already be taking one week off for the bank holiday, and two weeks holiday is unnecessary. In addition, this cancellation will cause the members to fall behind schedule.

As a researcher, I find this situation a matter of working preference, because the tutor and designer have different ways of working. For instance, the designer prefers to work to a rigid timetable such as the course hours/weeks which must be specific, although the content and method may be flexible, whereas the tutor prefers not to work to a rigid timetable. For instance, a similar issue is raised before the course starts: the tutor thinks that students will probably not even attend the course in the second week of the term, and he prefers to cancel the course for the second week. On the other hand, the designer thinks more than half the students will attend, and if a notification of the course is circulated among the students via an email list or in different ways, then the students would attend the course, as otherwise there would not be enough time to complete the course. So, here, there are two different kinds of working preferences which occur in this unforeseen circumstance. What makes the difference in the matter of conflict is the ownership of the power to run the course by taking the final decisions. In this case, the tutor takes the final decision, subsequently informs the student members about the cancellation of the course and this leads to hidden conflict for the designer, as according to her, she can not interrupt someone else's course and she should comply with his decision even though she does not agree with it. The underlying dynamic in the emergence of hidden conflict, (asymmetrical) distribution of power, triggers other conflicts later in the course as I present in the Interpersonal Conflict section.

The role of intrapersonal conflict in the community's learning experience

Conflict between the tutor and designer influences learning, as it involves the planned schedule/content, which in turn, leads to chaos among community members. For instance, when conflict regarding the desire to use Second Life emerged during the first three weeks of the course, as a result of this conflict, the student members could not learn how to use this technology. This becomes a matter of concern for them later in the course. As they do not exactly know how to use it, they cannot fulfil the given task which requires them to give presentations about their group work on Second Life about an island which has been assigned to them, using the virtual presentation boards. Immediately before their presentation, the student members feel anxious about how to manage their presentation and post messages on Moodle and on a synchronous communication tool. Because the course could not be implemented as designed in the first weeks, due to the conflict between the tutor and designer, the student members could not learn and this caused them firstly to face a chaotic situation and then to cancel their presentation on Second Life; thus, they could not learn how to use a new distance education technology in their course as planned.

Interpersonal conflict

In terms of interpersonal conflict, the tutor and designer essentially experience conflict in power relationship.

In the first weeks of the course, the groups for the Global Vision week are assigned by the designer, based on the attendance sheet, and subsequently she informs the student members about their group on Moodle. However, the tutor thinks that the groups have been formed without his consent, although the designer asks his opinion on how to form the groups and gains his consent at a very small meeting held for the course. Here, lack of communication is a matter that concerns both parties and creates tension. What makes this lack of communication a matter for conflict is derived from power relationships? In his conversation with the designer, the tutor expresses his feelings that his course is being taken over by her and she is independently taking decisions without asking him. This, in turn, makes the tutor feel that he is losing his power on running the course.

In line with this, power relationships also come into play in the learning process when the tutor suddenly takes the decision to examine the student members, by means of a written exam towards the middle of the course, although this is in conflict with the designer's pedagogical stance. I present this conflict as a type of socio-cultural conflict, as this development is more concerned with the conflict in pedagogical stance, but this case also represents power relationships in terms of applying the decisions in the context of the course. In other words, although two parties may have a

different pedagogical stance, the matter of whose stance is to be applied in the implementation stage turns out a matter of power relationships in this case. Accordingly, when the tutor informs the student members about the exam that they are due to have, as the designer is in charge of forming the reading lists with the tutor, the student members ask her what to study and which resources they should use to prepare for their exam. However, as the designer does not know the exam questions when they ask exam related questions, she replies to the student members' enquiries negatively on Moodle and informs them that all resources that she suggested for them are in fact for their learning in general rather than the exam. The extract below is a part of her Moodle post:

> […]
> Regarding sharing resources with you, I told you previously that I would either translate English resources into Turkish or put the resources which I have already got on Moodle. However, when I was planning to do this, I merely meant to enhance your perspective, learn about the subject matter and enrich the course through resources. I meant to achieve this regardless of the exam. Therefore, please do not regard the resources I shared as a way of `getting ready for the exam`.

This post triggers a severe conflict between the tutor and designer, as the tutor thinks that in public the designer and he are not speaking the same language, and this is causing chaos among student members. Alternatively, according to the designer, she does not know anything about the tutor's motivation in examining the students, as this is not in the syllabus and significantly contradicts her pedagogical stance. Given the limited time left before the exam – the exam is held a number of weeks after the tutor's decision- she feels the need for an urgent answer to the increasing number of student members' enquiries being made to her about which resources to work on and sends a post on Moodle.

What makes me regard this case as a matter of conflict in power relationship is that in his conversation with the designer, the tutor says, "students are confused about who to listen to, who to follow. From now on, do not tell me what to do, instead, do it directly and let me know afterwards". By saying this, he signifies an equal power over students, which causes conflict and consequently, chaos. This in turn brings about a need for arbitration of the course; therefore, either side should take the control from now on.

The role of interpersonal conflict in the community's learning experience

Conflict between the tutor and designer is reflected in the student members' learning experience in the way they encounter uncertainty, triggering anxiety among them. They suddenly face a forthcoming exam, which they have not been told about before, and they do not know what to work on for the exam. They ask the designer's help, because the tutor does not suggest any resource to work on; however, when the designer disappoints them with her answer regarding her non-involvement with the exam, anxiety dominates their concern about passing the course, they encounter chaos.

Furthermore, student members need to do additional work in order to pass their exam. They need to do additional work because, at the beginning of the course, they have been told that their Moodle/class participation as well as group projects would be taken into account when marking, whilst, towards the middle of the course, they are suddenly informed that they would also be assessed in a mid-term exam. This, in turn, causes the student members to experience a different type of conflict which is affiliation. With regard to this, in the focus group meeting Subject 1 says, "Having been examined after we had been promised we would be independent is a discrepancy and this assessment method does not actually evaluate a student's success". So basically, Subject 1 does not feel affiliation to the learning community with which she finds discrepancies.

Interpersonal conflict also influences the way the course is run. It causes chaotic situations in the course. The designer decides to withdraw from the course, when the conflict between the tutor and designer intensifies in terms of its frequency and severity. For a short period of time, this decision brings about chaos regarding the completion of the course with a different pedagogic perspective from the designer's intended pedagogic values, which forms the basis of the course; new contents and methods are decided upon for the rest of the process. However, both parties resolve this conflict with dialogue through emails and telephone conversations and this avoids further uncertainty and anxiety among members. Yet, this conflict leaves the community with chaos for a period of time and leaves the two colleagues with a sense of disappointment.

Conclusion

In this research, the course design is underpinned with democratic learning principles, which in principle, the designer and tutor agree upon. As discussed in the first chapters, the course content and the learning process is loosely structured in order to

fulfil the community members' changing interest, wish, aim, and so on. However, coping with the uncertainty derived from the loosely structured nature of the course is not easy for the tutor and designer; and they experience severe conflict in materializing pedagogical values during the course. Briefly, in particular because of the distribution of power as a trigger, the conflict results in chaotic learning experiences for the student members and also in tension and disappointment between both parties.

My further reflection is that this case leaves me with a fictional question of `what if the designer had not intervened in the course as frequently, as happened in this case, and rather stayed as an outsider during the time when the course was implemented, would the two parties nevertheless have experienced this severe conflict?`. This question is raised because in a learning setting where the designer is not frequently involved in the flow of the course, the process might have gone smoothly, as instructional designers do not usually interrupt the learning experience of the community members to the extent that happens in this research; rather they are mostly involved before the course, or occasionally during the course. At this point, the context of the democratic pedagogy stands out, requiring members to approach their learning as a process of inquiry and take new directions based on these inquiries when necessary. In a learning context, where new directions very often take place, and where the members' learning backgrounds are aligned with the traditional way of learning (as discussed in the next chapter), the designer's frequent participation may be helpful in reflecting and implementing the democratic pedagogies. In that sense, this research gives an insight into the place of the designer and the possible results of his/her involvement in the democratic learning models, based on a learning group coming from traditional education, as the designer signifies the assurance of the learning community principles.

It is also evident from this research that implementation of democratic pedagogies relies to a great extent on the socio-cultural context and it may not be possible to experimentally achieve as much as is possible with the designer's external intervention. In the next chapter, I paraphrase my arguments within socio-cultural parameters, which in fact constitute one's wish, expectation, and affiliation, or in other words, inter/intrapersonal conflicts drawing on the field work.

CHAPTER 8

SOCIO-CULTURAL CONFLICT

In this Chapter, I reveal the socio-cultural conflict through the whole virtual learning community drawing on all members' learning experience.

Throughout the field work, it emerged that the pedagogy underpinning the learning community is in conflict with socio-cultural values in terms of the members' socioeconomic conditions and the education system that they have been exposed to. For instance, the virtual learning community model in this research is founded on democratic learning pedagogy principles. However, the educational system that the community is embedded in does not have supportive democratic values. In a similar way, the societal values which influence the community members are in conflict with the epistemological values of the democratic pedagogy and this results, for instance, in student members being part of a learning community, which requires them to independently obtain and critically process knowledge, whereas the same members obtain knowledge from hierarchal structures without questioning in the society to which they are affiliated.

Although it had not been my initial aim to examine socio-cultural conflict, it very frequently emerged throughout the field work in the community members' discourses and I have therefore included this dimension in my thesis. The reason why I present this conflict type in a separate chapter is that unlike other types of conflict, socio-cultural conflict influences almost the entire learning community regardless of the different roles of the members (designer, tutor and student). Thus, I aim to give the general picture regarding the community's story of conflict by dealing with it in a separate chapter.

Finally, I aim to present socio-cultural values, drawing on the social and educational system as these elements represent the context of this research. My point of departure in discussing the context is that the socio-cultural values in fact to some extent constitute the individual's expectations, aims, affiliations and so on; therefore they have a significant place in understanding the occurrences of conflict.

In the sections below, in terms of socio-cultural conflict, I structure my arguments in two-fold discussions: 1) The Educational System in which the learning community is

embedded. I give a very brief description of the vision of the entire educational system regardless of any specific levels (e.g. higher education or primary education), how community members experience conflict with the system and then I will narrow my focus to institutional conflict. 2) I present societal values which influence members and the conflicts they encounter as consequences of these societal elements.

1. Educational system

1A) National Education Policies

In particular throughout the focus group meetings, the student members acknowledged to me the difficulties of learning via a learning community model, mostly because of the education system to which they have been exposed. According to them, they do not feel ready to learn through an emancipated education system, as this is not in line with what they are used to. With regard to their arguments, I examined the educational system from a very brief macro perspective and compared it with the learning community principles, in order to make sense of the student members' learning experience and to understand the `difficulties` that they refer to.

There are two pictures regarding the national education system in Turkey at different time periods (1989 and 2007): the first one is "the Basic Law of National Education, which was put into effect in 1793 and was subjected to amendments in purpose and in principles with the Law no 2842 dated 18.06.1989" (National Ministry of Education, 2010). The second picture represents a different paradigm introduced into the system in 2007, although it was not yet fully implemented when the learning community came into existence in 2009. The learning community members in this research are influenced by both pictures in 2009 although they frequently refer to their learning habits constituted by the educational policies which date back to the 1980s (the first picture).

> According to the Basic Law of National Education (National Ministry of Education, 2010: np),
>
> "The general purpose of the education is to raise all Turkish citizens;
> (1) as individuals who are committed to Atatürk's principles, the revolution and the Atatürk Nationalism defined in the Constitution, who assimilate, protect, develop the national, human, moral and cultural values of the Turkish nation, who love and continuously try to raise their family, country and nation, who are aware of their duties and responsibilities towards the

> Turkish Republic, a democratic, secular and social state of law based on human rights and the basic principles defined at the beginning of the Constitution and for whom these duties have become a habit;
> (2) as individuals who have a balanced and healthy personality and character, who are developed in terms of body, mind, moral, spirit and emotions, free and with scientific thinking abilities and a wide worldview, who respect human rights, who value personality and enterprise, who are responsible towards society, who are constructive, creative and productive.
> (3) in line with their own interests and abilities, to prepare them for life by helping them to acquire the required knowledge, skills, behavior and cooperative working habits, and to ensure they have a profession which will make them happy and contribute to the happiness of society".

On reviewing the above definition of the National Education Policy of the country, it can be seen that the policy includes behaviourist elements, as it proposes to train *citizens* who *follow* the constitution and national interest. The subjects of the education are referred to as citizens rather than, for instance, individuals. There is emphasis on nationalism and even self-actualisation as it contributes to the national interest (`which will make them happy and contribute to the happiness of society`).

However, there is then another picture which signifies a change in the country's educational system. As this change occurred very recently at the beginning of 2000, the community members situate their learning habits in the former one. Yet, I believe that it may not be right to merely present the applied (traditional) educational policies without including the seeds of change and the most recent education that the community members were exposed to. Another reason why I include the new National Education System is that the paradigm change in the new system is underpinned by constructivist learning principles. Because the students in this research are enrolled in the School of Education, they are aware of these changes and implications of these changes in the national policy and therefore, they frequently refer to constructivist learning in the data resources when they articulate their learning community experience during the course. For them, democratic learning in this research signifies constructivist learning as this is the concept they know and is very similar to the pedagogical values in this research.

With regard to the change which concerns constructivist learning in the education policy, Nohl, et al. (2008: 9) refer to this change from the minister's point of view and state: "On 12 August 2001 on the introduction of a new curriculum, the minister is

cited as follows: “With the new curriculum, the strictly behaviourist programme has been replaced by a cognitive, constructivist approach.” So, a constructivist paradigm underlies the new curriculum and is discussed by politicians and scholars (Akar & Yildirim, 2004; Aydin, 2006; Egitim Reformu Girisimi, 2005) across the country. Authorities from the Ministry and Higher Education Council propose changes in the National Education System through conferences and official meetings. As an example, in 2007, The Higher Education Council published a book including its official vision. In this book, the aim of the general education system is stated as follows:

> Education is delivered for the purpose of ensuring the equality of opportunity for everyone, helping individuals materialize their life projects by training them with rich qualifications, directing them to be active citizens who have critical thinking ability and who do not hesitate to undertake an enterprise and responsibility, and training individuals who are aware of the human rights, democracy as well as cultural, ecological and aesthetic values. (pg 143)

The above example of the vision of National Education appears to be more in line with the learning community principles in this research, as the underlying pedagogy, both in the national educational system and in the purpose of individuals in the learning community model who think critically, and who are aware of democratic principles and individual diversities. However, this change in the educational system is not easily practiced by the educational stakeholders in the country and scholars critically approach this change by pointing out some potential drawbacks which are likely to occur in the implementation stage. Egitim Reformu Girisimi (2005) (Educational Reform Initiative), which was formed by the leading scholars, draws attention to some success factors in the implementation stage. These concern the teachers’ intellectual development, school administrators and, broadly, the difficulties in transforming a country’s educational system from a traditional approach, which produces passive citizens, to the new approach which proposes `active citizens`. On this point, the student members in this research refer to similar difficulties which the scholars experience while adopting the change (both in the scope of their learning community experience and their student life in general) due to their past educational background as could be seen from the discussions below.

1A.1) The student members’ experience with educational system

Throughout the course, student members experience conflict with the pedagogy in the model because of their learning habits constituted under the influence of the National

Education Policy. They discuss their need for the presence of a tutor, knowing exactly what they are expected to do and having an exam. This leads me to think that their learning habits are in line with the national educational policy which dates back to the 1980s and which includes behaviourist elements.

Taking a closer look, when I ask them about their experience as a member of the learning community in the focus group meeting, they pointed out the difficulties derived from their learning habits. For instance, Subject 15 refers to adopting an emancipated learning at the end of their formal studentship in their life, contradicting their learning habits:

Subject 15:

> "A direction is needed … After all; these principles are adopted at the end of our education life. If this [emancipated learning] had been in all phases of our education then we would have been able to be comfortable with this [now]" (Focus group meeting, line: 440).

In line with this, in the post-course questionnaire, Subject 18 specifies the conflict he experienced in the education system by describing an image of a tutor in his mind:

> "I always want a didactic tutor. I do not think that it would be healthy when students direct the course, because the styles of directing a course would be different. However, I think that when this is done under the control of the tutor, this could be healthier. It is something good to be in charge of my own learning, but this should be under the inspection of a tutor".

Apart from these two examples, in the pre-course questionnaires, when I examine the frequency of the individual members who look for a tutor presence, I found that 42.83% of the student members describe themselves as learners who usually look for a tutor or guidance in the courses to learn the subject (Please see Table 2). On the other hand, 52.17% of the student members usually prefer to work without any interference. This leads me to think that almost half of the student members are in conflict with the pedagogy proposed in this research, as they are supposed to administer their learning process without the tutor's directions.

A further point regarding the conflict with education system is that, on Moodle, some discussions took place regarding the constructing of knowledge while community members collaboratively worked on defining terminologies in Distance Education.

Some members basically copy and paste the information they obtain from different resources without questioning, thinking critically and interpreting their findings. This contradicts the pedagogical values of the learning community in this model as one of the purposes of the model is to enable the student members to construct their own knowledge by articulating and negotiating from their own epistemological and ontological perspectives rather than simply plagiarizing someone else's ideas. It is interesting to observe that before the tutors do, some student members warn those students who do not contribute to the discussions with their own ideas and tend to paste from different resources. In response to those student members who criticize plagiarism, Subject 1 posts a message on Moodle:

> You may not like what I am doing but I see that you are not eager to add something new therefore I am sorry..
>
> AS FOR THE COPY PASTE ISSUE, I AM NOT TAKING OFFENCE. I AM AWARE OF MY POSTS AT LEAST I READ BEFORE I SHARE 

This example shows that the student members pursue their learning habits in the virtual learning environment while trying to adopt this newly introduced pedagogy by discussing each other's posts. Their previous learning habits represent the education systems they were exposed to and this system creates conflict, both within (as can be seen in the above example) and around the community (as a whole community, they experience conflict with the system).

With regard to the conflict in educational system, Subject 11 says in the focus group meeting:

> "Up to now, we were students [in an education system where] the tutor used to deliver the knowledge and we took for granted that knowledge originated in the tutor. When someone says, `you will obtain the knowledge` we have some fears about that. Because we used to obtain the knowledge from the tutor, we used to have fears about searching by ourselves. Perhaps we cannot be very effective within the group, cannot do research very well. We should have been trained like that very much in advance" (Focus group meeting, line: 327).

Subject 19 says:

> "Another reason why we do not do this eagerly is that this is not given from the basic level. If this system of learning [learning culture] had been in use since we were in primary school, we would do this eagerly" (Focus group meeting, line: 434).

Drawing on these statements and the above post sent by Subject 1, I understand that the student members experience conflict arising from the two educational systems, the one they have been exposed to and the education model in this research. What makes these differences a matter for conflict is that in the first place they need to pass the course, and in order to achieve this, they think that they must adopt the new model for the course. As a result, they experience a constant tension throughout the course and anxiety emerges in their learning experience.

The conflict in the education system is not limited to their learning habits. The student members also point out a discrepancy outside of the learning community. According to them, the constructivist learning [democratic pedagogy in this research] is misinterpreted by their teachers; in the name of emancipated learning and student centered learning, what their teachers [academic at the university] all do is to move the learning tasks onto students' shoulder. At the focus group meeting (line: 256), Subject 13 says:

> We have one lecturer who runs the Operating Systems course. He just tells us the names of the topics, you know we are talking about group work, this is not about group work, rather individual work but he just explains the next week's topic to us and says that someone [a student] will teach this topic the following week, if there is no one to teach, then there is no course [for next week].

So, in the first place, the student members do not believe in democratic pedagogies and are not eager to adopt pedagogy like that in their learning, as this signifies more work and chaos for them. With regard to this, Subject 17 says in the focus group meeting (line: 264)

> "They [the tutors] should not leave us free so much"

1A.2) The tutor's and designer's experience with educational system

The tutor's and designer's experience with socio-cultural conflict concerns two aspects: conflicts in pedagogical stance and conflicts in responsibilities.

Conflict in pedagogical stance

I worked with the same tutor in the pilot study and applied the same pedagogical principles to a four-week course. In the main study, on the first day of the course, I interviewed the tutor and asked questions about the pilot study on which the main study was built. Below are some highlighted notes from the pre-course interview:

> Tutor: [During the pilot study] I considered my role to be very passive. I was very passive.
> Researcher: What could have been done [differently]?
> Tutor: What could have been done, errr, I could have directed more effectively. However, as this was our plan, I felt myself like, I felt that I should stop myself.
> Researcher: What do you think the reason is [that students did not learn]? Is this you or some other reason?
> Tutor: Method. I am not blaming myself. I regard myself as having enough capacity to direct the students.

Based on the interview extracts below, I concluded that he does not feel comfortable in a course designed with a non-hierarchical pedagogy. The conflict here is important in terms of examining transference of power from the tutor to student members which sometimes may be problematic as happened in this research. The tutor's conflict may have a theoretical basis in the current educational system. Likewise, student members feel themselves to be passive learners and on the bottom level of the hierarchy. Tutors are considered to be in a higher position than student members and also considered as knowledgeable authorities, and this academic culture directly influences the tutor's pedagogical stance. In the interview, he says "I could have directed more effectively. However, as this was our plan, I felt myself like, I felt that I should stop myself". (Interview with the tutor, line: 23) I understand from this statement that he had constant tension between being a facilitator or a (powerful) tutor and experienced conflict with the designer as she continuously asks him to facilitate the student members rather than directing them in a specific way.

In addition to the element of non-hierarchy, the loose structure of the course also generates conflict between the tutor and designer. Throughout the course, the designer suggested new directions in the course, drawing on the student members` changing interests, expectations, needs, etc. or changing conditions. However, the tutor interpreted the process of rapid restructuring of the course as a result of an `arbitrary-

superficially` pedagogy and he adds: the designer `follows new directions depending on where the wind blows`. In his correspondence with the designer, he says that this may be because of the research itself which is designed superficially and now the superficially research is reflected in the course design. He points out the origin of the research and thinks that it may be because the research is done superficially in the country in which this research originates (United Kingdom).

When looking at the direction he points out in his analysis, I began to think that the reason for this difference in attitude to the pedagogical design indeed may be derived from the origin of the research (the United Kingdom) and the origin of the field work (Turkey) as different pedagogical paradigms dominate these two countries and the designer is eventually influenced by the country where she is educated. Therefore, I deal with the conflict in pedagogical stance under the title of `conflict in Education Systems`. However, as it is not in the scope of this research to examine the pedagogical differences in the two countries, rather to discover the conflict exactly where the field work is conducted, I do not include more detail of the comparative discussion here.

In parallel with the conflict in pedagogical stance, the tutor and designer experience conflict in responsibilities. Towards the middle of the course, the tutor thinks that the student members do not learn anything and discusses this issue with the designer. With regard to this, in the previous chapter, I gave an example of the tutor's sudden decision which is to examine the student members via a written exam for the purpose of encouraging them to learn while preparing for the exam. I presented this case from the perspective of conflict in power relationships before, but in this section, I deal with this case from a different perspective: conflict in responsibilities. Accordingly, it is the designer's responsibility to ensure the implementation of the democratic pedagogy in the course and it is the tutor's responsibility to ensure the student members' learning. So, what happens if the learning outcomes are not concrete but rather *subtle* such as the ability to think critically in line with the democratic pedagogy in this research? In this case, it depends on both parties' judgement, which is fostered by their pedagogical stances and is influenced by their responsibilities, which in the end generates conflict. As a result of the conflict between the tutor and designer, in the focus group meeting, Subject 1 criticizes the dilemma in the system. She remarks that having been examined after being promised that she would be treated as an independent learner is a discrepancy and this assessment method does not actually evaluate a student's success.

A further point coming out of the interview with the tutor concerns suggested resources in the research. He says in the interview:

> "[…] if I am to suggest a resource, this [the list of the resources] would be a very long one. Therefore, I refrain from suggesting resources; especially given the students socioeconomic status. The students usually use Google except the ones who regularly go to the library" (Interview with the tutor, line: 118).

This quotation demonstrates another example of the conflict between the tutor and designer in their pedagogical stance. According to the designer, resources are crucial for students to obtain and construct knowledge without the mediation of a knowledge authority. Therefore, as a facilitator, tutors should provide a wide range of alternative resources to students. However, according to the tutor's pedagogical stance, he does not suggest or provide any resource to his students. As a reason for not suggesting any resource, the tutor points to the socio-cultural characteristics of the student members. I discuss this in the next section; however, I present this quotation as an example of conflict in pedagogical stance as according to the designer, the student members should not be left without resources since their socioeconomic situations are not sufficient to obtain resources themselves. Without any suggestions as to resources, there is no option left for the student members but to take the tutor's knowledge as the primary resource.

This conflict is reflected in the student members' learning experience. The lack of resources caused severe conflict among student members, as I discussed in Chapter 6. The student members would like to work on a Continent's Distance Education Practices, enabling them to carry out their research among widely-available resources. In Chapter 6, I demonstrated how conflict emerges from a lack of resources within the groups. However, when looking at the whole community, I have noticed that they also experience conflict between groups, which in fact concerns the whole community. For instance, on Moodle, two groups undertake the same continent to work on and subsequently the group members encounter conflict.

Subject 10 opposed the other group's member:

No, Subject 21. Group II [her group] had already taken American Continent before you  (big grin) thks…

And afterwards she adds:

"Subject 13 [a member of her group] informed the tutor that we had picked the American Continent. We also wanted to record it here in order to avoid confusion. The American continent belongs to Group II. thnks.. Have a nice work".

However, nobody in her group had informed the tutor about their choice and she was mistaken in her statement. Nevertheless, she intended to use an authoritative figure to end the conflict in favour of her group. Apart from the conflict resolution, this quotation gives an example of how conflict emerges as a result of the tutor's pedagogical stance, according to which he does not suggest any resources and causes members to fight over the continent for which they can find sufficient resources. In the section below, I discuss another possible reason for the emergence of conflict.

1B) Institutional Conflict

The institution to which community members are affiliated in this research has a role in the emergence of conflict with its policies and its approach to learning activities, facilities, resources and so on. For instance, when student members experience conflict due to the lack of resources, in fact, it is not only because of the tutor's pedagogical stance, but also the institutional stance of investing in libraries. When I went to the institution to conduct my interviews, I also experienced the lack of resources and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) at the library. In addition to the insufficient library facilities, there was no centre for students in which they could improve their learning skills. This leads me to think that the institutional policies are in conflict with the pedagogical values of the learning community which require an institution to support and foster the learning communities as a way of enabling them to have an emancipated learning.

A further point is that the university administration has a prohibitive attitude towards the use of the internet. For instance, searching with some key words (e.g. `sex`) on the internet is forbidden and if the users on campus need to search `University of Sussex`, they cannot see their search results. Also, some internet applications are forbidden on

campus such as instant messaging services, some online games and Second Life which can be used for educational or social networking purposes. As a result of this policy the internet ports which community members intend to use are blocked by the university administration. This policy is in conflict with the democratic learning principles in this research which require freedom to use information technologies to obtain knowledge. Therefore, when the designer and tutor experience conflict in their wishes (as I discussed in the previous chapter) due to this prohibitive approach, I come to the conclusion that in fact this conflict is also triggered by a different type of conflict, socio-cultural conflict, more specifically institutional conflict as it should be neither tutor's nor the designer's responsibility to avoid prohibitions on the use of ICTs.

A further example of institutional conflict is that the institution[4] requires the academic members to teach large number of the students and mark them according to a rigid timetable. However, this again contradicts the democratic pedagogy in this research, as it takes considerable time and effort on the part of the tutor to run a course according to these principles. Consequently, the tutor feels constant tension between his commitments and the requirements of democratic pedagogy in the research. With regard to this, Subject 11 says at the focus group meeting:

> "Another thing is that there is a curriculum that the tutors should follow. The tutor is in the same situation [as the student members]; he/she teaches flexibly, but when it is the last minute [he cannot catch up with the curriculum any more], the same thing happens to the tutor, ehmm he finds solutions like 2 groups making presentations in one week [he refers to the tutor of the course] or he hurries up the students by saying we need to review the topics quickly or, for example, in extra time.

As the student member observes, the tutor is expected to teach in a limited time, but when he cannot manage to do this, his solution is to accelerate the process by asking the student members to finish their presentations, thus limiting the time available to learn from each other.

2. Members as part of the community versus society

In this section, I present the community members' experience of conflict from the societal point of view. Throughout the field work, I arrived at the conclusion that in

[4] Although this problem is the same for most of the universities in the country, I limit my discussions to the university in which the field work is conducted.

addition to the education system the members are exposed to, it is also the society which influences them in their experience of conflict. I will start my discussions by presenting an extract from the interview with the tutor.

In the interview, I asked the tutor about the learning culture of the students, based on his experience, as he had been working in that region for more than 2 years. He replied (Interview with the tutor, line: 114):

> TUTOR: Not good. Obtaining knowledge is very limited (...) There is library but it is not enough. In particular for my courses, I cannot generalize for other courses, I can say that I do not suggest concrete resources. I mainly deliver the course within its frame. Besides, it is not easy to finish the topics with 1-2-3 resources within this frame. Therefore, if I am to suggest a resource, this [the list of the resources] would be a very long one. Therefore, I refrain from that, especially given the students socioeconomic status. The students usually use Google, except the ones who regular go to library.

Here, the tutor refers to the socioeconomic conditions of the student members who are not able to obtain the required resources for financial reasons. In addition, some of them do not know how to obtain the knowledge.

The tutor continues his conversation by describing the society's learning characteristics (Interview with the tutor, line: 168):

> Especially, our sociological values are dominant. I mean, perhaps this might be the same for western cities in Turkey as well; but here, traditions [inaudible] are very intense. The students coming from these regions usually rely on auditory knowledge, auditory resources, I think. [Inaudible]. They pay more value to oral resources rather than written resources. Because, they listen to the leader of the ASIRET [this is a type of community which has some feudal traits], parents, neighbours, and find them more important. These are the cultural values that I referred to. These are more marked [in this region] compared to the western [part of the country].

The tutor refers to the student members' epistemological stance which relies on hierarchal structures and oral knowledge. In fact, his observation is consistent with the literature. For instance, in line with point made by the tutor, in their article, Sayilan and Yildiz (2009) refer to the oral tradition which significantly influences Turkish society and how this tradition affects the way society obtains knowledge. Dewey

(1916:103) makes a similar connection between epistemology and society within the scope of democratic education; he remarks: “A society which rests upon the supremacy of some factor over another irrespective of its rational or proportionate claims, inevitably leads thought astray”. As Dewey suggests, when society values some learning structures, in this case learning from oral resources or hierarchal structures, the members of the study end up with conflict in their societal values.

In conclusion, it is not only in the educational system that the members may experience conflict, but also the society itself may contain some conflictive epistemological characteristics that influence the community members in such a way they can feel the constant tension between a member of a learning community and a member of society.

PART IV

CHAPTER 9: Conclusions, Reflections and Implications

Preamble

The final part in this thesis consists of the concluding chapter. In this conclusion, I deal with the overall functioning of the learning community with all stakeholders.

I make conclusions based on the data and the model of conflict I have developed from it. I reflect on my findings and suggest some practical guidelines to designers and practitioners based on the implications of this study.

CHAPTER 9: Conclusions, Reflections and Implications

Overall Functioning of the Learning Community

In the previous chapters, I separated out the actors of the VLC for analytic purposes and dealt with them as different units of analysis. In this chapter, I integrate the stories and handle the community as a whole with its institutions, students, tutors, designers and programme structure by reflecting on the previous chapters. Briefly, I try to produce an account of the functioning of the virtual learning community when conflict is experienced. My primary aim in this chapter is to discuss my final research question, which is "To what extent can understanding the nature and role of conflict in virtual learning communities underpinned with democratic pedagogy contribute to the practice of educational designers, practitioners and researchers?" In answering this question, I address a gap in the literature on conflict in virtual learning communities, as there have been few studies that explicitly address this issue in particular in the context of democratic pedagogy. Thus, I aim to present the original contribution of this thesis in relation to the existing literature.

In the sections below, I revisit the point of departure which led me to formulate my research questions. I then summarize my findings, based on the research questions in relation to the literature; finally I refer to the possible implications of these findings.

Returning to my point of departure

In writing up this thesis, my point of departure was to investigate the VLCs' learning experience in the context of a democratic pedagogy. My rationale for working on this topic is to explore the implications of a pedagogy which is underpinned with emancipated educational aims. Such a pedagogy brings with it uncertainty and clashing individual differences as part of the experience of freedom of expression Furthermore, as I discussed in Chapter 1, democratic pedagogies are designed to produce democratic societies and therefore also concern the society in which the education is embedded. In that sense, it is crucial to include the socio-cultural context of the learning community in order to examine the pedagogy and society interaction. Therefore, the focus of this research is twofold: conflict *in* and *around* the virtual learning community. I have looked at these aspects of conflict in the virtual learning setting and this, I believe, contributes to discussion in the field of learning communities and democratic pedagogy, and therefore is helpful to designers, researchers and practitioners working in this field.

This rationale assisted me in the formulation of my research questions and in the light of these, I first summarise my findings below and then I go beyond the findings to offer my reflections on the overall functioning of the VLC.

Summary and implications of the findings in relation to my research questions

Conflict Types

Research Question 1) What types of conflict can be experienced in virtual learning communities?

The literature identifies a range of types of conflict which are as follows: conflict in power relationships (Blasé, 1991; Gronn, 1986; Minter and Snyder, 1969; Wenger; 1998; Yanoov, 1997), argument and counterargument (Stegmann et al., 2007), ethnographic characteristics (such as priori experience-knowledge) (Ference and Vockell, 1994; Huang, 2002), working preferences (Ke and Chellman, 2006), (Ayoko et al, 2002) and interest (Thompson and Ku, 2006). I have categorised these conflict types as a) interpersonal sites of conflict (in power relationships and in argument/counterargument) and b) intrapersonal sites of conflict (ethnographic characteristics such as priori experience-knowledge, working preferences, wishes and interest). This categorization enabled me to examine conflict from the perspective of an individual (intrapersonal conflict) as well as the conflict which is generated during community members' interactions (interpersonal conflict).

In my field work, I identified all the conflict types which are stated in the literature. However, I detected some more conflict types in my data which do not exist in the literature. These conflicts are affiliation and expectation.

A third category emerged in this research which concerns all community members: socio-cultural conflict. This type of conflict involves, in particular, democratic pedagogies as these pedagogies aspire to democratic societies and socio-cultural conflict rises if socio-cultural values are different to those that exist in the wider community.

It was revealed in this study that the occurrence of these conflicts varies across learning groups. The actors in the community do not all necessarily experience the same conflict types as it depends on the internal dynamics which trigger the conflict, as I discuss below. Sometimes, it also depends on the role of the members in the

community. For instance, while `conflict in responsibilities` is mainly experienced by the tutor and designer, due to their clashing commitments, `conflict in affiliation` is mainly experienced by the student members when they do not feel they belong to the group or to the community.

The conflict types are important in the sense that some types tend to result in more destructive learning experiences than others or vice versa. For instance, as I discuss in Chapter 6, members who experience conflict in affiliation tend to leave the group or even drop the course which is regarded as an unwanted situation in their learning process. Conflict in the form of argument and counter argument, on the other hand, tends to lead to intended knowledge production by drawing on different viewpoints.

Finally, it emerged from the research that socio-cultural conflict is crucial to the community's growth and actualisation of its full potential. The community's emancipation is not possible without considering the members' social roots. Likewise, it is not possible to *inform* the members that they are *free* to administer their own learning process. Freedom in these pedagogies can be realized only if the members feel this without any fear and without experiencing socio-cultural conflict. Otherwise, as happened in this research, members may respond to the emancipatory pedagogy by saying "They [the tutors] should not leave us free so much" (Subject 17) referring to their traditional educational background and experience of educational policies. As Knight and Pearl (2000:222) put it "Democratic education is effective only when it is in the front line of grassroots politics". In a similar way, it is not easy for members to switch their social identities, which foster their epistemological positions, to a learning community identity which may require them to have a different epistemological stance. In that sense, socio-cultural conflict is very important in the community's learning experience.

Implications for Practice

In this thesis, I have illustrated the conflict types which might provide practitioners with a guide to possible occurrences of conflict in the social learning process. Knowing the conflict types may also help them regard these types as a natural part of the social learning process and not just within the community but related to the surrounding context. Therefore, when designing or implementing a course, all possible conflict scenarios must be taken into account in order to ensure the community's growth and actualisation of its full potential.

Internal Dynamics

Research Question 2) What is the internal dynamic of conflict?

As I discussed in the early chapters, differences between individuals are triggered by the dynamics of the learning process and may become a matter for conflict. Or, on the contrary, the conversion of differences into conflict is avoided by these internal dynamics and as a result, intrapersonal differences are not perceived by the member(s) in terms of conflict. Therefore, these internal dynamics are the mechanism by which the emergence of conflict is triggered or avoided.

The factors involved in internal dynamics of conflict identified in the literature can be summarized as learning culture (Avcruch, 1998; Thompson and Ku, 2006), ontological security (Shyu, 2002) and technological factors (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999). Drawing on the data in this research, I have added another 2 categories which are *group size* and *distribution of power*.

Dynamics help us understand conflict as a complex system which must be carefully managed throughout a community's learning experience. A further point about what makes these dynamics important in conflict studies is that, to some extent, they also refer to the conditions in which the community members have experienced their learning. For instance, anxiety as a signifier of ontological security refers to the psychological state of the members and has a role in triggering conflict. Therefore, providing members with a learning environment in which they feel happy and confident would put them in a better state of mind and foster the learning conditions for democratic pedagogy. In line with this, Knight & Pearl (2000) also stress the importance of the environmental conditions in democratic pedagogies. According to them, democracy in education can be achieved when optimum environments for learning is provided. In that sense, the dynamics of conflict has a significant place in assuring optimum learning conditions for the learners.

Implications for Practice

Each learning community can naturally accommodate individual/interpersonal or socio-cultural differences; however, there are some dynamics which practitioners and designers need to take into account as these lead to, trigger or avoid conflict. Below, Below, I make suggestions for the practitioners based on the learning community members' experience in this research which I presented in Chapter 6, 7 and 8.

In order to offer a learning environment to the learners in which they can feel ontologically secure, at the beginning of the course, trust-building activities should take place and learners should be given a chance to talk about themselves and their feelings. The course should not only involve subject matter but also learners' feelings and ideas, as these are equally important.

Group size is very important in experiencing conflict. Usually, the number of the group members signifies the degree of heterogeneity of the group and more members usually bring more differences to the group discussions. When a heterogeneous group needs to work together in a limited period of time and with a demanding work load, conflict among group members is likely to emerge. The data from this study suggest that the ideal group size can be identified as less than 5 persons in each group (based on the student members' suggestions in the focus group meetings and questionnaires).

The learning culture of the group is another potential source of conflict. Although a group's learning culture may not be manipulated by an outsider (e.g. practitioners), facilitators can encourage the learners to respect each other's ideas, listen to different opinions and promote dialogue among members, thus fostering an accommodating learning culture.

Distribution of power as a conflict dynamic concerns the use of power over certain situations, decisions and subjects.. How to use the power heavily depends on the owner of the power. In traditional pedagogies, it is usually the teacher who holds the power whereas in democratic pedagogy, distribution of power is shared among all stakeholders, as otherwise conflicting situations can emerge and damage the relationships and togetherness of the community. Therefore, in particular tutors and designers should promote equal distribution of power rather than its asymmetrical use among stakeholders.

Finally, technological factors play an important role in conflict. Practitioners must be aware of the likely misunderstandings in a VLC due to the lack of access to information which is available in face-to-face settings. Emoticons in virtual settings replace verbal communication (and body language) in face-to-face settings. These emoticons have meaning in communication and are regarded as part of the interaction when investigating conflict. In parallel with this, because written language sometimes causes misunderstanding, due to a lack of some communication tools, and because virtual settings rely heavily on written language, the possibility of the emergence of conflict is increased in these settings.

Also, as could be seen in this research, technical difficulties may trigger the emergence of conflict among participants. Therefore, practitioners may help the participants cope with these difficulties by providing them technical guidance.

Results of Conflict

Research Question 3) What is the result of these conflicts?

This research reveals that, once conflict has emerged, as well as resulting in possible scenarios in the literature, it has the potential to result in *resolution* or *compliance*, *fragmentation* and *drop out.*

With regard to conflict resolution, this concept is a trait which characterises democratic pedagogies. While student members engage in conflict resolution negotiations, they are "exposed to factual inquiry, question their own beliefs, and weigh and debate arguments; in brief, deliberate with respect and tolerance" (Lefrancois and Ethier, 2010: 281). Members in this research tend to resolve the conflict via either an authoritative figure, dialogue (Agerback, 1996) or a mediator (Smith, 1999).

However, conflict resolution is not always achieved in the learning process and sometimes conflict ends up with *compliance*, *fragmentation* and even *drop out*. Compliance is seen in either of two forms, as acceptance or oppression. In particular, conflict in power relationships tends to end up with oppression and results in favour of the dominant authority. As for acceptance, when the parties do not have faith in resolution, they tend to accept the situation as it is and, as a solution, usually accept what the majority accepts. In fact, the situation of *majority acceptance* is seen in democratic regimes and known as `majority rule`. Although it is a practical methodology in democracies in terms of reaching the common decision with the number of the votes, in the context of virtual learning communities, this has controversial results, such as passive acceptance. In the case of majority rule, the majority's decision is accepted as a group decision, regardless of the minority's counter arguments. Consequently, minorities are either oppressed by the dominant members who support the prevailing idea in the group or are left with a solution of accepting the prevailing ideas. According to Thompson and Ku (2006), in these situations, some learners might feel discouraged and disengaged; consequently, more conflicts are generated within a group.

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A further scenario concerns fragmentation when conflict is not resolved. When pre-existing differences become a matter for conflict for a group of individuals, instead of asking all group members to find a common solution, members tend to divide into smaller homogeneous groups in order to fulfil their individual choices. I discuss the practical implications of fragmentation in the next section.

The final scenario resulting from conflict is drop out. When parties do not have any hope of resolution and when unresolved conflict destructively influences their learning experience, parties tend to drop the group or the course.

All these possibilities demonstrate that conflict significantly influences members' learning experience and therefore needs to be taken into account in the VLCs.

Implications for Practice

As discussed above, community members in this research resolved conflict via a) a mediator b) an authoritative figure or c) dialogue. Based on this finding, conflict resolution strategies can be developed by the practitioners. Of these three ways of resolving conflict, *dialogue* is attributed to democratic education as it rests on exchanging ideas, arguments and rationales and makes the process more meaningful as well as open. Therefore, members should be encouraged to articulate themselves, discuss and defend their ideas, respect and empathise with each others' beliefs.

The second conflict resolution scenario lies in the possibility of *compliance*. Compliance has two components: oppression and acceptance. Although oppression is an unwanted situation in democracies, sometimes, as happens in this research, there is no way of avoiding it and practitioners should pay special attention to the oppression which is mostly seen when hidden conflict is experienced. However, it is not always easy to bring to the surface a situation which is hidden. In this case, it may be helpful to examine the situations where conflict is most likely to emerge. In this research, conflict was mostly generated in the task allocation process, where the members needed to take a number of decisions. Therefore, paying attention to the task allocation, as well as the situations when members need to take decisions, would be helpful to identify conflict. Also, encouraging members to use virtual technologies such as discussion forums on the internet would be helpful in uncovering the conflict and thus helping them to get out of conflict situations, although this is admittedly a controversial solution, since discussing matters in public also has the potential to lead to surveillance (e.g. tutors can easily monitor the student members` activities).

The third scenario is a group's or community's fragmentation when conflict is not resolved. At first sight, this appears to be an undesirable situation, because consequently the group/community produces more individual work rather than socially constructed work. However, in their articles Hodgson and Reynolds (2005: 16) maintain that in fact the emergence of subgroups or multi-communities is a quite natural process. In their words: "...subgroups which form across differences of any kind can become detached from the 'community-as-a-whole', undermining the educational benefit for those who attach more importance to learning from difference". They suggest that a single group cannot be exposed to a whole community (or whole group when the group size is very big). They give an example from Giroux (1992: 134) and remark that one community is characterised by 'a multiplicity of democratic practice, values and social relations` by referring to `sub` or `multi` communities. Therefore, although fragmentation brings about more individualized learning outcomes, on the other hand, this situation allows members to materialize their individual choices in the learning process.

The final scenario is about drop out when conflict occurs. In theory, there are different approaches to democratic education. In radical democracies, the students are free to do whatever they wish, as happens in Neill's Summerhill School (see Chapter 1). In his school, there is an example of a student who did not attend his classes for years (yet improved his skills in tool making). There are also other approaches in democratic education which somewhat limit the concept of freedom. Within these varieties of approaches, it depends on the standpoint of the researchers or practitioners how to perceive the drop out. However, regardless of the standpoint, the reasons for drop out must be questioned and student members must be encouraged to discuss freely their feelings and ideas, and to articulate themselves regarding their negative learning experiences.

Role of conflict in the social learning process

Research Question 4) What is the role of conflict in the social learning process?

In the literature, as I presented in Chapter 2, the discussions about outcomes of conflict are twofold: destructive and constructive results of conflict. In this research, I took a different approach and did not differentiate in any way between the two, as I believe this would cause me to produce a biased analysis and report; therefore, I tried to avoid potentially deleterious effects of my committed standpoint by remaining neutral and analytical about the role of conflict in learning.

In the literature, irrespective of whether the results of the conflict are destructive or constructive, the outcomes of conflict can be summarised as having an impact on group effectiveness & cohesiveness (Folger et al, 1997; Kuhn & Poole, 2002; Passos & Caetano, 2005; Pondy, 1967) and on problem-solving ability through different points of view (Duffy & Jonassen, 1992). In particular, in the group or community studies regardless of the underlying theory, conflict which leads to intended knowledge construction and improvements in team working skills is regarded as a necessary and important process (Reynolds, 1994, Staggers et al., 2008, UHI Millennium Institute, 2009). However, there are also different types of conflicts which lead to a variety of learning outcomes. Therefore, in this research, I expanded the discussions about these learning outcomes of conflict, drawing on the data to identify variations in learning experiences. These variations are categorised as 1) learning orientation, 2) intended knowledge production 3) participation in collaborative/cooperative learning 4) chaos, as discussed in Chapter 5. Although these learning outcomes appear to be connected and inseparable, the community members tend to experience one or other more intensely. For instance, if conflict in argument and counter argument results in resolution, members reach a consensus among a variety of different points of view and produce their own knowledge; therefore, they focus more on *intended knowledge production* compared to other outcomes of conflict. On the other hand, if, for instance, when conflict in power relationships is not resolved and results in fragmentation, subgroups emerge and each subgroup tends to work separately and independently. When they work separately, they become involved in more cooperative work and compared to other learning outcomes (e.g. orientation), their learning experience is more influenced by *cooperative work* as a result of the conflict they experienced.

The above analysis suggests that it is very important to follow the flow of the conflict through the learning process and to see the whole picture emerging in the communities' experience of conflict. The model of Conflict in the Learning Process (Figure 7: pg 99) that I have developed in this thesis is useful for this. In this model, I presented a snapshot of possible chains of events which commence when conflict is triggered from pre-existing differences and which end with different learning outcomes. This model brings together the factors I referred to in my discussions in the thesis.

To sum up, in particular in the pedagogies where knowledge is constructed through interactions and negotiations, conflict inevitably tends to be generated among the

learners and leads to variations in learning experiences. Therefore it deserves attention.

Implications for Practice

The possible influence of conflict on members' learning experiences is crucial as members' learning experience is the primary concern of the democratic pedagogies. In the sections above, I tried to demonstrate what these possible learning outcomes, when conflict emerges, may mean for a learning community; but here, I would like to emphasise one of the learning outcomes which is chaos. Chaos as a learning experience signifies lack of order which emerges after uncertainty. Particularly in democratic pedagogies, in the case of uncertainty and when everybody has the right to decide and take action, the emergence of chaos is very likely. This is not represented in the literature. Therefore, practitioners must be aware of chaos and have alternative plans when necessary to avoid the destructive effects of chaos and thus control the occurrences of undesired learning experiences.

> *5. To what extent can understanding the nature and role of conflict in virtual learning communities underpinned with democratic pedagogy contribute to informing the practice of educational designers, practitioners and researchers?*

In the sections above, I briefly mentioned the contribution of this research to practitioners by referring to the implications of the findings. I will further my discussions by summarising the key findings of this research and illuminate why these findings are important for the practitioners, as well as for researchers. Furthermore, I will make recommendations for future studies into conflict in virtual learning communities.

This research contributes to the work of designers and practitioners by bringing to the surface the (usually) latent realities of the stakeholders in education, which in this research is focused as conflict. This research demonstrates that even in pedagogies in which emancipation is proposed, conflict is generated and sometimes may even lead to oppression. Each conflict results in variations in learning experiences and has a significant place in the learning community's life. Therefore, bringing out conflict with its complex dynamics is helpful to designers and practitioners.

As a result of this inquiry (bringing conflict to the surface), I developed a model of the conflict in a VLC's learning (Figure 7: pg 99). I believe this model illustrates the significance of the emergent themes and presents an original contribution to existing

literature. In Chapter 6, I applied the student members' (groups') experience with conflict into this model and tried to show how small learning groups took different pathways through the conflicts that emerged during the course. As I describe in the Summary and Reflection section of Chapter 6, each learning group follows different conflict pathways. For some groups, a certain type of conflict is important in their learning journey compared to other types. However, although they experience different conflicts, the model in this research reveals the patterns of their different pathways and each pathway exists underneath the umbrella of the model. For instance, all groups experience a type of conflict identified in the model (or they do not perceive any conflict which is again covered by the model). In a similar way, the conflict they experience is triggered or avoided by the dynamics shown in the model, regardless of the particular type of internal dynamic they experience.

Therefore, although the conflict pathway that each group follows differs from group to group, all the pathways taken can be identified within the model. In that sense, the conflict model which is developed in this research represents a superset which encompasses all possible different conflict pathways and adequately represents conflict in a VLC's learning experience.

Since this research was carried out in a limited time period and with a single case study, further research studies are needed to enhance the model. For instance, in this research, I have not identified any incidence of conflict in *gender,* neither in the questionnaires and Moodle nor during the focus group meetings (I directly addressed a question about conflict in gender at these meeting but the students informed me that gender has never been an issue for them). However, other virtual learning communities may experience conflict in gender as a dimension of intrapersonal difference and further research studies can be conducted to enhance the model I have developed.

A further key finding in this research concerns the conflict between the tutor and designer. In the literature, there are not sufficient resources to deal with this aspect of conflict. The studies usually revolve around socio-cultural factors in online learning settings, which a designer needs to take into account (e.g. Campbell et al, 2009). This research reveals that conflict between these two practitioners can be very influential on the community members' learning experience. What makes this conflict important is the context of the democratic pedagogy which brings uncertainty to the community's learning process. The emergence of conflict between these two key

stakeholders in a situation of uncertainty is crucial, as this in the end may lead to chaos for all members.

As the aspect of conflict between designer and tutor emerged during the field work and was implicit before the study, and in addition there are not sufficient resources in the literature to support or enhance my interpretation in this respect, the findings in this research represent more descriptive results than in-depth analysis. Therefore, these descriptive results might be regarded as new insights into the studies in relation to the relationships between the tutor and designer in learning theories and practical reflections of this relationship in learning settings.

Finally, a third conflict type, socio-cultural conflict, emerged in the data, signifying educational and societal values in which a learning community is embedded. In the literature, the socio-cultural aspect of democratic pedagogy mainly represents an educational system aiming to prepare responsible and informed citizens for democracy (Dewey, 1938; Knight & Pearl, 2000; Neill, 1992). In this research, drawing on the data, I had a different approach to socio-cultural issues and questioned whether society and the education system are ready for democratic pedagogies, unlike the prevailing approach in the literature. As a result of this enquiry, I arrived at the conclusion that, without having socio-cultural roots (such as having behaviourist-determinist educational aims or in Dewey's words (1916:103) "a society which rests upon the supremacy of some factor over another irrespective of its rational or proportionate claims", virtual learning communities underpinned with democratic pedagogy would remain idealistic, and in practice community members would experience constant socio-cultural conflict. As a way of coping with socio-cultural conflict, drawing on the field work, I would recommend practitioners to allocate the first weeks of the course to discussing democratic pedagogies with student members as well as epistemological and ontological perspectives behind these pedagogies, by which student members would internalize the idea of democracy. Furthermore, learning activities would be most effectively promoted by connecting the members with each other as well as with learning resources.

Summary

This research has addressed the issue of conflict in virtual learning communities designed with a democratic pedagogy. In doing this, I first reviewed the literature about conflict and then conducted field work. I show how the data I have collected from my field work goes beyond existing knowledge or insights expressed in the literature by using a grounded theory approach. As a result of this enquiry, I

developed a typology and demonstrated this with a model (Figure 7: pg 99). In this model, I indicated the conflict types, dynamics of conflict, potential results of conflict and roles of conflict in learning. Finally, I made concluding remarks regarding the knowledge claims and implication of my findings for practitioners and researchers.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: The Design of the Course Presented as a Life Cycle

2009 WINTER TERM

Course: DISTANCE EDUCATION

Phases	Week	Content	Tutors mainly involve		Student members mainly involve	Notes	Resources
			FTF (Face-to-face)	Virtual Settings	Learning Tasks		
Foundation	0	Tutor and I as a designer meet to form the virtual learning community – also designed with the advices of my supervisors					
Foundation & Induction	1	**Data collection: Pre-course questionnaire** Introduction a. learning settings b. historical and conceptual foundations of DE c. learning and learners in DE	- Acknowledging members about the course - Introducing with the learning settings - General information about distance education (DE) - Discussing Learning Communities - Teaching Second Life	Second Life: Guest tutor teaches second life (Exercises)	Moodle Members introduce themselves to show their presence. Every member creates a thread: "I am here" and will state their expectation from the course, their background, etc. *Thus, as being distant learners, members are able to learn the DE practices based on their own experience. SL: -	The first 3 weeks are Induction of the VLC. Therefore, everything is essentially designed to build the community. Members do not perform tasks as much as possible, rather, they get to know with each other and discuss the idea of community.	
Induction	2	a. Technologies used in DE b. The economics of DE	- Technologies used in DE LMS (Learning Management Systems)	SL: In order to get used to SL, members might visit an Island which is built for educational purposes. Consistent with the topic, they observe the techs. used in the islands.	No task for this week	Students are informed that SL would not be the same as real life in terms of technologies used for DE. Since this week is still regarded as incubation phase, members will mainly focus on getting to know each other and the environment.	

Phases	Week	Content	Tutors mainly involve		Student members mainly involve	Notes	Resources
			FTF (Face-to-face)	Virtual Settings	Learning Tasks		
Induction	3	Designing and instruction in DE	a. Material design b. Environment design c. Pedagogy in web-based education		No task for this week	- Since students perform a project in the following weeks, the activities and task are given for these weeks –later. - Members are advised to work on the following weeks' tasks so that they can build relationships as members of the community.	
Incubation & Improving performance	4	Terminology	Terminologies used in DE.		Moodle Members develop a wiki for terminologies. They form a wiki based on the terms that they have come across but did not know the meeting. In addition to that, the tutors give a list of terms that students need to know about DE. However, these terms do not have any definition. Students construct the definitions drawing on the discussions take place on Moodle. SL -	In case students are reluctant to find new terms, a reading list is given to students which they can find new terms or overlapping terms. As this week's topic is relatively simple, members are advised to work on the following weeks' tasks	Anohina, A. (2005). Analysis of the terminology used in the field of virtual learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 8 (3), 91-102.

Phases	Week	Content	Tutors mainly involve		Student members mainly involve	Notes	Resources
			FTF (Face-to-face)	Virtual Settings	Learning Tasks		
Improving performance	5	Policies, administration and management	- DE policy issues - Accreditation - DE policies in Turkey. Especially the regulations which are related to the students enrolled in Computer Education and Instructional Technology Programme.		SL Students visit Lancaster University's island. The tutors synchronise the time between Lancaster and Turkey. Moodle Members discuss accreditation of any university's DE programme– Firstly, they form a check list which includes criteria and then they choose a university's DE programme and then they assess the programme based on their criteria.	The chosen reading might be helpful in enhancing their perspectives on evaluating a DE programme A power point presentation is put on Moodle which consists of Turkish translation of the article	Conlon, C. (2000).Visions of change: information technology, education and postmodernism. *BIJET*, 31 (2).
Implementation	6	Global vision	- Members give presentations. - A guest speaker working on DE is invited.		Moodle Members allocate the tasks and organise the presentations. Since the topic is about World Wide perspective and practices, each group picks up one country and then gives a presentation about their findings. Task allocations take place on Moodle –so that I can analyse. The students also put their presentations on Moodle.	All of the tasks, including this one are given at the beginning of the term so that members can have enough time to perform the tasks.	Related web sites will be given

Phases	Week	Content	Tutors mainly involve		Student members mainly involve	Notes	Resources
			FTF (Face-to-face)	Virtual Settings	Learning Tasks		
Implementation	7	Future of DE (as well as trends and issues in DE)	- Future technologies		Moodle - Members discuss the future implications of DE based on their experience on SL. The discussions are limited to 3D learning settings and the suggested article. In order to help members elaborate their discussions, some outlines/key points are given regarding the future of DE. - Members might add new terminologies in the article on Wiki on Moodle. For instance, multi-user virtual Environment; VR		*Vignettes about the future of learning Technologies.* By Chris Dede. Wirth Professor of Learning Technologies Harvard Graduate School Of Education

Phases	week		Student Activity	Notes
Implementation	8- 9- 10- 11	Student Activities	Students, as a group, deliver small-scale courses in SL through using DE tools. Students decide what to and how to teach. In case there are not any activities decided by students, tutors send a suggestion list to follow. For example: 1. In SL, they might use different methodologies such as role playing – as if the owner of a DE company. One member could introduce his/her company or product while the rest of the members in the same group might be customers. 2. They might deliver seminars to distant learners. Thus, they can learn how to design and how to deliver a course on online settings as well as they can learn the different roles in DE such as designer, technicians, marketing, etc. 3. Members might teach the previous weeks' topics to each other. Thus, it might be a good opportunity to discuss what they have learnt. In addition, as the previous weeks' topics are very general, members can learn in detail by discussing to different dimensions of topics.	As facilitators, tutors provide members with resources and tips on Moodle. For instance, Planning the Delivery of Distance Learning Materials. Task 1: Identify the type and level of the course you deliver: # What are the key components? # What qualification will be offered? # Will progression to other qualifications be available? # a critique of a theory or model of ICT use…

Phases	Week	Student Activity
Implementation	12-	Members decide three weeks of entire course. These three weeks could be anytime during academic term – not necessarily the last weeks. For instance, in the 2nd week, members can interrupt the course and decide the next week's topic and methodology. A thread is allocated to students at the beginning of the term on Moodle so that they should be able to decide these three weeks through out the flow of the course as well as decide together. In case they do not feel the need to interfere the course up to the 11th week, This week (12th week) is deadline for student members to submit their projects. Members discuss their projects on Moodle. There is not any grouping as these three weeks are allocated to all students. The tutors ask members to create a final thread on Moodle which includes: - What to deal with (what do they want to learn?) & How? (methodology) In case members are not keen on doing nothing, I suggest the following activities :
	13-14-15	In case they do not decide, tutors give a list of topics such as 1. Members need to carry out a project for the next term's course which is called "Service to the society". They might find a project for this course regarding distance education, thus, they can also transfer their knowledge in to a different situation – contributing to the society – on Moodle. According to this, each group is required to produce a project related to how to service a society via distance education. 2. A problem might be given to the members (in group) to resolve. – On Moodle. For instance, the problem given in the pilot study might be a good example: The Presidency of Bahcesaray University faces with a problem that there is not sufficient number of academic staff to assign the colleges located in Bahcesaray (it is located in an urban area, not a college on the main campus in the city center). As a solution, presidency asks for scholars to travel from main campus to Bahcesaray for a day. However, especially because of the transportation problems due to the severe weather conditions in winter, academic staff can not always travel to Bahcesaray and that impedes the educational activities. In order to find a solution to this problem, a team is formed at the Presidency and necessary financial support is allocated to the project. The team decides to conduct a survey among academic staff, administrative staff and students aiming to consult and implement the project. In this context, as students at the Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology department in the Education Faculty, you are being asked to participate in this project. You are expected to offer a proposal especially on distance education to find a solution to this problem. 3. Problems of distance education could be another topic for members to research on and teach each other. Barriers in distance education ; Drop rates; Overlap between educational technology and distance education; Gender
Closure	Data Collection:	Focus group & interview with the tutor

Faculty of Education
Computer Teaching and Instructional Technology Programme

DISTANCE EDUCATION

2009-10 HANDBOOK

WINTER TERM 2009

(day, hour, venue)
Course Tutor:

Distance Education

Venue:
Convenor: Dr.
(Contact Details)
Tutors: (Names and contact details)

TIMETABLE

Week 1- /10/09: (T. Öztürk)
Introduction
a. Historical and conceptual foundations of DE
b. Learning and learners in DE
c. Learning settings in DE
Week 2 -10/09: (T. Öztürk)
a. Technologies used in DE
b. The economics of DE
Week 3 -10/09: (T. Öztürk)
Designing and instruction in DE
Week 4 -10/09:
Terminologies in DE
Week 5 –11/09:
Policies, administration and management
Week 6 -11/09:
Global Vision
Week 7 - 11/09:
Trends and issues in DE
Week 8 - 11/09:
Student Activities
Week 9 - 12/09:
Student Activities
Week 10 –12/09:
Student Activities
Week 11 –12/09
Student Activities
Week 12 –12/09
Students' week
Week 13 –01/10
Students' week
Week 14 –01/10
Students' week
Week 15 –01/10
Students' week
Week 16 –01/10 Closure (T. Öztürk)

Contents of the handbook

- Aims of the course
- Methodology
- Assessment
- Course outline

Aims of the course

The purpose of the course is to be knowledgeable about distance education practices. Essentially, at the end of the study, students are supposed to find solutions to distance education problems.

Lastly, please note that you can involve yourselves in the entire course as independent learners. In that sense, even this guidance might be regarded as a draft.

Assessment

Assessment will take place during the course and at the end of the term. Participation is one of the basic criteria for assessment, as the methodology will be collaborative learning which requires members to participate and contribute. In saying participation, we refer to student participation in fulfilling the tasks and projects as well as student attendance not only in face-to-face settings but also to virtual learning environments: Moodle and Second life.

In the scope of this course, students will be asked to fulfil the given tasks, discuss a particular topic or make presentations. Briefly, during the course, students are required to submit or fulfil the given coursework which is to be assessed. In addition, students will have a final exam at the end of the course. According to this:

Coursework:
If coursework requires students to write a report or discuss on Moodle, students should produce an essay of up to 5,000 words in length. All assignments should be fully referenced and include a full bibliography of material used. Deadline for the assignments will be the following week of the course.

Students can see the details of the coursework in the outline section below.

The criteria used for marking participating and the essays are as follows:

- Participating the discussions, fulfilling tasks especially on virtual settings and attendance to FTF courses;
- Peer reviews (Accordingly, students will mark their peers with feedback given. Especially, when groups make presentations about the global vision of DE, the other groups will mark the presentation. In addition, when members present a small size course on Second Life, group members will mark each other)
- Understanding of issues concerning given topics or tasks;

- Being able to resolve distance education problems
- Being knowledgeable about distance education concepts, terminologies, trends and issues and
- Taking a critical approach to distance education theories & practices.

In addition to all parts of the course, the assessment part will be also discussed with the students at the beginning of the course, so that they are able to administer their own learning.

Outline of the course

Week 1: Introduction

:

This session will introduce the historical and conceptual foundations of DE, learning and learners in DE and learning settings in DE. Apart from the core concepts, learning settings to be used during the courses will introduce to students. The idea of a learning community which is also a base for this course will be presented and discussed.

Second Life as a 3D learning tool in distance education, as well as a learning platform for this course, will be taught to students.

Task

Students will create a thread on Moodle about their virtual presence. This thread might be titled as, for example "I am here" aimed at showing their presence, getting used to the learning environment and acknowledging other students, which might contain their photos, their expectation from the course, background, etc.

Thus, as being distant learners, students will be aware of practices for distant learners based on their own experience.

References

Moore, M. G. and Anderson, W. G. (Ed.) (2003). Historical and Conceptual foundations of Distance Education. Chapter I in Handbook of Distance Education, Lawrence Erlbaum Press.

Pedler, M. (1981). Developing the learning community.. Ed. Tom Boydell and Mike Pedler. *Management self-development : concepts and practices.* Gower Publishing Company Limited.

Duration : 3 hours

Tutor : (Name of the tutor)

Week 2: Technologies used in DE & Economics of DE

:

This session will introduce the technologies used in DE as well as the economics of DE such as modelling the costs, cost effectiveness of online education and comparisons between different delivery systems.

It is aimed in this session to illustrate commonly used technologies, in which cases to use them, advantages and disadvantages of these technologies, how to chose a technology, how to adapt learners to these technologies and how to get updated information about changing technologies. In addition, the costs of these technologies will be presented. As an example of software technology, LMS (Learning Management System) will be shown to students. As for the economics of DE, this theme will be dealt with in two dimensions: cost effectiveness of DE and costs modelling of DE, in other words, the (dis)/advantages of DE in terms of costs as well as how to model costs if students need to design a distance education programme.

In order to be familiar with Second Life, students will visit an island built for educational purposes. As consistent with the topic, students will observe the technologies used on this island.

Tasks
There is no coursework for this week.

References
Barker, B. O., Frisbie, A. G. and Patrick, K. R. (1993). Broadening the definition of distance education in light of the new communications technologies. In K. Harry, M. John and D.Keegan (Eds) Distance Education: New Perspectives. Routledge Publishing

Moore, M. G. and Anderson, W. G. (Ed.) (2003). The Economics of Distance Education. Chapter VI in Handbook of Distance Education, Lawrence Erlbaum Press.

Willis, B. (Ed.) (1994). *Distance education*: *Strategies and tools*. *Educational* Technology Publications, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, N. J.

Duration: 3 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor)

Week 3 - Designing and instruction in DE

:
The session will provide students with guidance about how to design a DE programme. Different approaches to designing will be introduced to students. In the scope of designing, how to design a distance education syllabus, target groups, general frame factors, designing materials, pedagogy in web-based education, designing instruction for virtual environments and developing self-instructional courses will be presented.

Tasks
There is no coursework for this week

References
Holmberg, B. (1989). Practice of Distance Education. In Theory and Practice of Distance Education. Routledge Publishing.

Moore, M. G. and Anderson, W. G. (Ed.) (2003). Design and Instruction. Chapter III in Handbook of Distance Education, Lawrence Erlbaum Press.

Duration: 3 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor)

Week 4 - Terminologies in DE

:

This week's session will be divided into two parts. First part will be theoretical discussion on terminologies. The first session will consider terminologies in DE and debates about discords on definitions. Students will be asked to read a suggested article.

Tasks

In the second part, students will be asked to form their own terminology on Moodle. (There will be a wiki on Moodle). This task will not be performed in group but the entire class will work on it. Related terms will be chosen by students. In particular, overlapping terminologies in the literature or new terminologies might be defined. The discussions on how to define terminologies could be made in the discussion forum on Moodle, the negotiated definitions could be written on Wiki. Taking into account the number of the students, there should be at least ten new terms.

References

Anohina, A. (2005). Analysis of the terminology used in the field of virtual learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 8 (3), 91-102.

Duration: 3 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor)

Week 5: Policies, administration and management

:

The course will cover DE policy issues, quality and its measurement in DE, accreditation and DE policies in Turkey. Especially, the regulations of distance education by HEC (Higher Education Council) will be reviewed; these are closely related to the work of students enrolled in Computer Education and Instructional Technology Programme.

Students will also be provided with a broad overview of the philosophical thoughts to evaluate a distance education programme.

In addition, if synchronisation is provided on Second Life, students will attend a distance education practice on Lancaster University's island.

Tasks

On Moodle, students will discuss accreditation of any university's DE programme. Firstly, they will form a check list which includes criteria to assess. Secondly, they will choose a university's DE programme and finally, they will assess the programme based on their criteria.

References

Conlon, C. (2000).Visions of change: information technology, education and postmodernism. *BIJET,* 31 (2).

Harry, M. John and D.Keegan (Eds) (1993). Administration of distance education. Chapter III. In Distance Education: New Perspectives. Routledge Publishing

Moore, M. G. and Anderson, W. G. (Ed.) (2003). Policies, administration, and management. Chapter III in Handbook of Distance Education, Lawrence Erlbaum Press.

Duration: 3 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor)

Week 6: Global Vision

This section is aimed at reviewing international perspectives in DE. Basically, different countries' distance education practices will be examined and compared. More specifically, countries' national development strategies, international cooperation, cultural differences and distant education in the perspective of global issues and concerns will be dealt with in this session.

Tasks

Students will take over the courses after and including this week. Each group will present a different country's distance education practice. Task allocation will take place on Moodle. Every group will put their presentations on Moodle.

References

Harry, M. John and D.Keegan (Eds) (1993). International perspectives. Chapter V. In Distance Education: New Perspectives. Routledge Publishing

Moore, M. G. and Anderson, W. G. (Ed.) (2003). International perspectives.Chapter VII in Handbook of Distance Education, Lawrence Erlbaum Press.

Assessment : Peer review (each group member will mark his/her peer)
Duration : 3 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor)

Week 7: Trends and issues in DE

In this session, trends and issues will be dealt with in two dimensions: institution-based trends and changes as well as the future of DE. As a methodology, case-based examples will be discussed to see recently raised issues in DE. In addition to this, a given article will be debated to enhance students' viewpoints and to reflect on future implications of DE.

Tasks

Students will discuss the future of DE, based on their experience on SL. The discussions will be limited to 3D learning settings and the suggested article. Each group will produce an essay which in the end they will share with the other groups. In

order to help students in paraphrasing their discussions, some outlines/key points will be given regarding the future of DE.

References
Dede, C. Vignettes about the future of learning technologies.

Duration: 3 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor)

Week 8 – 9 – 10 – 11: Student Activities

Students, as a group, will deliver small-scale courses in SL through using DE tools in these four weeks. Students will decide what to and how to teach. Tutors might help students in deciding what to and how to teach when needed.

Assessment : Peer review (each group member will mark his/her peer)
Duration : 3 X 4 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor) & (Name of the tutor)

Week 12: Students' weeks
Students will decide three weeks of the entire course. These three weeks could be anytime during the academic term – not necessarily the last four weeks. For instance, in the 2nd week, students can interrupt the course and decide the next week's topic and methodology. A thread will be allocated to students at the beginning of the term on Moodle so that they should be able to decide these three weeks throughout the flow of the course.

In cases where students do not feel the need to interrupt the course prior to the 11th week, this week (12th week) is set as the deadline for them to submit their projects. There will not be any grouping on Moodle as these three weeks are allocated for all students. The tutors will ask members to create a final thread on Moodle which includes:

- What to deal with (what do they want to learn?) & How? (methodology)

In cases where students do not decide, tutors will give a list of topics.

Week 13 – 14 – 15: Students' weeks

In these weeks, students will perform their desired course.

Assessment : will be discussed with students after submitting their projects.
Duration : 3 X 3 hours
Tutor : (Name of the tutor) & (Name of the tutor)

Appendix 3: Consent form for the focus groups

Invitation to Participate & Consent Form for a Research Study

Dear Participant,

My name is H. Tugba Ozturk and I am a doctoral student in the Department of Educational Research at Lancaster University. I wish to invite you to participate in a study entitled: Conflict in the Collaborative E-Learning Communities and Ontological Security. Please read this form carefully, and feel free to ask questions you might have. You can contact me with questions by e-mail at t.dogan@lancaster.ac.uk

As an e-learning practitioner you are asked to participate in a focus group in order to provide me with your expertise on learning communities.

I will facilitate a focus group. The group will include approximately 8 to 10 e-learning practitioners. . The 60 – 80 minutes discussion will be audio-taped. Participants may request that the recording device be turned off at any time.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the situations which influence the collaborative e-learning process in learning communities in terms of conflict and ontological security. E-Learning communities hold promises in education and could be considered as a new way of learning. Since it is a relatively new topic and holds good promise in education, it needs to be scrutinized and supported academically. In this research, I will investigate in how a community continues its existence when conflict is encountered from the perspective of ontological security.

Our discussion will be informal and topics may emerge as we exchange ideas. However, I hope to address (7) areas of inquiry:

1. Did anyone experience difficulties that influenced the learning process? (Explain)
2. Did anyone have contrasting experience? (Explain)
3. Were there debates or arguments on the learning community? (Explain)
4. How did your groups take decisions? (Explain)
5. Do you think that groups are better problem solvers than individuals? (Explain)
6. Did you feel you belong to your group? (Explain)
7. What makes the groups work in unity? (Explain)

When I have completed transcribing the recording, I will e-mail you a copy of the transcript of our discussion. You will have one week to review the transcript. If you are comfortable with the content of the transcript, please reply to me by email as soon as possible to let me know. If not, you may add, revise, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit.

The data from this study will be used in the completion of course work in a doctoral programme. The data may also be included in my doctoral thesis or published and presented at conferences. To safeguard your confidentiality and anonymity, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information, such as the institution or department to which you belong, will be removed.

Because the participants in this study have been selected from among experts in your field, you may be known to other people in the focus group or identifiable to others on the basis of what you have said. As the researcher, I will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

The audio recording and transcript of our discussion will be safely stored, as will your contact information. You may withdraw from the study for any reason, at any time, without penalty of any sort. If you withdraw from the study at any time, any data that you have contributed will be destroyed.

Consent to participate

I have read and understood the description provided above; I have been provided with an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered satisfactorily. I consent to participate in the study described above, understanding that I may withdraw this consent at any time. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

An email message from you that states, "I agree to participate," will be considered confirmation of your consent.

Appendix 4: Invitation to participation

Participants in the Research

Name of Project: Conflict in the Collaborative E-Learning Communities and Ontological Security

Researcher: Hayriye Tugba DOGAN

Supervisor: Prof. Dr. Mary Hamilton

Date: 09 October 2008

Dear students,

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study which is part of my PhD studies in the Department of Educational Research at the University of Lancaster. Before you decide you need to understand why the research is being done and what it would involve for you. Please take time to read the following information carefully. Talk to others about the study if you wish. Please send an email to me t.dogan@lancaster.ac.uk if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the purpose of the study?
The purpose of this study is to investigate the situations which influence the collaborative e-learning process in learning communities in terms of conflict and ontological security. E-Learning communities hold promises in education and could be considered as new way of learning. Since it is a relatively new topic and holds good promises in education, it is needed to be scrutinized and supported academically. In this research, I will investigate how a community continues its existence when conflict is encountered from the perspective of ontological security.

Why have I been invited?
E-Learning communities could be regarded as a relatively new topic to investigate. Although these communities bring many benefits in theory, it needs to be researched in depth in practice. Therefore, by participating in my study, you will contribute to explore the e-learning communities by representing a member of e-learning community.

Do I have to take part?
Your participation is voluntary and you can withdraw at any stage of research.

What will taking part involve for me?
I will analyze e-learning environments in which the learning process is run such as discussion forum, Wiki or Facebook. At the end of the learning process, I will have a short meeting with you regarding your experience as a member of the learning community.

I will collect the data during Fall Term in 2008. Your tutor, domain expert and I will access the data. I will protect your anonymity by changing your names. The data will be restricted with the Conflict and ontological security concept.

What will I have to do?
All you need to do is participate in the sessions, meetings and sign a consent form.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?
As a student at the university which is taking part in conducting research and contributing to science, your participation in carrying out this research as part of your course will be beneficial.

Thank you for reading this information sheet.

H. Tugba Ozturk

E-mail: t.dogan@lancaster.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Group 3's data set

Conflict type			Subject 14	Subject 15	Subject 16	Subject 17	Subject 18	Subject 19	Subject 20
Interpersonal site of conflict	Roles taken in group work	PRE (Q9)	I prefer to participate equally. In case a problem occurs, I like helping others and taking advice from others.	I prefer to participate equally. We take the decisions together with other members.	It depends. Sometimes I lead the group; sometimes I accept what the majority accept.	I am an influential member. I lead the group and direct the other members in a systematic way.	I prefer to participate equally	I prefer to participate equally	I prefer to participate equally
		POST (Q5)	Because I could not hang around, I accepted what the majority said.	As a member of the group, I work equally with other members and fulfilled my commitments together with them.	I coordinated the members and allocated the task by asking other members' thoughts. Of course as the name implies, this is a group work. We worked together as pieces of the whole and each of us, I suppose, did good works.		I never prefer to be dominant in the group work. Therefore, I always take a back seat. Yet I contributed to coming together and deciding on tasks and time allocation.	Usually, I participated equally. I accepted what majority said and I preferred to decide with the other members.	I participated equally, and preferred to take decision together with the other members.
		Focus G.			I asked their opinion democratically				
	Working preference	PRE (Q7)	Group	Individual	Individual But Depends	Individual	Individual	Individual	Individual
		[5]POST (4)	Group	Group	-	Individual	Group	Group	Individual
		Focus G.		It was a nice experience for us to share knowledge, share diverse knowledge with other friends and had a positive impact on our learning.			In the group work, main problem was the issue of time […] but the positive side is that when we came together, if one was facing with a problem, the other could help to this friend. Therefore, there were both positive and negative sides.	[…] because in a group, there is more than one person, so, different points of view are reflected on presentation.	

[5] Based on their experience in the course

Appendix 6: Focus Group Protocols

Venue :
Duration : Expected duration is 40- 50 minutes for each group
Size of the groups: 4 (or) 5 groups consisting of 7 students each.

1. Greeting and Introduction (3 minutes)
In order to form a warm atmosphere, I will initially talk about myself, their lectures, exams, etc.; briefly talk about their involvement in the course, course of study, etc.

2. Theoretical Framework and expectations (5 minutes)
I will explain my research purpose, why I need to gather them, etc.

3. Ethics (2 minutes)
I will also remind them about ethical rules and will want them to sign the forms.

My speech will be similar to:

"Thank you for coming today. I hope you enjoyed your time during the project.

My research is about difficulties in collaborative virtual learning communities. At the beginning of the course, we had small seminars about virtual learning communities that I assume here you have knowledge about these communities. But in case you do not remember or want me to remind, a virtual learning community is a learning culture in which a group of individuals come together, working collaboratively and autonomously in a life cycle, by utilizing online tools to create a sense of community with shared values and construct knowledge.

I am interested in this topic since learning communities promise new formations in education. Learning community is a cohesive community that embodies a culture of learning which attends to issues of climate, needs, resources, planning, action and evaluation; and responsibility of learning is shared among community members. This formation of community could be considered as relatively independent, autonomous, less under control of authorities in the center of learning network. Also the idea of setting forth effort, labour, knowledge in order to learn from each other drive me to scrutinize learning communities. However, as could be happened to all formations proposing being independent, self controlled or working in cooperation, especially when considering its internal dynamics, it is possible to observe difficulties such as obstacles or blockages on community's learning experience. In that sense, learning communities need to be better understood; in order to support academically, Therefore; I am conducting a focus group with you now.

I guess I share same concerns with you by supporting them!

I've brought you together so that we can learn from each other about what is really going on in learning communities in terms of conflict. This is a `''no holds barred'' discussion. I want to know what you're seeing, even if it looks bad. That is the only way we are going to learn!

The data from this study will be used in the completion course work in a doctoral programme. The data may also be included in my doctoral thesis or published and presented at conferences. To safeguard your confidentiality and anonymity, you will be given a pseudonym, and all identifying information, such as the institution or department to which you belong, will be removed.

Because the participants for this study have been selected from students in the same programme, you may be known to other people in the focus group or identifiable to others on the basis of what you have said. As the researcher, I will undertake to safeguard the confidentiality of the discussion, but cannot guarantee that other members of the group will do so. Please respect the confidentiality of the other members of the

group by not disclosing the contents of this discussion outside the group, and be aware that others may not respect your confidentiality.

After the session, I will send you a transcript and want you to confirm if I you said what I transcribed. When I have completed transcribing the recording, I will e-mail you a copy of the transcript of our discussion. You will have one week to review the transcript. If you are comfortable with the content of the transcript, please reply to me email as soon as possible to let me know. If not, you may add, revise, or delete information from the transcript as you see fit.

Please feel free to communicate with me at any time, especially if you don't feel yourself comfortable during the focus group; I appreciate your contributions by sending me an email and tell me about your thoughts after focus group.

4. Discussions (40 minutes = combined 58 minutes)
I will ask my prepared focus group questions as below:

- Did anyone experience difficulties? If so, what were they?
- Did anyone have contrasting experiences that influenced the learning process given the nature of learning communities? (Explain)
- If so, what was the outcome of these differences?
- Do you think that groups are better problem solvers than individual? (Explain)
- Did you work with the same members before?
- What influenced your working together? (conditions, deadline, good/bad coordination, lack of tutor authority)
- What do you think enables or helps groups to work together/collectively? (Explain)
- Would you regard your group as a sub-community? What do you think worked well or what didn't

5. Gratitude and Future of Data (2 minutes = combined 60 minutes)

At the end of the focus group I will briefly summarize the main points of the discussion. I will encourage some general agreement by saying something like:

"What I have heard you saying this morning/afternoon was ... Did I summarize your thoughts correctly? Is there anything you would like to add or amend?"

Thank everyone for attending.

Appendix 7: Pre-course student members questionnaire

Dear Student,
I would like to ask you the following questions in order to understand your perception of group works and independence working as well as to design the learning process according to your working preferences.
Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask to me.
Thank you very much.

Tuğba Öztürk, t.ozturk@lancaster.ac.uk
PhD student
Educational Research Department
Lancaster University

Name – Surname:

1. **Age**
   ☐ 16 – 19 ☐ 20 - 23 ☐ 24 – 27 ☐ 27 – 30 ☐ 31 - 34 ☐ 34 -
2. **Gender**
   ☐ Female ☐ Male
3. **Do you use internet for educational purposes? If so, how long?**
   ☐ Yes ☐ No _____ Years
4. **Do you have internet access at home?**
   ☐ Yes ☐ No
5. **Where do you connect to the internet when you need to?**

6. **Have you undertaken any courses using the following communication and delivery tools before? If so, what was your experience? (You can choose more than one)**
   ☐ Synchronous communication tools (e.g. chat) ☐ Enjoyed ☐ Didn't Enjoy ☐ Neutral
   ☐ Asynchronous communication tools (e.g. forums) ☐ Enjoyed ☐ Didn't Enjoy ☐ Neutral
   ☐ ICT in general (e.g. obtaining information via internet) ☐ Enjoyed ☐ Didn't Enjoy ☐ Neutral

7. **How do you *usually* prefer to work for your courses? (You can choose more than one)**
   ☐ As an individual ☐ In a group
   ☐ It depends on …….
   e.g. it depends on the task, course, my priori knowledge, whether I chose the group members

8. Which of the following best describes you? (Please choose one of them in each pair)

 I am usually self motivated person
(e.g. Interest in the subject matter is usually what motivates me)

OR

 I am usually externally motivated person
(e.g. I am keen on working especially if there is a reward, mark, deadline at the end of the work)

 I usually look for a tutor or guidance at the lectures to learn the subject

OR

 I usually prefer to work without any interference

9. Please describe the role you usually take in groupwork

(e.g. I usually take the lead; I participate in equally, I usually put much efforts than other members in the group; I usually accept what majority accepts; I wait for others to make decisions

10. In which learning setting are you more comfortable?

- Face to face
- Virtual settings
- I am equally comfortable in all
- it depends on…….

11. Please rate your level of knowledge about Distance Education (Please choose one of them)

- I have a strong understanding
- I have some understanding
- I have not explored this area
- Other …….

12. What is your expectation from this course and how would you like this course to be run (e.g. methodology, coursework, learning settings, etc.)**?**

13. What do you aim to get at the end of this course?

(e.g. only to pass, learn about distance education practices and theories, develop my skills to work as a team)

Appendix 8: Post-course student members questionnaire

Dear Student

I would like to ask you the following questions in order to understand your experience regarding this course during the term.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask to me.

Thank you very much,

Tugba Ozturk
PhD student
Educational Research Department
Lancaster University

t.ozturk@lancaster.ac.uk

1. Name – Surname:
2. (Second Life) Name – Surname:
3. How comfortable were you with using Moodle or Second Life? Did using virtual settings have an impact on your learning in the course?

4. Based on your experience of this course, would you have preferred to work individually or as a group? Please explain.

5. Please describe the role that you took in group works?

(e.g. I usually took the lead; I participated in equally, I usually put much efforts than other members in the group; I usually accepted what majority accepts; I waited for others to make decisions)

6. When working with your group, were your interests, aims, expectations, working preferences, ideas, etc. consistent with the other group members? if not, how this might have influenced your learning at the course?

7. During the entire course, were your interests, aims, expectations, working preferences, ideas, etc. consistent with the tutors' ? if not, how this might have influenced your learning at the course?

8. Was there any time when you couldn't reach consensus with group members or with the tutors on a certain topic? If so, how was this resolved? How did you construct knowledge, etc.

9. Do you feel comfortable in a learning setting where the tutor has less influence, the content is semi-structured and students direct the course? How would this influence your learning process?

10. What would you suggest if I ask you how this course should be run for the next term? What would you change? or remain same? (e.g. methodology, coursework, learning settings, etc.)

Thank you for your participation
Tugba Ozturk

Appendix 9: Interview with the tutor

1. Could you tell me about your experience of last year (my pilot study)?

- First of all, how do you position your view of teaching as a tutor?
- How did you find your role as a facilitator in the learning community?
- What worked or what did not work?

2. What is your expectation from the students and learning process taking into account of learning community principles as a different way of lecturing for this academic year?

3. You have been lecturing at this university for almost 3 years. Could you please tell me about learning culture of the students?

- How do they reach at knowledge & construct knowledge?
- Do you think some cultural factors could be an issue in their learning especially as a community (such as Gender, Religion, Age, etc.)
- What do you think how students resolve the conflict when they face with it?

Appendix 10: Individual interview with a student who might have conflict based on his answers at the pre-course questionnaire.

Question

Based on your pre-course questionnaire, I assume that you are not comfortable with working in a group. However, this course has been run by collaborative learning methods which sometimes required you to work with a group. Could you please tell me about your experience with working in a group?

Sub questions

A. In case of a negative response

- Could it be also because you do not like communicating with people when you need to construct knowledge?
- Could it be because there were some dominant people in your group? or the way that group took the decisions non-democratic style?
- Could it be because there were some pressures on you such as deadline or passing the course?
- Could it be because your interest, expectation, arguments etc were conflictive with the group members?
- Have you ever worked with the group members before? if so, how was your experience?
- How did you find a solution (manage) to finish your tasks or project?

B. in case of a positive response

- Or could you tell me what worked for you in terms of working with a group?

Appendix 11: A form on Moodle site for the student members who want to change their groups or drop the course.

Dear Student,

By sending this form to me, I understand that you either want to change your group or do not want to participate in group works. Could you tell me about your reasons? Please be explicit as much as possible and justify your reasons very well so that I can decide whether to change your groups or not to include your non-participation to assessment.

Please note that what you will share with me will be kept very confidential and I might use this essay in my research without revealing out your identity.

You want to change your group or drop the course:

A. Is it because of the way this course is run that you did not like?

B. Is it because of any dispute or anything you do not like with your group friends?

Appendix 12: Extract from the researcher's reflective journal (An Example from my field notes)

[My observations about student members]

…

One more thing is that, the family life is very much important for these people. They usually grow up in a crowded family such as 5 siblings grow up together, and always get in touch with relatives; these persons are the members of the networks. They naturally learn the social norms in a community or perhaps even how to behave in accordance with the social norms, how to get along with members in the network they belong. So this was a part of their personality, the meaning of this personality in the learning community settings could be independent, autonomous, well obtaining alternative knowledge, knowing about communitarian knowledge and sociology of knowledge. In fact, I saw some reflections of these in data as well. When I asked the question about conflict with the group members that they don't like working with, students were explaining this with their family culture. In addition, when I was talking about discourses like emancipated learning or freedom to learn, they were paying me attention, apparently motivated as these discourses are the ones they wish to achieve every sense of life, in particular education.

Appendix 13: An email from Subject 27

[The email below was sent to me (as a guest tutor) by Subject 27 in regard to his request to change his learning group]

Hello,

I want to change my group that you formed for Distance Education Course because there are some people in this group that I don't get along well with them.

As for the reason, I worked with some of them before when I was on my second year. However, some debates (conflict) emerged between us and we couldn't have a fruitful term. Therefore, I would like to change my group.

Subject 27
His Student Number

Appendix 14: Thematic Framework of conflict (drawing on the data and literature)

THEMES	ELEMENTS – EXAMPLES
Theme 1 : Conflict Types	
Intrapersonal	- *Interest*: (Thompson and Ku, 2006) (a student member says in the pilot study) "They were just intending to pass this lesson, not to learn!" - *Wish:* (Ayoko et al., 2002) (a student member says in the pilot study) "some people did not want to participate in. they thought that we would eventually finalize the project". - *Ethnographic characteristics* (Ference and Vockell, 1994; Huang, 2002) Prior knowledge, prior experience. e.g. (a student member says in the pilot study) "my previous group work were always unfruitful, the other members did not contribute equally" - *Expectation*: (the tutor says in the pilot study) "They (student members) complaint about their reporters and wanted me to change him/her. But we said it is not that important we only expect them to have a reporter who can put your decisions on internet". - *Working preferences* (Ke and Chellman; 2006). (a student member says in the pilot study) "I can say that coming together with other members in the group was a big trouble for me"
Interpersonal	- *Argument -Counter Argument* (*Stegmann et al.,2007)* For instance, (a student member says in the pilot study) "Tablet PC seems like a good idea, now, for example, a tutor teaches mathematics from here. if we also use microphone, there you go, it is a Smartclass." Another member replies: "But tutor says that it is very expensive, tablet PC is not possible, very expensive" - *Power relationships* (Blasé, 1991; Gronn, 1986; Minter and Snyder, 1969)- e.g. (a student member says in the pilot study) "I found out that they (other members) had hesitations on stating their thoughts to him(ambassador of the group)" - *Affiliation*: e.g. (a student member says in the pilot study) "I did not feel belonging to the group"
Socio-cultural conflict	- Educational system a. Educational philosophy of the society b. institutional issues c. designer and tutor - Members of the community versus society
Theme 2: (Indicators of) Hidden Conflict (Kolb and Bartunek, 1992)	
- *Non-Participation*- [-pilot study-In the second phase of the learning process, a member dropped the course without informing other members in her group.] She said on her essay "I was thinking that three of my friends in the group will not contribute sufficiently and in the past years I had a row with the fourth one – the representative of the group" - *Silence* - *Data cross-referencing*	

Key point: Internal Dynamics of conflict	
a. Trigger of conflict b. Avoidance of conflict	- *Ontological security* (McConnell, 2005; Chetkow-Yanoov, 1997)e.g. (a student member says in the pilot study) "I did not trust them [the grop members– deadline causes anxiety: "when one week was left to the course, we could say we need to do this and that, you should do that, s/he should do that. We a few people came together and did something but we forcedly decided in who to do what is next. But I cannot say this was useful. - *Learning culture* (Avcruch, 1998; Thompson and Ku, 2006) `(Subject 4 says) As Subject 4 says "I am thinking that we had same goals and expectations while working with the group. […] We took the advantage of learning from different points of view" - *Distribution of power* - *Group size*: (Subject 9 says) "But if we had been 3 people, that would have been more convenient to get the common points." - *Technological factors* (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 1999): [emoticons] "To me, the only advantage of this implementation [she refers to online universities] is that it is nice to both work and study at the same time. Or I am very pessimistic as usual ☹ "
Theme 3: Potential results of conflict	
Results of conflict	<u>*Conflict resolution*</u>- via - *Mediators:* (Smith, 1999). (Subject 25 says): `I usually suggest some different ideas. I am a mediator when there is conflict. I also take the lead when necessary but this is not my preference.` - *An authoritative figure*: (Agerback, 1996) (Subject 10 says on Moodle under a thread titled `task allocations` in the 4 week of the course) "Subject 13 informed [the tutor] that we have already chosen this topic" Tutor [in her email to that student]: "No, this topic belongs to the other group as they have chosen earlier than you and I have not heard anything from Subject 13 about that task allocation up to now" - *Dialogue (*Agerback*, 1996):* On the times there was not consensus, we were discussing and took decisions together." <u>*When conflict is unresolved*</u> - *Comply with conflict* a. *Acceptance*: (Subject 6 says): "[conflict in our group] could not be resolved and is left like that." b. Oppression: (Whitworth, 2005) Subject 17 says: ` But I tried to disguise myself as if I was not leading` - *Fragmentations* (Hodgson and Reynolds, 2005) *(*Subject 21 says) "While allocating the tasks, some different sub-groups emerged" - *Drop out*
Theme 4: Influence of conflict in learning	
- *Orientation*: (Subject 10 says) "Because after some point, this reduces my motivation and I do not want to research as well" - *Knowledge production*: (Subject 19 says) "Because in a group, there is more than one person, so, different point of views is reflected on [our] presentation" - *Participation in co-operative and collaborative learning* - *Chaos*: Tutor says: "Student members confuse whom to listen, whom to follow."	

Appendix 15a: Information about the members in Group I

Characters

Subject 1

Based on her pre-course questionnaire, she states that she works a lot in the group work but prefers to work as an individual. She does not change her mind in the post-questionnaire either. Apparently, she likes working independently –without inference- and is internally motivated. Having said that, she looks for a tutor presence in the post questionnaire. She says: ` I think the directions [tutors' directing the students] were even less! I do less research when I feel comfortable.`

She does not have internet access at home; because of this her contributions might have been impeded.

At the focus group meeting, she criticizes the dilemma in the system. Accordingly, there was a discrepancy in the fact that she was examined, after being promised that she would be independent, and this assessment method does not actually evaluate a student's success.

Subject 2

He knows very little about Distance Education and expects a course to run without assignments. He seems like a responsible person in group work (`I would like to take the decisions together, and to pull my weight`). He has got internet connection at home. He is an internally motivated and independent person. He has worked with the some members before. He is a moderate person. On Moodle, he uses facial expressions. When he speaks about something negative, he uses a `smiling face`. For instance, students were discussing how to cancel the course for bank holiday reasons, but he was not adhering to this idea and while expressing his thoughts, he used an upset face and used a moderate excuse.

Subject 3

He is a very quiet person. He does not have any expectations from the course, but he aims to pass with a good mark. He does not have any a priori knowledge. He is internally motivated and does not like interference. He has concern about learning community principles. In the post-course questionnaire, he says: ` No, I would not feel comfortable. This might negatively influence my learning process.`

For him, the course should be very interesting or should attract his attention; otherwise he does not contribute or even does not participate. If the course attracts his attention, then he does his best to contribute and participate.

Subject 4
He has some understanding of DE. He likes and expects to work in virtual settings as part of a group. He aims to pass with a good grade and learn. He usually either takes the lead or accepts what the majority accepts in group work. He has internet access at home, had asynchronous education and enjoyed it. He is externally motivated but likes working without interference.

Subject 5
She is a very quiet person. I often could not hear her voice either in virtual settings or during the course or focus group meeting. She did not return the pre-course questionnaire. However, based on the post-questionnaire, I can say that she was comfortable with Moodle, but had some difficulties with using SL. She states that she would like to work in a group again (based on her experience during the course). She looks for tutor guidance in the learning process. She says: ` I would not feel so comfortable. After all we are in the learner position and we lack knowledge. We need the tutors to fill this deficiency. We can do something, learning by ourselves, but when a tutor does not direct, it is incomplete.`

Subject 6
She has some understanding of DE. She has internet access at home. She had asynchronous learning before and enjoyed it. She expects to learn collaboratively with people living at a distance. I interpret this that she likes collaborative learning, although she states that she prefers to work individually in pre-post questionnaires. Having fun while learning is important for her as she repeatedly states this in the questionnaires. She aims to pass with a good grade. According to her, she puts more than average effort into group work. She takes decisions together with the group members.

She thinks she can work better in the learning environments designed with VLC principles. But she adds: ` However in order for this process to be fruitful, every student should pay close attention to the course, and attend, to learn and to teach. I think I learn better in a learning environment like that.`

Appendix 15b: Information about the members in Group II

Characters

Subject 7 did not return either pre-course or post-course questionnaires. He did not attend focus group meetings, either. However, interestingly, On Moodle, he is one of the most active student members in his group. Therefore, I could capture his story of conflict mainly from his interactions on Moodle.

Subject 8 has some understanding of Distance Education (DE). His expectation is in line with DE settings: he expects to work with students at a distance. He aims to learn about DE. He has internet access at home. He has attended an asynchronously delivered course before and enjoyed it. He describes his learning characteristic as an internally motivated learner; however, he looks for tutor guidance. He prefers to work on an equal basis with the others, but in case somebody does not pull his/her weight, he takes the lead. He is a very religious person; always uses religious discourses in his messages on Moodle.

Subject 9 has some understanding of DE. He expects to work with students living in distant places. He aims to improve his skills to work as a team member. He has internet access at home. Previously, he has attended both synchronously and asynchronously delivered (online) courses and enjoyed both. He prefers to lead the group democratically. He describes his learning characteristic as an internally motivated learner and works independently.

Subject 10 has not worked with the same members before (focus group). She has some understanding of DE. She expects a course run as a real practice of DE. She aims to learn about DE. She has internet access at home. She has attended a synchronously delivered (online) course before and enjoyed it. She describes her learning characteristic as an internally motivated learner and looks for tutor guidance. She states that she prefers to work on an equal basis, but if the members do not take their responsibilities then she leads the group. She would prefer not to work in virtual settings designed with VLC principles. She says she believes that "Students are not the ones that always do research; hence, cannot learn everything by themselves." (Post-course questionnaire).

Subject 11 is not interested in leading the group and describes himself as a problem solver rather than maker. He has not explored Distant Education. He aims to pass the course. He prefers to participate in group work equally. He has internet access at

home. He has attended a synchronously delivered course before and enjoyed it. He describes his learning characteristic as an internally motivated learner.

Subject 12 has some understanding of DE. He aims to learn and develop knowledge/skills about DE. He prefers to participate in group work equally. He has internet access at home. He describes his learning characteristic as an internally motivated learner and looks for tutor guidance. He prefers to work in face-to-face settings. However, he was comfortable with virtual settings throughout the course and the learning settings positively influenced his learning (Post-course questionnaire).

Subject 13 has worked with some of the group members before and according to him, this has had a positive influence on working together as a group (focus group). He has some understanding of DE. He expects a course run with a student-centred approach, not too many assignments and fun. He aims to learn as much as possible and pass with a good grade. He does not have internet access at home. He has attended both synchronously and asynchronously delivered (online) courses and enjoyed both. He describes his learning characteristic as an externally motivated learner and looks for tutor guidance. He says that he never takes the lead but likes participating in group work equally. He likes the idea of VLC, but thinks that students should be well informed about how to act in which parameters.

Appendix 15c: Information about the members in Group III

About the characters

Subject 14 is a very moderate person and likes working in a group. He appears to be someone who is happy with working under VLC principles. He says: "Of course I feel more comfortable in an environment that I created. I can deal with the conditions within my own possibilities." He does not have a priori knowledge of DE. Also, he does not have any expectation from the course. He aims to learn about distance education practices and theories. He prefers to work equally in the group work. He describes his role as: "In case a problem occurs, I like helping others and taking advice from others." He has attended an asynchronously delivered (online) course and enjoyed it. He needs guidance in courses. He identified himself as not an autonomous learner.

Subject 15 prefers to work equally and take decisions together. He identified himself as an externally motivated and not an autonomous learner. He has a positive attitude towards the VLC principles but points out some issues: "At the beginning, student-centred learning might be challenging for students but as students participate in the educational process, they gain self confidence and regulate their learning process based on their own wishes and work, then get more fruitful results." He has some understanding of DE. He expects a course run with hands-on activities. He also thinks that the methods which attract students' attention would boost participation. He aims to obtain DE-related knowledge which he can use in real life and to pass with a good grade. He has internet access at home. He has attended both synchronously and asynchronously delivered (online) courses and enjoyed both.

Subject 16 is a very silent person and exists in the community almost without a trace. He does not participate in group work, either on Moodle or at meetings. All I can say about him is based on the information I could gather before the course started. Accordingly, he has some understanding of DE. He expects to learn from the course as much as possible. Also, he expects to have a course with assignments. He aims to learn about distance education practices and theories and to improve his abilities to work in a team. He does not have internet access at home. He has attended an asynchronously delivered (online) course and enjoyed it. He identified himself as an internally motivated and not an autonomous learner. He prefers face-to-face settings. The role he takes in the group work depends: Sometimes he leads the group; sometimes he accepts what the majority accepts.

Subject 17 is the leader of the group based on the post-course questionnaires and interview meetings. He is a person that does not like collaborative work but heads up the group if he is obligated to work together with others. He has some understanding of Distance Education (DE). He expects a course run according to constructivist learning principles. He aims to pass the course and learn about DE because he wants to do his masters on DE. He does not have internet access at home, and he states that this situation is an obstacle for his work. He has attended synchronously and asynchronously delivered (online) courses before and enjoyed both.

Subject 18 has some understanding of DE. He aims to learn about theories and practices in DE. He does not have any internet access at home. He has attended an asynchronously delivered course and enjoyed it. He identified himself not as an autonomous learner. He prefers to participate in group work equally.

Subject 19 aims to learn about DE theories and practices. He does not have internet access at home. He identified himself as not an autonomous and externally motivated learner. He prefers to participate in group work equally. He looks for tutor presence because, according to him, while participating in the course, the learning process would be more effective if directed by tutors.

Subject 20 does not have any prior knowledge of Distance Education. He expects to have a course run with assignments. He aims to pass with a good grade. He does not have internet access at home. He prefers to participate in group work equally. He has attended ICT based courses before and has a neutral feeling about his experience. He identified himself as an internally motivated and autonomous learner. He prefers to attend internet-based education for this course.

Appendix 15d: Information about the members in Group IV

About the characters

Subject 21 did not return the pre-course questionnaire. Based on the post-course questionnaire, he describes his role in the group as `I accepted what the majority accepts`. He thinks that sometimes, he could not get results when he put in too much effort.

Subject 22 did not return the post-course questionnaire. Based on the pre-course questionnaire, he has some understanding of DE. He thinks that the learning settings and methodology are very important to run the course fruitfully. He aims to learn about distance education practices and theories and improve his abilities to work in a team. He does not have internet access at home. He has had synchronous and asynchronous education before and enjoyed both. He prefers to participate equally and leads the group. He is internally motivated and an autonomous student. He prefers to work individually.

Subject 23 has some understanding of DE. She expects to work on the aims and benefits of DE. She does not have any specific expectation for methodology as she has no idea about methodologies in the DE course. She aims to learn about DE theories and practices. She does not have internet access at home. She has had synchronous education before but she did not enjoy it. She also had asynchronous and ICT based education and she enjoyed both. She is internally motivated and an autonomous student. She was comfortable with settings and this influenced her learning positively. She replied to the question regarding whether she would prefer to work under the learning community principles as "Tutor direction is very important. I do not believe that there should be less tutor influence. It is because there is a significant contribution to our work when the tutor is involved. On the other hand, when a student is in charge of his/her own work, then his/her learning process is more fruitful. At least it could be seen that students are more encouraged and do their own research."

Subject 24 did not return the pre-course questionnaire. He describes his role as: "at group work, I concurred with the suggestions by my group mates or I objected. I created discussions about task allocations or reinforced the topics". He articulates his views about conflict by saying: "I do not expect other members to share the same thoughts with me. Of course there will be some objections and concurrences. I do not object to the people who concur. However, listening to the people with different points of view will create different perspectives for me. My attitude towards the topics

would change". He adds: "I will mention one thing I experienced in my group regarding the running of this course. I believed it was not a fair task allocation and opened the discussions about this with my friends. Only one of my friends concurred, however it was only me who heard what I said. There was no consensus." In the post questionnaire, he states that he prefers to work individually.

Subject 25 has some understanding of DE. He aims to pass with a good grade. He does not have internet access at home. He had asynchronous education before and enjoyed it. He is an autonomous student, internally motivated. He prefers to participate equally. He prefers face-to-face settings. He was not comfortable with the settings for this course. In my opinion, he would not like to be a member of a learning community, because, he replies to my question about LC by saying "not really, because then everybody says something and there will not be any course left to run."

Subject 26 is a very quite person. He did not return the post-course questionnaire. He did not participate in courses properly, has no statement at focus group meetings, the same for Moodle. Therefore, I know too little about him. He has some understanding of DE. He aims to pass with a good grade. He prefers to participate equally. He does not have any access at home. He had asynchronous education and enjoyed it. He is internally motivated and an autonomous student. He likes face-to-face settings. He prefers to work individually.

Subject 27 has some understanding of DE. As an expectation from the course he would like to learn about what distance education is, how it is practiced and developed. He is happy to work both on face-to-face and computer-based settings. He aims to learn about DE practices. He usually puts in much more effort than the other members. He has internet access at home. He has had asynchronous and ICT-based education before the course and enjoyed both. He is internally motivated, looks for guidance. His view about LCs is "Yes, I would feel [comfortable]; you only feel the responsibility to learn when the content is semi-structured, to research on your own, and in the meantime the tutor guides, and adapt yourself to the content and motivate yourself more."

Appendix 15e: Information about the members in Group V

About the characters

Subject 28 is a quiet person, does not like speaking negatively about any person. I interviewed her at the beginning of the course, as she wanted to change her group. Her previous group was the 3rd group. When she found out that she would be working with the 3rd group, according to the provisional groupings, she paid me a visit in my office and demanded a change in her group. When I asked the reason, she did not want me to get negative thoughts about her, and preferred to give me short answers such as, `I do not believe I can perform as I wish with these group members`. She has little knowledge about DE. She expects this course to be run on a project basis. She aims to learn about DE and to participate in a DE project. She has internet access at home. She had asynchronous education before and enjoyed it. She is internally motivated. She describes her role in group work as "I usually take an ambassador's role. We decide together by learning about the topic and directing my friends."

Subject 29 does not have any prior knowledge. He aims to learn about distance education practices and theories, and to pass with a good grade. He has internet access at home. He has had synchronous education before and has a neutral attitude. He also has had both asynchronous and ICT-based education and enjoyed both. He is internally motivated. He prefers face-to-face settings. He usually accepts what the majority accepts. He has positive thoughts about LCPs. He says "yes, I would feel [comfortable with LCP designed settings] but to the extent that we feel confident. Actually, this could be more positive".

Subject 30 does not have any prior knowledge. She expects this course to be run with mutual interaction. She aims to enjoy the course. She has internet access at home. She has had asynchronous education before and has a neutral attitude. She is internally motivated and an autonomous student. She describes the role that she usually takes in group work as "Leading the group is for me. I usually determine what is to be done and how. However, I am always open to new ideas. The important thing is determining what is to be done as a group." For this course, she was not comfortable with the settings. This influenced her negatively. She says "I was not comfortable with the settings: `besides, always visiting those sites on the internet, examining what was shared, to share pissed me off." She expresses her thoughts about LCP as "I do not think environments like that would be run fruitfully in the real processes. The concept of constructivism is usually misunderstood or not applied in

that way. For us, this is applied in a way that only students make presentations. Therefore, I do not find it useful."

Subject 31 does not have any a priori knowledge. He aims to learn about distance education practices and theories as well as to pass the course. He has had asynchronous and ICT based education before and enjoyed both. He is internally motivated but looks for advice while working. He describes the role he takes in group work as "I prefer to participate in it equally; I usually do not express my thoughts before learning others' thoughts. I accept what the majority accepts. I like contributing to others' participation". He might not be comfortable with being a member of a learning community. With regard to this, he says: "if there is only a little direction by the tutor, then this course would not be good for me. It is because the tutor shows me the path I need to follow. If s/he is not didactic, then I cannot progress sufficiently. I would stop at some point."

Subject 32
He has some understanding of DE. He expects to learn about the implications of DE. He aims to learn about DE practices and theories. He does not have internet access at home. He had synchronous education and has neutral feelings. He also had asynchronous education and enjoyed it. He prefers to participate equally.

Subject 33 neither returned the pre-post-course questionnaires nor attended the focus group meetings nor even the face-to-face sessions. The reason for his nonparticipation is possibly because he is a fourth year student (whereas this course is run for the third year students) and he had enrolled on this course because he failed in his third year. However, he also did not actively participate in Moodle discussions, although Moodle provides him with flexible times to engage in group work as a distant learner. It is also interesting that, according to the Moodle statistics, he viewed the topics 272 times but there is no log of his active participation (e.g. posting, editing and deleting a discussion).