

Voices of South Africa - Internet-based education for communication and globalization



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Prologue

My first thoughts go to my family, Peter, Richard and Sarah, for all your love and support. I know I have been a busy mum and wife the past two years but seldom did you complain. Thanks Oscar for giving me insights in a whole new, and mind-blowing, way of using information and media. To Jan Olof for engaging, wise and firm supervision. Thanks Kerstin for helping me out when I needed it most. I am also grateful to Shirley and Madeleine for opening up the ICM-programme for me. Thanks to you, Kathy, for interesting conversations and delicious meals. And a warm hug to you Sofia for your friendship and guidance in the beautiful city of Cape Town.

Finally, I owe my warmest gratitude to Nomvula, Terry, Gavin, Jacky, Goolam, Rudy, Zulfa and Mpumelelo for sharing your valuable time, thoughts and experiences with me. Keep the intercontinental dialogue going and good luck with everything in life.

"Globalization is like the sunrise which is going in all its directions. It spreads everywhere."

Mpumelelo "Fruits" Ndlovu

"The web is the equalizer as space and time and status has no place."

Therene "Terry" Grove

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Definitions and abbreviations

In this report following definitions and abbreviations are used:

Blackboard	The software and communication-platform used for the ICM-programme
Cohort	Group of students per year (class)
ComDev	Communication for development, 40 p
CT	Cape Town
ICM	The Intercontinental Master's programme for adult learning and global change, 40 p
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IRL	In Real Life
LiU	Linköping University
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
S-A	South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WBI	Web-based instruction

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

“- The possibility to interact and exchange experiences is a democratic right whether status or individual situation. Cooperation, dialogue and reflection are fundamental human needs and therefore key-issues for Internet pedagogy.”

Those are the words of Else-Beth K. Sørensen, professor at Aalborg University in Denmark and a pioneer within Internet pedagogy. The lecture was given at my workplace Linköping University, Sweden, in April 2003 and I attended as the local newsreporter. But while writing down the usual quotations and essentials the lecture caught my interest in a deeper sense. What was Prof. Sørensen actually saying? She was not only talking about Internet as an innovative platform for learning, she emphasized the communication-dimension, the interaction and participation that must take place in order to create learning. Teachers and students are given quite different roles in a virtual classroom than in the traditional classroom. On top of that, Internet provides a time- and space-neutral meeting-point. And if one is supposed to interact, if one is supposed to express ones opinions, share ones experiences and, even more important, in a dialogue with others - what a great opportunity to meet, understand and learn from other people and cultures!

Meanwhile, I took my last modules at Communication for Development and it was time for me to seriously choose a topic for the degree thesis. I can't say that Prof. Sørensen's lecture struck me as a lightning. Rather did it plant a seed in my mind that silently grew within while struggling along with my courses, still without a realistic idea for the forthcoming project. Summer passed and one day in August the bits and pieces fell into place. Internet for education, education for cultural encounters, communication and globalization - what could be more interesting to me, working at a university since ten years and also, as a student, already part of that collaborative learning process? Even better; I found that my own university was giving an intercontinental masters program focusing on adult learning and global change. Students from four continents study together with a common purpose; to develop their competence within adult learning and their cultural sensibility as well as preparing for work in a global world. One partner-university is UWC,

University of Western Cape, situated in South Africa, although rich in an African context, still a developing country. Bingo!

1.2 A presentation of myself

Maybe it would be proper to introduce myself at this level. I am a female Swedish academic, raised in a middle-class family, born 1963 in Austria but was brought up on the west-coast of Sweden. Today I am a mother and a wife, working as an information-officer at one of the largest, and fast-developing, universities in Sweden. My academic back-ground is a master's degree in Media and Communication studies combined with economics, psychology, law and some other courses. I have been working with information and marketing within the public sector since 1989, the last ten years at Linköping University.

I have lived a safe and quit happy life far from the traumas that black and coloured South Africans suffered for generations. And although I have spent eight years abroad, and done some travelling during the years, my encounters with non-western-cultures have been few. I was, therefore, very humble towards the field-study and prepared to confront any aware and unaware notion or preconception that I had. My eyes and ears were wide open but I knew, nevertheless, that I would interpret the encounters and impressions through my socially and culturally coloured filters. And, probably I did.

South Africa has been in the eyes of many Swedes, mostly thanks to influential politicians, intellectuals and organisations (like Palme and Amnesty International) who acted strongly against the Apartheid-regime. After 1994, and during the last years, S-A has become a popular country for Swedish tourists. Never the less, I did not know very much about the country when deciding about my topic. I wanted to go to Africa but why I landed in S-A had to do with the fact that UWC was situated there. So before leaving for Cape Town I tried to read as much as possible about S-A and its history. I also wrote to people I knew, who either lived in the country or had been there, and asked a thousand questions; Where should I live, what should I see, how should I transport myself around, what should I prepare for before leaving, what should I do and absolutely not do when arriving etc. etc. People in S-A and people in Sweden answered, somewhat, differently to my questions. Swedes tended to emphasize the dangers I could (and would) face as a lonely, female visitor and traveller. South Africans, on the other hand, seemed to avoid this topic but I

could read between the lines that the safety-issue was real. All these safety-precautions made me a bit angry and worried before departure. I certainly didn't want to feel scared in S-A. I wanted to explore Cape Town and meet its people. How would I be able to do that, locked up behind safety-bars at my bed-and breakfast? I decided to follow some of the advices but then, while being there, follow my instincts and act depending on the specific situation. This turned out to be a good strategy. I walked or travelled around the city in minibuses, Rikkis, taxis, rental-cars and with new friends, Swedes as well as South Africans. Every day I saw something of the city or its outskirts and met, and talked with, at least one new person. I took a lot of pictures and, beside the interviews and studies, I wrote two articles for our local newspapers. I saw African movies, attended a great concert with local bands, climbed the Tablemountain (that almost killed me), swam with penguins and walked with baboons, helped out at a closing-ceremony for an AIDS-project for schoolchildren in Kayleitcha, one of the biggest Townships in Cape Town. I was constantly thrown between realities in this beautiful but segregated city. But as a white visitor, I certainly lived the good life that Cape Town can offer. But first, and foremost, I met students and teachers at the ICM-programme. People, places and situations I will never forget.

1.3 South African education in short

Ever since the first democratic public election in 1994, S-A has been going through dramatic changes. Today the country has a new government, a new parliament and a new constitution. This has created totally new conditions for social and economic changes in a country with a history of severe segregation and inequity. The Reconstruction and Development program (RDP) was launched to try to repair the damages caused by apartheid but this task is huge. Millions of South Africans still lack houses, education and employment while the AIDS pandemic is growing in horror for every year.

The South African universities strive with a lot of structural and financial problems and cooperate poorly. The regional responsiveness is blurry towards the national. Added to this, both students and teachers often lack awareness of the surrounding world. Kalie Strydom describes the situation like this:

“South African students are citizens of a world in which industrial pollution in the North and the AIDS pandemic in the South have a direct impact on individuals’ lives. These same students are going out to work in a different economy and workforce, where the ability to work in multi-cultural teams and to understand different cultural paradigms are important practical skills.”¹

Still, the National Plan, created by the new government, states that the country must build a national higher education so that the whole country can be better equipped to act in a global world.

South Africa is a huge country at the southern tip of the African continent, where two oceans meet. The Rainbow nation, as it calls itself, has 44.6 million inhabitants where 23.1 million are women. The South African people counts to 76.7 % black/Africans, 10.9 % white, 8.9 % coloured and 2.6 % Asians/Indians but within these groups, there is a wide diversity of cultures and religions. The country is divided into nine regions and has 11 official languages. Zulu (22.9 %), Xhosa (17.9 %), Afrikaans (14.4 %), Sepali (9.8 %) and English (8.6 %) are the most frequent ones. Since 1994, though, English has become the *lingua franca* for almost everybody in S-A.

Cape Town is the capitol city of the Western Cape, one of the richest regions in S-A. The population in Western Cape differs from the rest of the country. Here you find that 58 % speak Afrikaans, 20 % English and 19 % Xhosa. The region is expanding fast, both in economy and population. It produces wine and has a large textile- and fish industry. Although Western Cape is a relatively rich region, the inequity between people is apparent with poverty and high unemployment among the black population (40 % compared with 7 % within the white). And women suffer more of unemployment than men (60 % compared to 40 %).²

There is no exact date, or separate incident, to explain for when the system of apartheid was born. But after the Boer-war, in the late 1800, the white minority started to banish the black and coloured people from the richer cities, calling this policy “Separate development”.³ By the time of 1961, when S-A became independent from Great Britain, all power within government and economics was dominated by the white minority and it was at this point the racial laws, Apartheid, was launched at a

¹ Enders, Fulton (2002), p. 164

² Cape Times (November 2003)

³ Hemer (1993)

political and legislative level. Apartheid is built and maintained on the ideology that white people are superior coloured and black people. While the white minority grew in superiority, the black and coloured majority were told they were inferior, only capable of taking orders. Every service, including the educational system, was constructed to serve the white minority and despite the ongoing democratic process and the affirmative actions (a quotation-law that forces organisations and companies to strive towards representativity), white South Africans still dominate higher positions in society having better education and other resources.

In the beginning of 1990, the white minority (at that time 13 %) came in favour of 38 % of the educational budget whereas only 9 % was given to the black majority (76 % of the population). The quality of education varied heavily depending on who was educated and 50-80 % of the population was counted as illiterates. When the ANC-government came to power 1994, education was given high priority. Reforms as 10-year, tuition-free, compulsory-school and primary-school for all children was launched together with programs for adult-learning and programs against illiteracy. But it will take many more years before these programs will become a reality for everyone.

Higher education and research is a responsibility for the national level while primary- and compulsory-school are handled by the regional level. Today there are 36 universities and technicons but at the present, fusions are made and the goal is to have 21 higher institutions. In Western Cape there are three universities; University of the Western Cape, University of Cape Town and University of Stellenbush. UWC was established in 1959 by an Act of Parliament as an ethnic college for coloured students. Since then, it has transformed itself from a small apartheid educational institution to a recognised university with almost 13 000 students, 38 % black, 49 % coloured, 6 % Indians and 3 % white. One Swedish exchange student told me that almost all white students are exchange-students, many from Northern Europe. The white students in Western Cape choose the prestigious UCT or Stellenbusch. I was actually asked, several times, why I did my field-study at UWC. And one of the coloured informants was very proud of his undergraduate degree from UCT.

Formal education is a vital tool for communication and good organisation but in S-A, with its particular history and a young democracy, many people still lack both education and self confidence to do something about their situation. This fact

becomes more tragic considering how important local initiatives and local development-work is for the rebuilding of the country, both from a financially and humanitarian perspective. The democratic movement started on a grass-root-level, within the communities, and it is still on a local level that the real changes is, and can be, done. Today, societies in the industrialized world have become knowledge-based societies where the creation, transmission and application of knowledge are social issues. The boundaries between the universities and the wider world have become more blurred as the importance of, and external demands on, the university in the society has grown.

Within this context, education and training plays a very important role for the future of South Africa.⁴ And despite of the national educational efforts made since 1994, there is much more to be done before one can talk about education as a democratic right in the Rainbow Nation.

1.4 The Intercontinental Master´s program in Adult Learning and Global Change

Since four years, Linköping University together with University of the Western Cape (South Africa), University of British Colombia (Canada) and University of Technology (Australia) offers an educational programme called The Intercontinental Master´s programme in Adult Learning and Global change, 40 p (60 ECTS credits) which engages students with varied language, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The programme offers global perspectives on learning in cross-cultural environments by providing insight into globalisation and cross-cultural collaboration for practitioners within adult learning. One of the South African teachers describes one of her personal aims with the course:

"I want them (the students) to leave the course with a firmer and more confident sense of themselves as global citizens with a more nuanced sophisticated understanding of what that mean. So where am I in the world? That sense of actual real connection to other people in other countries, which they might be able to use in different ways."

The basic approach, during the development of the programme, was that four equal partners should contribute to content and structure and that it should be designed to enhance practioners´ ability to work in a globalized world. The programme offers

⁴ SIDA Evaluation 99/37 (1999)

global perspectives on learning in cross-cultural environments and the aims are to provide insight into globalisation and cross-cultural collaboration for practitioners within adult learning. This is done, for instance, by learning how to learn and teach globally and use global technologies, to understand globalization discourses and develop cultural sensibilities as well as establishing a global community of adult learning practitioners and challenge orthodoxies in adult education practice.⁵

The programme is a distance learning programme, taken part-time over two years. The teachers, at the four institutions, work collaboratively and the dominating working forms, and forms for contact between teachers and students, are electronic communications via flexible web-based distance learning tools (like virtual classrooms) and e-mail. The thought is to give all students a fair chance to take part in the education on equal terms. However, this master-programme is also a Sida-financed research-project and the results, from the ongoing studies, have shown that there is a large variation in student's participation and communication and that participation and communication is requiring very different things for different students.⁶

During research-workshops, data was collected in various ways, all focusing on the students reflections about their own communication and participation. The results suggest that the socio-culturally situated identities of the participants influenced not only their presence, but also their absence.

The studies showed that the technological obstacles were much higher for the South African students than for the others. But it also revealed other aspects to explain the differences in participation and communication within the ICM-programme. One was language. The course is taught in English which means that the demands on language proficiency are higher on some students than others. One has to consider that for some students, mainly the Swedish, the fear of using the English language poorly prevents them from interacting with the other students, especially in chats.

Another aspect that seems to be important for participation and communication has also to do with the technical conditions but concerns time and space. Due to limited band-width and undeveloped ICT-structure in S-A, as well as diverse telephone rates, students log on at inconvenient working hours like night or

⁵ Curriculum, ICM (2000)

⁶ Dahlgren, Larsson, Walters (2003)

early mornings and spend more time and costs on transportation to public computers or Internet cafés.

The fourth, and last, aspect, brought forward in the study was conflicting priorities regarding personal and social conditions. The individual family circumstances were crucial for some of the South-African students and had a strong impact on their participation and frequency of communication in the course.

As mentioned before, the environment of a virtual educational programme is clearly different from a face-to-face encounter in the traditional classroom. The study showed that the creation of socio-cultural identities and views upon, and positions towards, "the others" - both students and teachers - created barriers for real interaction. Adding on, there is also an inequity in literacy practices, between different students, which was revealed in another study of the ICM-students done by one of the first students at the programme. Pilz describes how some learners battled with their computers and the web, lacking appropriate basic knowledge like how to create a folder. He writes:

*"The inability to do this on a course such as ICM would make the course an administrative nightmare."*⁷

1.5 Objectives

My reason for signing up for ComDev was this, for me, new and cross-disciplinary approach of using media and information, as a strategic tool for cultural and social development. My interest in higher education as a democratic right for human, social and intellectual development is perhaps obvious. But I have also a sincere interest in women's situation in the world, their hardships and rights. In this patriarchal world we live in, women generally have to strive and work double as hard as men to reach the same goals. For many women there are no options at all, only survival. In S-A the situation for women differs depending on class, culture and race. Even though women in S-A do not have access to Internet as men, could an Internet-based education be a better option for a formal education than ordinary classroom tutorial because of its flexibility?

I have chosen to look at the ICM-programme because it is a close example of a web-based education in cooperation between the

⁷ Pilz (2003), p. 44

first and the third world. The programme supports me with the necessary framework but is, in itself, not in focus for my study. My interests in, and approach towards, Internet-based education were two-folded. I therefore divided the study in two parts where my overall question was:

Internet-based distance learning for female South African students - what are the possibilities and disadvantages?

1. All in all, I could see that there were a lot of aspects to explain for the differences in student's participation and communication and that education on equal terms, meaning equity between students in the different participating countries, is not a realistic goal. I knew that the South African students have pointed out family circumstances, poor technological infrastructure and language as obstacles for participation and communication within the ICM-programme. But there was nothing in the previous reports about gender. Focus for my interest here are the female South Africa students at this programme. How do they experience their studies at the ICM-programme compared to male South African students? How do the female South Africa students balance between external demands and internal needs? What do they identify as obstacles and possibilities of being a student at an Internet-based, intercontinental, master-program?

2. The ICM-programme has a number of aims defined in the syllabus. As a student you are, for instance, supposed to learn how to learn and teach globally, use global connective technologies, understand globalization discourses and develop cultural sensibilities and sensitivities and develop an equality perspective on learning. But what is globalization for a South African student? How do they receive the intercultural perspective of the course? Why do South African students sign up for an intercultural course?

2. Learning by interviewing

2.1 Why personal interviews?

To collect research-material for my degree thesis I did personal interviews with both female and male South African students at two of the cohorts. For cohort I had to do the interviews by mail. Even if the female students were in focus for this study I interviewed male students to have something to compare with. In the beginning I had the ambition to also do additional interviews with Swedish students but after coming home from South Africa I changed my mind. I had already enough interviews and needed to limit my material. Just before leaving for CT I got a list of 25 still active, or recently graduated, students at the ICM. Nine of them lived in, or nearby, Cape Town and these were the ones I contacted prior to my visit. For different reasons, mentioned on page 18, I only met five of them but had the opportunity to do a personal interview with a student living in Eastern Cape.

A positivistic, quantitative approach could have been a way to collect material for this report. By using a structured questionnaire, and let all students at ICM-programme fill in the form, I could have been able to collect at least quantitative data. But my interest had nothing to do with numbers, nor did I seek definite answers. I wanted to talk to people and, through the dialogue, discover and understand individual views and experiences. Since my pre-knowledge of the students was limited I wanted to be able to rephrase, explain and raise new questions depending on what the informants said. I wanted to have the possibility to find patterns and tendencies that I did not know I was looking for by digging deeper into individual circumstances. Listen, interpret and maybe get back to the informants if necessary. With that purpose, qualitative research is recommended by several scholars like, for instance, the Swedish sociologists Karin Widerberg⁸, Bengt Starrin and Per-Gunnar Svensson.

“Qualitative methods withhold the requirements needed for greater intimacy and openness towards the phenomena we want to study.”⁹

If there were, indeed, differences in activity between female and male students, would these show through the students themselves? I also knew that the students at the ICM-programme

⁸ Widerberg (2002)

⁹ Starrin, Svensson (1994), p. 147

have had to answer different evaluation-questionnaires. One of them was in fact sent out at the same time I was going to Cape Town. I therefore suspected the students to be quite tired of questionnaires. These circumstances, together with the fact that I really wanted to meet the students personally, also supported a qualitative approach.

The cultural, and sometimes social, discrepancy between me and the South Africans could be a disadvantage when doing individual interviews. The fact that I had to use English in the interviews, in other words another language than my native, could also be an obstacle for deeper understanding and sensibility for connotations and all that is "unsaid". Nevertheless, the questions I raised needed to be penetrated on an individual level and I therefore used a tape-recorder and a field-diary to minimize potential misunderstandings due to cultural and/or linguistic causes. During the interviews I seldom felt that the use of English was a hindrance. If I did not understand, I asked the informant to explain and vice versa.

I chose individual interviews as the main research method. But I also had to do two mail-interviews since my informants in cohort 1 lived far from Cape Town. An interview by mail has a lot of disadvantages. First of all, it gives much less material than the personal interview since people talk more freely than they write. Another disadvantage is that you, as the researcher, can't be sure that the informants understand the question correct. In the dialogue you can express and explain the underlying thought behind the question in a way that you can not do in a written questionnaire. You can't observe the informants first reaction, whether they find the question uncomfortable or inadequate or whatever, since you can't register their body-language. You don't know if they hesitate in answering or just come up with a connecting thought that could be more useful than the actual answer to the question. In a written interview you simply can not follow up the answers as in a personal interview.

On the other hand, the written interview gives a well-thought and compressed answer to the question. It is written by the informant so there could not be any misinterpretation by the researcher. The material is already written and therefore much easier to handle for the researcher. Still, I would not have used this way of interviewing if I could avoid it.

2.3 The interviews

Knowing I was going to meet busy working adults meant that I had to prepare the interviews well. In Cape Town my assumptions were proven to be correct. There was never more than two hours, sometimes only one, for each interview. Since I needed to be both well-prepared and flexible at the same time, a high degree of standardization could be used but a low degree of structured questions. By standardization I mean that I prepared a set of questions as guidelines for myself and the informant, but often used the questions in different sequences depending on how the dialogue went on. At every new interview I also rephrased some of the questions, excluded some or added new ones depending on what the informant said or how we understood each other. By unstructured questions I mean that there were no pre-constructed answers. I left the answers, and whatever time they needed, to the informants. I also used probing, a concept within the technique of interviewing, that has to do with keeping the dialogue vivid by using comments like “I don’t understand, explain to me” or “interesting, tell me more about that”. Patel and Tebelius write:

*“Probing has a motivating function but also gives the interviewer control over the interaction. The interviewer can use probing when she gets an incomplete answer, when she doesn’t get an answer to the question, when the informant remains quiet or if the informant says she/he can not answer the question.”*¹⁰

Before meeting the students I did three interviews with teachers (two course facilitators and one tutor) at the ICM-programme, in Sweden as well as CT. The purpose of these interviews was to receive a deeper understanding of the ICM-programme and its students. I asked about the structure of the programme, the intentions behind the programme and what kind of students it is supposed to address and what kind of students the ICM has. But I also wanted to hear the teacher’s personal reflections upon the programme, their roles as teachers in a virtual environment and in an intercontinental context, their experiences of Internet as a pedagogical tool, problems they have encountered and what potentials Internet-based learning has.

I used one set of questions for the teachers and another for the students. Even if the students had been on the programme for a different period of time, I used the same basic questions. The

¹⁰ Patel, Tebelius (1987), p. 106

main-questionnaires are attached to the report as appendix nr. 1 and 2.

The informants did not see the questions beforehand (except in the mail-interviews). They decided where they wanted the interview to take place but they knew it had to be a reasonably quiet environment since I was going to use a tape-recorder. The students were all working so we either met at their workplaces or at a restaurant/café during lunchtime (not always that quiet) or just before working hours. I started the interview by presenting myself on a personal and professional level and explained the purpose of the interview and my field-study. I also asked for the informants consent to use the tape-recorder and gave her/him the possibility to read the transcriptions before published in this report. The informants seemed comfortable with this setting and I thought they were all very easy-going, open and talkative. I ended up doing personal interviews with six (three female and three male) students, two teachers and one tutor/evaluator (all female).

I also did two mail-interviews with one female and one male student from cohort 1. On top of that I did a shorter, non-taped, personal interview with a former male student who dropped-out from the ICM-program. This opportunity occurred unexpectedly and, at that time, I did not have my taper-recorder with me. That is also why I have used this particular material only as background-data for my own understanding of what kind of problems students in S-A might have to deal with.

2.4 Methodological problems and weaknesses

I first contacted the head-teacher at UWC, Shirley Walters, in August 2003 and we decided the field-study to take place in November the same year. I wanted to prepare the students for my arrival one month in advance but when asking for the student's e-mail-addresses I was confronted to administrative routines and regulations that were quite different from what I am used to. The University of Western Cape demanded a formal recognition of my project-work together with an ethical clearance. Without these documents I was not allowed to address the ICM-students. Coming from a country where practically all information is public this unexpected and harsh bureaucracy felt awkward at the time. But I am glad these demands was revealed to me in advance when I still had time to do something about it. The required documents were produced at Malmö University

and sent to UWC. The first document, recognition of me (as a student at Malmö University) and my project-work, was rejected by UWC. The second document passed and I eventually got the formal approval one and a half week before leaving for CT. Today I can understand the university's concern for the student's integrity, being in the eyes of a whole world's interest. But except for the worry this delay caused me, I also discovered that some of the ICM-students thought I contacted them very late. I actually suspect I missed out on a couple of them due to this fact. It was generally harder to make contact with the female students than the male students. Often, I had to call or mail the female students several times before I could arrange a meeting. That also explains for the fact that only four of the total eight students are female. I missed out on the others for different reasons; one had recently become a mother, one had lost her job and struggled with that, one was out of town etc. But when I met the female students they were as talkative and cooperative as their male counterparts.

Another weakness in my study was revealed during the actual interviews. Since I was living and staying in Cape Town under a limited period of time, because UWC is situated there and several students live in or nearby the city, I planned to interview only Capetonian students. But after the first interviews I realized that these students are quit privileged compared to fellow-students in for instance the Eastern and Northern Cape. In CT the students often have access to computers, if not at home at least at work or at UWC and Internet-café's. Students in the Eastern Cape might have to drive 2-3 miles to reach an Internet-connected computer. So after one week in Cape Town I investigated the possibility to go to Kimberly for one or two days, a city in the Eastern Cape where three of the students lived. Unfortunately, the domestic flight-tickets were much too expensive for my personal budget but, luckily, one of these students suddenly appeared in CT during my stay and we met at the UWC. On the other hand, I also want to stress that only a minority in Cape Town have access to Internet. One of the teachers said:

"You know, people don't necessarily have to live in the Northern Cape to not have access. You can live in Kayelitsha (one of the biggest townships in Cape Town) and have the same problem."

Although cohort 1 had the opportunity to get SIDA-funded computers, the IT-infrastructure has development rapidly in The Western Cape and at UWC during the last three years. It was obvious that cohort 1 had to struggle much more with ICT-problems than cohort 3. A teacher told me:

“One student, she didn’t get the SIDA-funding, she didn’t have a job, she didn’t have a computer at home, she had never touched a computer before she started (at ICM). Her only access to the computer was at UWC...And she said: “I got so frustrated, because I spent an hour in a queue waiting to get access.”

Three years ago we didn’t have the banks of computers that we have today. The new group, these guys are all computer-literates and they are...I mean they were teaching us in the orientation-programme what we should do with Blackboard, because they were experimenting and just very comfortable with the media. They are all...financially secured. They are not going to have a problem with a lot of the things that these guys (pointing at cohort 1)...the barriers that they had to overcome, they really aren’t.”

The third weakness has to do with overrepresentation of students in cohort 3. Of the eight students interviewed, four of them belong to cohort 3 and had only been on the program for two months. The overrepresentation was caused by the fact that the last cohort was the biggest group with active students and, unfortunately, only two of the students in cohort 2 and none in cohort 1 lived in Cape Town. I therefore decided to complete my material with two mail-interviews with students from cohort 1.

The fact that half of the informants came from cohort 3 had another bias. Learning from the ICT-problems with cohort 1, the facilitators of ICM-program changed the specific requirements for students to be enrolled. Today you must show your computer-literacy in written as well as have access to your own connected computer. This means that the students in cohort 3 don’t have to face technological obstacles as previous students. And I was also afraid that they would have been too short on the program to really have opinions about the questions I wanted to ask. But in the interviews I soon discovered that these students had been so active on the course that they could already present well-thought opinions about and experiences from Internet-based learning, negative as well as positive.

A fourth problem, not a methodological but technical one, was the recording-quality of two of the interviews. Back in Sweden again, when doing the transcriptions, I noticed that two of the recordings were disturbed by a sound from fans or AC in the room. Both these informants spoke English with a strong accent and although I followed their arguments when we met, there were parts I did not comprehend when listening to the tape. However, I believe the most important parts went through and I collected enough material to compensate for the partial losses.

So what did I learn from these mistakes? Well, the most important is that thorough preparations and pre-knowledge is essential for the success and outcome of a field-study. Sometimes I am too impatient and eager to get going and blind for things that might stop me. If I would do a similar field-study today, I would start investigate possible formal or informal hindrances against my work in due time. I would also read more about the phenomena I want to study before, and investigate if there are any potential circumstantial changes vital to, the phenomena I want to study before choosing informants and place for the field-study.

2.5 Additional research-data

When doing research, a good thing is to combine methods for broader and deeper understanding of the phenomena or problem you want to study. Initially I thought of combining the interviews with personal media-diaries. These diaries could possibly have added more material to my report by showing the individual students media-patterns and activities at the course-site. However, I decided not to use them for a number of reasons. The risk of only getting back diaries from those who are very active was one reason (the problem of overrepresentation). Another was increased activity, due to the fact that you are supposed to show what you actually are doing for someone else (the problem of influence). And last, but not least, it was not easy to pick the "right" period for the media-diary. As a student on an Internet-based course there are periods when you are less active on the site but, still, very active reading literature or writing assignments.

I also thought of using log-files from the course-site that could have shown the actual activity on an individual level. This way, I would get quantitative data that could serve as a complement to the qualitative material. But in discussions with the teachers on the ICM-program it became clear that the log-files produced were highly questioned. First of all the teachers thought the numbers of hits were incorrect since they often counted up to unreasonable high numbers. So what did the log file exactly measure? One teacher expressed her confusion:

"You can look at the logg-files but you don't know what you are looking at. What you have to do to be logged-on, is it only to turn it on? Is that

enough? Does it mean you got to go into a particular place? I think its unreliable, cause what does a hit mean?"

We also have the problem of the "witness learner" (see p. 25), people who actually log-on and watch the others activity but do not contribute themselves. And then we have the students who have access-problems. One female student said:

"I have had, on a continuing basis, problems with my machine...So what I do is I go in and dump the things, I print them. Then I read through them, look at the tasks and see what I have to do. I prepare them and go here (to work) to put my messages on, read the responses and respond. But I prefer to do this at home."

This behaviour was also confirmed by one of the teachers:

"It is about the visible and the invisible. Because among certain students, you can't equate participation with visibility...So, a number of the students are very mobile and they travel a lot and they don't have lap-tops, and they might be travelling on the country-side and there's no any electricity or what ever. So, you will find that they take hard-copies of things, readings whatever or working on an assignment but not on-line."

The log files could possibly serve as a complement in a study-environment with no access-problems. Therefore I left them out.

What I have used as additional, and valuable, research-material is different evaluation-reports written by, or on behalf of, the facilitators of the ICM-program. One was done at the same time I visited Cape Town. The evaluator is also a tutor at the ICM-program and before I met the students, we had a long talk about the questions we both wanted to raise and we realized we had coexisting interests. But the ICM-questionnaire consisted of structured questions, put to all South African students. My interviews, with unstructured questions, left more space for the individual responses of the Capetonian students. We decided to go along as planned. Since my field-study has some methodological weaknesses, the use of the ICM-programmes own evaluation-report ¹¹ as a comparative material, becomes even more important. This report was finalized in March 2004 and I mainly relate to these results in chapter 4 and 5 where I present and discuss the results of my field-study and put new questions forward.

¹¹ Watters (2004)

I also wrote a personal field-diary on a daily basis. In the diary I wrote down all sorts of general and specific reflections, additional information I got, meetings with others than the informants and experiences of the city and the surrounding landscape. The diary had a combined function as a practical and administrative note-book as well as a therapeutic tool. It was my loyal companion on this adventure.

2.6 Ethical considerations

During my field-study, in the writing-process and interpretation of the material, I have:

- Respected all informants meaning that individuals were being treated as autonomous agents. The tapes and transcriptions were handled safely, written material kept in locked files to which only I had access, and all tapes were erased after transcription.
- Used informed consent meaning that all material was collected through information, comprehension and voluntariness. All informants were told that they, before my examination, could be excluded from the report on demand. All informants had also the right to read their individual contributions.
- Made sure to not do harm to my informants meaning publish information that they did not want public.
- Not fabricated any data or copied material from other sources. Nor have I tried to benefit from information revealed in the field-study.

These ethical considerations, together with an ethical clearance and project-certification, were sent to the Registrar of UWC in order to get the formal permission to contact and interview the students at ICM.

3. Internet and education

3.1 Internet for globalization and social change

Although critical voices have been raised against Internet (as an arena for real cultural encounters and a tool for global change) others, especially Castells, argues that ICT plays an important role in driving social and economic development, as well as promoting globalization. ICT is, for instance, more and more used within distance education. Castells talks about the importance of knowing how to get knowledge in the modern society. It requires the capacity of finding necessary information among billions and billions websites and documents, but also to be prepared to re-skill and re-think in an ever-changing work-environment. The E-economy demands E-learning to become a permanent and vital part of working-life.¹²

Bauman, on the other hand, speaks about the interactivity of the new media as “a gross exaggeration”.¹³ Instead, he says, it is a “one-way-medium”, unlikely to ever become universal since those who eventually get access, have to make their choices within the frames set by the institutional elite. Gail Hawisher and Cynthia Selfe question the very concept of “world-wide-web” since there are large segments of the world that are disconnected and thereby, left outside the technological globalisation. Those who lack the appropriate tools and understanding of how to use the web, will they be even more isolated from the developed world? Hawisher and Selfe also argue against Internet as a neutral, cultural, literacy environment. Instead they ask in what ways the system itself is culturally determined, structured and ordered?¹⁴ The global-village narrative, they say, is a construction grounded in Western politics, economics and culture and this view is too reductive.

We do not know if the literacy environment, offered on the web, really is contributing to a globalized world in its real sense. For instance, what does the use of English as the primary language of the web, mean for the exclusion of people?

Let us leave ICT for a moment and instead, go deeper into the word “globalization”. Globalization, as a concept, has been, and still is, so used that it is almost worn out. Globalization encompasses everything and therefore nothing. Nevertheless, it

¹² Castells (2002)

¹³ Bauman (1998), p. 53. *Consider that he wrote this four years prior to Castells.*

¹⁴ Hawisher, Selfe, (2000)

still is an important issue in contemporary debate among scholars and politicians, sometimes ideologically very far from each other. For the anti-globalization-movement, globalization is synonym with the western finance market, moving capital and production around the world, exploiting nations and local workforce. The anti-globalization-movement does not necessarily protest against a global market but to the unfair distribution of the profits. For others, globalization has to do with westernization, meaning by new media forcing western ideas upon “the others”. In the 1980s and 1990s a more liberal view argued that globalisation only partly is connected with westernization. That it is a more decentralised phenomenon, under less control of nations and large corporations than one would think. The core of this view is that globalization is extending the basis of cultural exchange and communication by open up new lines between different groups, offering new types of bonding and solidarity.¹⁵ It claims that new media, by crossing national, and cultural, borders, gives people access to information and ideas normally withheld from them. And that globalization, therefore, have a dimension of empowerment.

3.2 Internet-based education - a democratic right?

In the network society, universities find themselves operating in a global context rather in a, so often, regional one. The growing, world-wide, demand for higher education and the need to make place for students with varied backgrounds (so called non-traditional students) are two major challenges for universities that has supported the development of alternative pedagogy and new ways of learning. Modern societies have also acknowledged the positive effects of life-long-learning, both for its economical benefits and the removal of social inequalities, which demands educational opportunities regardless of time and space. But it is universities that already have a significant commitment to distance and open educations that has been in the forefront of adopting new technologies in order to increase access to education and training opportunities.

Distance education operations have evolved through the following four generations: first; the Correspondence Model based on print technology, second; the Multi-media Model based on print, audio and video technologies, third; the Tele-learning Model, based on applications of telecommunications technologies to provide opportunities for synchronous communication, and

¹⁵ Curran, Park (2000)

fourth; the Flexible Learning Model based on on-line delivery via the Internet.¹⁶

Using Internet as a platform for learning and education demands technical resources, organizational changes, revised curricula's, new pedagogy and new types of human resource capacities. Although it is a low-cost-education, one also has to have initial funding to build up the technology and competence required. But if an Internet-based course should reach success, it also must be designed to meet the student's technical abilities and pedagogical demands.¹⁷ Critical success factors in on-line-working have proven to be for instance competence among group-members and shared understanding of the goals. This is, of course, not an easy equation when a course consists of students from different countries and cultures. A study done at the Open University Business School in UK in 1996-1997 revealed that the on-line-teamwork added value to the learning-experience for the students but they also found this teamwork much harder to manage than they had anticipated. Despite knowing one another they also felt a need for initial trust-building before working together. Many students witnessed of technical problems but also lack of time (for participation and readings of others contributions), lack of response to their own contributions and a preference for face-to-face or synchronous (for instance telephone) contact.¹⁸

The virtual classroom is fundamentally different from the traditional face-to-face education, and therefore demanding a lot from its participants, students as well as teachers. One big difference is that communication between students and teachers is done through the written word. But Internet-based education also open new possibilities by allowing working adults, students in remote areas, the disabled, seniors, and many more to continue their education almost wherever they are and whenever they choose. Actually, distance-education is probably better suited for adults since a high degree of motivation, discipline and maturity is needed to fulfil the courses. With Internet-based distance learning, the instructor and student are usually geographically, and sometimes culturally, remote from each other. And the notion of Internet as a neutral space, where participation and communication is taken place on equal terms, is highly questioned. Authors like Bauman, Robins and Hawisher/Selfe have all presented arguments against the ideas of transnational

¹⁶ Taylor

¹⁷ Lockwood, Gooley (2001)

¹⁸ Lockwood, Gooley (2001), p. 63-70

communities, or cultural globalization if you will, and ICT for communication and cultural encounters on equal terms.

There is a major difference between the communication in a traditional classroom (real-time verbal communication) and in the virtual classroom (asynchronous written communication). Where the latter is more reflective and precise, the communication in the traditional classroom is more spontaneous and less structured. In the traditional classroom, *education* is delivered by the lecturer who plays the leading role. In the virtual classroom the students *learn* on their own terms. The students are the leading actors while developing their knowledge, together or alone.¹⁹

The other side of the time- and space-less coin is loneliness. As a student at an Internet-based course you are, to a high degree, left alone with your studies and your writing. But the virtual student's "anonymity" has also been proven to have somewhat unexpected positive effects.²⁰ Instead of being an impersonal environment, the virtual classroom seems to stimulate the students in getting very (almost *too*) personal with each other. This situation was also confirmed by one of the male ICM-students:

"There were somebody who said that she did her BA with 500 students and she said; "Maybe I knew two of them. And now I know everybody" ... I think the group..once you get used to the navigation and everything, the lack of physicality, the lack of personal contact..it shouldn't really be an issue. Because it's not a personal thing."

Internet-based courses are knowledge building communities. And even if everyone's active participation is essential for the individual and total outcome, one must also keep in mind that everyone is not able to show up on the website on a regular basis but could still get a sufficient learning experience. This type of student is referred to as "the witness learner".²¹ Students that seem to be inactive, or even regarded upon as drop-outs, can suddenly appear again at the end of a course/seminar and show that they have learnt a considerable amount on their own. Passive participants can be active learners. One of the teachers said:

"I have a theory that..a lot of students whose language is not English are voyeurs. Who go on the site and read what other people are saying

¹⁹ SOU (1998:83), p. 95

²⁰ SOU (1998:83), p. 80

²¹ Lockwood, Gooley (2001), p. 219

but don't say anything themselves. Those are the Swedish and some of the South African student. There are certain people who do very well on the course, and in the class. Who seem to be very active, and will contribute quantitatively, a lot. And there are students, who according to the stats (logfiles) seem to spend quite a lot of time on the site but you can't actually see what they've done."

The virtual university is often described as a university without walls, unconstrained by its physical location and with global connections of potential learners, learners, teachers and researchers.²² This view, however, is not shared by everyone. Goddard and Cornford express their skepticism towards the high expectations of ICT for social development and claims that student's relationships with the new technology are more complex than the educational facilitators like to admit.²³ And Strydom challenges the concept of "African Virtual University" as being more a way for rich institutions of gaining new markets in the commercial competition than a useful solution for the poor and rural.²⁴ The closing of the digital divide can simply not be done without relevant infrastructure. And the poor regions of South Africa still lack that infrastructure.

3.3 Globalization within education

Both Internationalisation and globalisation have been key-concepts within higher education policy debate and research since the 1990s. Today, a university can no longer respond to only one society. It has to respond to governments, local and national interest groups, international partners, students, labour market, industries and so on. For the contemporary university it is, in fact, strategically important to be internationalized. Increased competition for students, researchers and funds, as well as reforms like the Bologna Process, forces universities all over the world to act and cooperate over national borders. But it is also interesting to think that the university always have been perceived as an international institution (compared to other major institutions in a society) since students, to a high degree, tend to be trained to become national functionaries. In this perspective, the general university is a national institution.²⁵

²² van der Molen (1999), p. 145

²³ van der Molen (1999), p. 134

²⁴ Enders, Fulton (2002)

²⁵ Enders, Fulton (2002)

Internationalisation and globalisation are, more or less, important issues in higher education. But in the debate, there are critical voices against globalization of higher education. Their arguments are mainly that this would be disadvantageous to smaller countries and decline the quality of education.²⁶

There are several networks for international cooperation within distance education. EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities) and ICDE (International Council for Distance Education) a Norwegian NGO in cooperation with UNESCO who has a strong interest in open and distance education as a means of providing solutions for different development issues. ICDE has two major priorities on its agenda: One is the development of ICT in education, and the risk of treating education as a marketable product at global level. The other one is the digital divide, and how to deal with it at all levels: grass-roots, national, global.²⁷

The problem of cultural differences, and diversity in distance education, was brought forward by Hofstede²⁸ already twenty years ago. Granger and Benke²⁹ points out that there are multiple distances to be navigated in distance learning programmes. Distances related to knowledge, prior skills, language, culture, context, learning patterns, goals and motivations. What students need, their interests, goals, and motivations, opposed to the actual goals and motivations of learners.

The 2003 spring-edition of Journal of Accelerated Learning and Teaching analyzed the learning styles of students in Web-based Instruction (WBI). But also showed the strains put upon the teachers when they have to adjust to WBI.³⁰ While working to meet the pedagogical demands of the new media, they discover that it has a considerable price in terms of time, effort and resources. One of the ICM-teachers said:

"I think one of the biggest challenges, of working on the web, is that it changes your workpatterns.. So what happens it that I do most of my computer-work at home...I do most of my teaching from home. And that means at night or early in the morning, or at the week-ends. So most of this work happens outside normal work-time."

²⁶ Enders, Fulton (2002), p. 117

²⁷ www.icde.org (2004)

²⁸ Hofstede (1980)

²⁹ Granger, Benke (1995)

³⁰ Journal of Accelerated Learning and Teaching (2003)

With Internet-based education, both teachers and learners have to adjust to a new learning context. But from a globalization-perspective, what is more optimal than students and teachers living very far from each other? With their different perspectives, the learning-process could be enriched by the geographical and cultural distance. This view is shared by several facilitators of distance-learning courses, and also by teachers and students at the ICM. One teacher expressed:

“From the beginning I thought that dialogue cross differences, cross the first and the third world was very important...You can’t talk about a global course or talk about global learning without having the third world being very present.”

3.4 South African women and Internet

In countries where citizens still struggle for reliable sources of food, water, medical care and educational opportunity, bridging the digital divide may seem like a lofty goal indeed. But adding to cultural and technological differences comparing to the western world there is also a digital divide between men and women within the third world. It would be easy to assume that the application of technology is gender-neutral. However, there are many signs showing that women in developing countries rarely benefit to the same extent as men from projects promoting the use of ICTs. It is proven that African women do not have equal access to ICT as African men. In fact, the vast majority of African women are excluded from the new technology. The World Bank Group presented, in 2001, the numbers of Internet users in Africa and the percentage of female users. In South Africa only 3 % of the population had access to Internet and, of them, only 19 % percent were women.³¹ Later statistics reports of radical changes but the reliability of this source is hard to estimate. NUA, a resource for Internet trends and statistics, reports that 49 % of South African Internet users are women, but they, on average, spend half as much time on-line as their male counterparts.³²

The question of gender within distance-education has been in focus for many research projects during the last years. In a report, by the Swedish Ministry of education, some of these results where presented.³³ It stated that distance-learning has given

³¹ Worldbank (2001)

³² NUA, (2002)

³³ SOU (1998:83), p. 80

women new possibilities to education, especially in countries and cultures where women still are expected to stay at home as a house-wife and mother. The possibility of combining homework with education has, in fact, led to a notion of distance learning as especially suitable for women. A German study found that women feel as isolated as men (in this context) but they experience this isolation much more negative to their studies than men. The researchers drew the conclusion that this had more to do with women's need for cooperation and teamwork than with the practical obstacles.

If the digital gap is over-bridged, African women tend to struggle more than men in combining learning and networking with other responsibilities and demands. Maud Larsen, a former student at Com Dev, studied a cyber forum for female journalists in Africa. She found that the women, although having access to Internet, felt a conflict between the demands of family and/or employers and their personal need for education. Larsen writes:

"This continuous balance-act often led to feelings of insufficiency." ³⁴

The problems of balancing family-life with studies appeared again and again in my interviews. One female student said:

"Most of my study-time I try to set up outside my family-time. So it would be either early in the morning which means that I have to up before 4 o'clock. I have to spend about two hours in the morning reading or being on line or whatever. At night I find that my energies are exhausted so I keep the non-academic things, that don't require a lot of thinking, after hours."

A gender-positive aspect of Internet-based distance-learning was put forward in a report from Lund University, Sweden. The researchers found that conversations in virtual space supported women's participation. Many studies have shown that the quiet students in a traditional classroom often are women. But in the virtual classroom all students can speak out since everyone, in principle, has an equal chance to participate. The virtual classroom is, from that point of view, much more democratic than the traditional.³⁵ This perspective is shared by B. Filip, a scholar and consultant:

"In traditional societies where female enrollment in formal education is faced by unease of conservative cultures, e-learning may present a

³⁴ Larsen (2001), p. 52

³⁵ Nilsson, Nilsson (2003), p. 8

channel of education that is neutral and does not involve direct interaction between the sexes thus facilitating female participation.”³⁶

One of my informants was on the same track. She was both an ICM-student and IT-project-manager. She said:

“And also the fact that it on-line give those people, that normally not speak, a sense of anonymity. They..(hmm)..that will give them a chance to construct their answer. It gives you that space to sit and think and contribute as well. It almost give you like that curtain you can hide behind and no ones sees you. So that can also be a disadvantage as well (laugh).”

Still, inhibiting factors for women’s participation in Internet-based education is diverse; lack of education and training, cultural and religious restrictions and inadequate ICT policies and infrastructure.³⁷ Unlike men, women have less chance to use a computer at office or go to public services like cyber cafes or tele-centres where they can have access to Internet. And given the high cost of PCs, Internet and telephone connections, most women cannot afford to pay their own computers to have access to Internet from home. As a consequence, women, more than men, in Africa are disconnected from the rest of the world. Considering these facts it would appear women in Africa have to deal with a “Catch-22”. Internet-based distance learning could in theory create more flexibility for the individual, and therefore be a way for education and new encounters for women who do not have the same personal freedom, and options in life, as men. But if women do not have access to Internet, what is left for them? And do African women have to sacrifice more than men when attending an Internet-based education? One of the female students said:

“You know, I don’t think we use and relate to technology the same way as when you come from north and knowledge-based societies. But I am lucky, I consider my self as one of the lucky ones.”

³⁶ Filip (2002)

³⁷ Diop (2003)

4. Voices of South Africa

4.1 The South African students at ICM

The students at the ICM-programme construct world-classes, coming from all parts of the world. But the majority comes from the four collaboration countries; Sweden, Canada, Australia and S-A. 31 South African students has registered for the ICM since 2001, 20 black/coloured and 11 white students, 12 women and 19 men. The average age is 40 but the range is 24-57 years. A third of these students have previously studied at UWC. The rest had often had some prior connection to the institution, either through friends or word of mouth before enrolling the ICM. Most of the students I interviewed had some kind of pedagogical profession, for instance working with workplace learning, teaching or teacher development. But they had a variety of workplaces from a NGO, a language-school, universities to an Insurance company. One student managed his own media-company.

My informants are four male and four female students, two white and six black/coloured. The three teachers are all white female. Five of the students where married and had younger children at home, one was divorced with a grown-up child. One still lived with her parents and siblings and another one lived in a relationship with no children. All informants worked full-time beside their part-time-studies. Two of them had graduated.

The reason for signing up for the ICM-programme differs of course between individuals. But in the ICM evaluation-report, most important for applying was the adult-educational perspective. Almost all of my informants worked one way or another as trainers or teachers, often for adults. Other important reasons for signing up (in the report) were the E-learning in itself and the globalization-perspective. What was mentioned by several in my interviews (but not an option in the ICM-evaluation) was to get a formal academic (master's) degree.

This part of the report presents the results of my field-study in Cape Town. For the reader to be able to get to know and understand the South African students better I let the students talk with their own voices. I want to reader to feel their presence and their comments withhold both individual analyses and knowledge. The South Africa students have so much to give us and it is a privilege for me to use this thesis as a channel for what

they have to say. Therefore I will, to a high degree use quotations, straight from the voluminous transcriptions.

Male student:

"And that's for me amazing about the course, when you see that everybody say that they want to change. Only one person, a student in Australia, talked about marks. And she was honest. Fair enough."

Female student:

"I applied to ICM to hone my skills and knowledge as a community development activist and stay abreast with the latest thinking in the field of adult education, adult learning and globalization."

Male student:

"I just think that education is a privilege. I have always thought so. And because it is a privilege, you and I, and all of us at that level, are also responsible for what's happening. It is up to us to make sure..that education is not being maintained...(ahm)..that it is active, that is relevant, that it is important. Because my children know nothing about Apartheid, and if we don't care for...If we don't tell them; "Look, that is what it was" from perspective, then they will learn nothing. The fact that everybody should have access to technology, that absolutely we must fight for."

Female student:

"When I read the advert in the paper and I realized that it (ICM) offered me something that would challenge myself; learning as a part of a global network. Because for me, whatever I have studied it has always been within a South African context."

Male student:

"I think adult education is a sadly neglected area in this country. We have something like 12 million functionally illiterate people in S-A, in a population of 44-45 million people. And you can imagine, half of them are adults, so we have massive problems on our hands. We have problems with crimes, unemployment and I believe that is one of the reasons why we have a high crime-rate. Because when people are uneducated, they are unemployable. The other thing is that I would like to derive some benefit from the ICM-course, by way of learning how people learn in other parts of the world. I want to learn from those experiences and see how I could possibly, maybe 2-3 years from now, get involved in the design and policy of a curriculum for adult education in S-A. That is my long-term goal. That is what I want to do."

Female student:

"I don't like pure academia. So I don't want to sit in a class where they just give me academic stuff and it can't link to what I do personally. So what I liked about the programme was that it did allow the opportunity

to bring your own experience to the learning situation and that was something that I found in the ICM course."

4.2 Learning and Internet

We know that people who actually have access to Internet in S-A are in minority. We also know that attending an Internet-course is very different from following a traditional classroom-course. Are the problems and possibilities universal or do they differ depending on who the student is and where she comes from? What do the students at ICM identify as problems and possibilities with Internet-based learning? It was obvious that the students had somewhat ambivalent feelings towards the media but the convenience of being independent of time and space and the access to competent teachers was mentioned by several as the main advantage.

Male student:

"For me, the fact that you can do it..asynchronysly..with people who are not in the room (ahm) and you work with top-academics in the staff, in three, four countries..(ahm)..I mean if you want to work with David Boud, you have to go to Australia. If you want to work with Madeleine, you have to go to Sweden....You don't have to do that. You can actually work with them so the physicality and time is not an issue...I have put my question in, while she (his studypartner) is sleeping now. By the time she wakes up and reads it and answers me I will read further. I think it is a huge benefit."

Female student:

"After completing the diploma course I thought; "Oh my goodness, I would really love to do a master's in adult learning, but I can not do it". For various reasons; holding down a full-time job and study, you really need to find a balance. Secondly, in my organisation we work as consultants, we do a lot of travelling, all over. I, myself, I work in the continent mainly South Africa, sometimes Eastern Africa. Yeah, we do quit a bit of travelling. The job takes us sometimes out of the continent. So the fact that I travel...I was looking for something that enabled me to study, without necessarily putting on the pressure to have to go to class."

Male student:

"There are a lot of advantages with an Internet-based course. First and foremost, I believe we are living in a global village. And because we are living in a global village this course allows us to interact with people across the world, it allows us to exchange ideas."

Teacher:

"Well, I think that Internet gives access to some people that don't have access. It's better than a material space distance-education course because you have an opportunity to interact. And you can get fairly quick responses...I think it depends on what you are comparing it to. If you compare it to another distance-education course it has the real advantage of..interaction..(ahm)..almost immediate. I think that the same problem that you find within any distance-course, is that the students feels isolated..(ahm)...you got to go on-line, you got to get response otherwise your isolation continuous...So I think there are the same problems within any distance-education course that also exists here, but at least you have the advantage of interaction."

Female student:

"The biggest advantage (with Internet-based learning) is that I don't have a set time for study. I don't have to travel to go to class. I know what I have to do so I can structure my own learning-time and calendar according to that. I don't have to go to class in the evenings when I am tired and I wouldn't understand $\frac{3}{4}$ of it because I am so tired I can't absorb it. I can do my studies when it best suites me."

Teacher:

"Students have access to that really good teacher, and the teacher can reach a far bigger audience than just this class of twenty. Particularly is S-A were good teachers are not...really common. They are quit hard to find. I think also..you seem to do a lot of more examples in an interactive mode on the web, and learning in fact, than if you're sitting in the classroom and everybody is doing the same example. I think it is a very dynamic way of learning."

Male student:

"But it is an odd thing for me and new to me. I used to hate just the thought of sitting in front of a computer and now I sit in front of the computer for hours. I feel like a child starting school again for the first time. And I love it! For me it is like having a new toy. But it can also be a very lonely experience".

The last student mentioned the loneliness in cyberspace. There are several other disadvantages, both for teachers and students.

Female student:

"What I have seen, at this university (UWC) is that the most challenging obstacle is resources. Most students don't have PC:s at home, some of them don't even have electricity. The second most challenging thing is computer-literacy. Every year we have...hundreds of students that we train, to be computer-literate and there are still thousands left."

Female student:

"When I travelled to deep rural areas (with no Internet access) I would download and print out the current discussions, read them when I had time and then respond over the weekend when I got back home. Often the discussion would have moved on and I would be reluctant to take the discussion back and so not respond. My constant travels did affect my participation."

Teacher:

"I don't think there are any advantages for the teachers, mostly disadvantages. For the student it is, of course, the evident; flexibility in time, to come in favour of an education on their own terms. But that is, perhaps, only rhetoric. The interesting thing is that what shows on the screen - the asynchronous dialogue - seems to be disconnected from time and space. But it isn't. It is, to a high degree, connected to time and space. Access to computers, work and family-situation decides when and how you participate in the education."

Female student:

"I have access, but I have had, on a continuing basis, problems with my machine. So that has created a lot of additional stress. That means that I have to make time at work to log-in, actually most of my studies I do at home. I don't have time to do it at work, my days are full. So what I do is I go in and I dump the things, I print them. Then I read through them, look at the tasks and see what I have to do. I prepare them and go here to put my messages on, read the responses and respond. But I prefer to do this at home."

Female student:

"The computer-literacy is very un-even in my group. Two men are extremely knowledgeable from a technological perspective, and there's a woman too. They are also very helpful but some of us felt quit.."Oh, will we survive, will we make it?" You acknowledge that there are people who can help you but in the end of the day it's a personal challenge. It's not fear but it is anxiety."

Male student:

"And there are no Internet-café's in my area. And then when you go to the Blackboard again you have to apologize, I mean, at some stage you get tired to apologize. I hate to come in and excuse all the time, so I felt..I have thought of leaving the course but my tutor has intervened and said "Of course, you will make it, come on", so I thought.."

Female student:

"The technical problems can wear you down, very seriously, in the beginning because the pace is very fast. If you lag behind, you've had it. You must stay with the pace. So that's the one thing in that...they set

up certain things and if you miss that dead-line, it impacts on other things that you are doing....It is also very costly. Immediately my phone-bill increases by 500 R a month....And then I think the third reason is definitely the remoteness. You are alone. Even though you got this virtual classroom but still you are alone. And it takes a lot of time to talk to people, because you have to figure out what to say. You can't just, as we are talking now, say what's on your mind. You first have to think about it, and then you have to write it, and put it down. And then you have to wait for somebody to respond"

The absence of fellow-students on-line is also a problem for those who are there. But teachers and students seemed to approach the problem of absence from different angles:

Teacher:

"It is about the visible and the invisible. Because among certain students there's..(ahm)...you can't equate participation with visibility. So, (ahm) because some of them will be very participative but not on-line. So, a number of the students are very mobile and they travel a lot, so..and they don't have lap-tops, and they might be travelling on the country-side and there's no any electricity or what ever. So, you will find that they take hard-copies of things, readings whatever or working on an assignment but not on-line. Or they might print out certain kinds of discussions, or whatever, and take it with them."

Male student (graduated):

"Other students seemed to experience huge problems with accessing and participating. Some learners simply never participated for what ever reason, but still seemed to be on the course. Students did not always seem to have all the required literacy skills. This is very difficult on an on-line course as you have no way of knowing whether they are even still on the course. I found this very frustrating."

The sense of loneliness seems to be present both among those who are on-line and those who are not, but for different reasons. One student explained silence as a combination of lack of confidence in the virtual classroom and absence of instruction/teachers. This student had created a solution to this problem:

"You can post the question to the lecturer, but it is not the same as having someone giving you input, who contextualize the reading. Now, it is difficult to put questions when you don't know what to ask. Sometimes, because it is on the web, because you are writing, you have to check yourself and you know; "Now, is that a stupid question?", "What will the others react to this?" Maybe it is stuff that they understand and you don't. So it is difficult because the web does expose

you. It exposes you in that you are putting things on it. I don't generally have problems with that because I just put it down the way that I think. If there are spelling-mistakes, so be it. It is as I am talking. But, that is the biggest down-fall for me. That you don't have a lecturer helping you to understand these things. So what we have done, me and another student, we meet on a regular basis. We link up, so if we are busy with an assignment or busy with readings, we set up a physical session. And we say, OK you read this part and I read that part and then we discuss what we have been reading. Let's talk about it, like last night I phoned her and said; "What the hell to you think they mean by that?" (Laugh).

This student arranged physical meetings with a fellow-student. And she is not alone. Most of the informants spoke of the importance of meeting the people you were supposed to work with IRL.

Female student:

"And also what we have done, we are a few students that meet everyday Saturday. So..that makes it much easier for us, we meet and we discuss and go on-line and that makes it more easier for us to... you don't feel so isolated. You don't feel alone."

Female student:

"It was good to meet the people face to face that one conversed with over the web. It made the communication more authentic as it is possible to create a persona on the web which is unrelated to you when one is only communicating virtually. You can in a sense "reinvent" yourself in the virtual world and be what you think people want you to be. It enhanced my communication with people after I met them face to face and got to see other facets of their personalities. After all, people are more than just their words which is mostly what one gets on the web. I need to interact with people by using my other senses too."

At the ICM-programme there are no formal physical meetings. If people want to meet IRL, they will have to do that on their own initiatives. However, in S-A the teachers have chosen to facilitate orientation seminars, at UWC, once in the beginning of each academic year. The purpose is two-folded; to get an orientation about the programme and its facilities and to meet teachers and fellow-students. But there is a third purpose. One teacher explains:

"We also felt that students need to be highly motivated in order..(ahm) to remain on the programmes...Because of they are normal working adults and time is precious, so one has to do whatever you can to keep people on the programmes. So we have found, we thought, and I think it

has been proven correct, that the physical getting together is extremely important to keep that group feeling like a group. So whereas you can't get together with everybody else, around the world at least, you need some kind of stronger sense of an identity within the South African community. And that's why..we've done that."

The importance of the physical meeting was confirmed by all informants, students as well as teachers. Some of the comments:

Male student:

"I think it (the orientation programme) was excellent. It was very important, because orientation is always, for me, like a gateway. It helps you through the door. You know when you come to an air-port...and you know that the flight to Stockholm goes such and such time but you have never been there. The way they build the airport is to make you feel comfortable, with the toilets, showers, coffee-shops. That also, for me, has a meaning when you study. You come to the university, many people don't know where the UWC is. I didn't know where the admin is, or the library."

Female student:

"It found the orientation-programme extremely useful. I think that..when you see the ad in the paper, you think "Oh, this is something you really would like to get on but I'm not a technical freak". I can find my way around the web and that's it. For me without the technological knowledge, and without the orientation, it would have been extra difficult to cope. To know exactly what's expected of you."

Teacher:

"For the first cohort it was obvious because at least half of them had never worked on the web before. And they would have really struggled without that orientation-programme, to get that confidence going, to feel that they were literate in that world and they would be..much slower to get involved if they hadn't..I think for some of them they would have given up before they even started because they really didn't know how to do it..so that was essential."

This teacher mentioned both problems of access and lack of self-confidence towards ICT. One of the students expressed that South African women feel, to different degrees, inferiority towards the Internet-media, but mainly due to lack of time and interest.

Female student:

"Let me give you an example from my family. I've got four sisters, and one of them has got a computer at home. My nephew has got a computer. My nephew..has a life, he spends thirty days on the web. Either early in the morning or late at night, it's part of his practice, this

is part of what he does. Because he thinks; "I need to know, I need to inform myself, I need to find this out". My sister, she has the equipment but she just uses the computer to type her assignments. So when I say to her: "You can use it much more effectively!" You see it's the matter of affinity."

On the other hand, most of the informants found it easy to use Blackboard for their study-purposes. And the fear of not being able to handle ICT was a reality amongst male students as well.

Female student:

"One does not need advanced computer skills to participate in Blackboard. In fact I started using the Internet in August 2001 when I started the course. No previous experience."

Male student:

"I had a lot fear, about whether I would be able cope on my own, logging on to Blackboard, setting up my pages. I am not a technical person, I had to get a friend coming to come over and do that for me. And once I got going, I realized I could learn from my partners and we became friends, and we set up a loose study-group."

Another side of the coin, which already was mentioned earlier, is the anonymity of the virtual classroom. Some finds that to be a problem, others to be an advantage or just a new way of getting to know people.

Teacher:

"I was talking to one of the other tutors and I said to him: "I suppose you are going on holiday now?" And he said: "No. I'm not." And then I realized he was in Australia and I had assumed he was from Sweden. I mean, your whole...relationship with the person is based on your images of them and I have had these pictures of the students in my head, so when I am e-mailing them and working with them I visualize who they are, but when I...I've never met them, I don't know what they look like."

Female student:

"It's funny, and maybe it's a mind thing, but they actually start to become real (laugh). I don't know, you build yourself a picture, in your mind. And it has nothing to do whether they have posted a picture or not of themselves. I mean, I haven't gone into the papers for half of the people. For me, they become real through their own engagement and their participation, in their contribution."

4.3 Balancing life

Attending a part-time course beside a full-time job is of course a huge challenge. The fact that the ICM is Internet-based was raised, by many, as a necessity for attending the programme at all. Despite technical obstacles, none of the informants wanted to change from Internet to traditional classroom-tutorial. On the other hand, it was evident that both students and teachers spent very much time on the course-site and with their books. Since they all were working, the studying had to take place off hours which means mornings, evenings and weekends. How do the students and teachers cope?

Teacher:

"And because you have a commitment, especially when you are teaching on the programme...and you have to set up the programme, each week you summarize what's happening and you set up the programme for the next week so therefore, what happens is your work floods your life."

Female student:

"I log-in at least every other day, some days I go in at morning and evening. That depends on the topic and how hooked you become. If it is like now, we doing research-methodology, which is more academic and it is a tedious process for me. If I'm hooked I actually stay with it. You post a message and you want to see what people have responded to it. You want to be a part of the conversation".

Male student:

"I try to spend at least four nights per week, in front of my computer. Anything between two hours and four hours every day."

Initially, before leaving for S-A, I had a theory that there might be a problem of gender-inequity at the ICM mainly for two reasons; South African women do not have access to Internet as men and women are also much more expected to take care of their families (both husbands, children and parents) beside their jobs. Apart from that, community-work is a time-consuming reality for many South Africans. So how and when are women supposed to be able to follow an Internet-based education? In my interviews I never put the gender-issue straight forward. Instead I asked if the informant could identify groups that might have problems attending an Internet-based course. Often the informant thought of race and, therefore, social status before gender, but when asking about their personal situation, how they balanced life, between the lines the gender-differences started to appear.

Female student:

"It is difficult because you need about 20 hours a week for the studies. I battle with the academic stuff so the reading takes me longer. And then you have to stay, you have to keep on with the on-line pace, so you got to log on to the website on regular basis. And then you have assignments and other stuff you have to prepare for. Most of my study-time I try to set up outside my family-time. So it would be either early in the morning which means that I have to go up before 4 o'clock. I have to spend about two hours in the morning reading or being on line, or whatever. At night I find that my energies are exhausted so I keep the non-academic things, that don't require a lot of thinking, after hours.

.....

I need to strive but I try to make sure that I get at least 5-6 hours of sleep. I do find that I run down quit often. When I come towards the end of a course I am finished. The other thing that I also do is over weekend. On a Saturday morning my kids like to take it easy because they also have to get up very early in the week. They have to travel with me to school. So at Saturday morning I can study for 4-5 hours."

Female student:

"I did not find a balance. The nature of my work entailed a lot of travelling - every week I was in a different part of the Northern Cape, Johannesburg or Cape Town either visiting projects or attending meetings or training. My life for the past 2 years has been work and studies with very little time for family.

....

When I was home during the week I would log on at night after 10 pm (after my daughter had gone to bed and I had performed all my family oriented tasks). Mostly I logged on at weekends. From about 10 am to 6pm on Saturdays and 2 till about 8pm on Sundays."

Female student:

"I try to bring the two together but also setting aside family-time so I make sure that it doesn't impacting on the intimate. It impacts on me because I don't get the sleep that I need but for me it is worth it because the learning experience that I get from the process is very valuable."

Female student:

"Well..a lot of people would say time-management is the answer, but I say "No, not really". Sometimes you plan but then something else pops up. So, to some degree time-management helps and planning your day etc, what needs to be done. But sometimes you find that you have to sacrifice certain thing. In my case it is my social life. Most of my time I spend at work or with my studies. I don't have much of a social life.... I am supposed to help out at home but since I am working now my domestic responsibilities are less. My mother cooks the food, she helps we with the work at home. But probably, that changes when I get married."

This student had not married yet and later on we talked about her future. She was extremely well-educated but seemed to be unsure about her professional career as a wife. She said:

"Ahmm, for me personally..If I can..It depends..I don't know how my husband will be..(thinking) I would like also, if I get children, I will like to stay home, taking care of them, but I will still like to do something from home. Maybe tutoring or working from home. I would like to, maybe, continue with my studies to keep myself going."

Male student:

"I have to set aside time but fortunately my kids, my family, have a kind of discipline and attitude that will allow me to study which means.. I need my evenings, and the ICM-course is essentially something I devote time to in the evenings. And..(ahm)..because we have an arrangement at home that my evenings are basically, Monday to Friday, they are free. From seven o'clock until early hours in the morning I can do my reading, I can do research. And because it is an Internet-based course I have the luxury to be in my room working from there."

One female informant talked freely about the gender-inequity as she saw it:

Female student:

"I would say, in my situation, I've got a slightly different situation....But I would definitely say that it is more difficult for women, because the way I set up my learning, I make sure that it does not impact on my family. And I try to accommodate it, whereas I think men, they don't think about that. They will just do it in a time that suits them. It has to do with the time you have available. Women, their free time, outside of work, is absorbed in other activities. The time that I'm not studying I have to do other things. When I go home, I have to make sure I am spending time with my daughter for her home-work, the little one. The big one, if she's got any projects where I can assist her, I need to make sure that I support her if she is studying and so on. The reason why women don't have access to Internet as men is because women do not have time to fiddle around the Internet. And that is also one of the reasons, when you asked me previous about my first experiences with the Internet, I mean, I would go into it when I really needed something. I really didn't had time to just play around. If you take my husband, I mean, before, he spent a lot more time on the Internet than I did. Because he could come and just play around and I just went in when I had to."

When interviewing both students and teachers I noticed an ambivalent position towards the gender-issue. One teacher said:

"..but I think it's maybe class, maybe your living and working circumstances as well. And the fact is..I think you..in the South African society, if you're male, and you've got a task to do, then the woman will pick up all the peaces around the male, and make sure that he's left alone to do the work. I think for a lot of women they don't have that situation, you know the men will still expect them to come home and cook even if they are whatever. So, yes, it is..I mean, you know..this guy here, he has basically not done the course at all because the university posted him in a position where there was no Internet-access and there was two hours drive to the nearest Internet. You know..and his father died."

Second teacher:

"So it's difficult..I mean I think that (ahm) from the first cohort we went through we had twelve students, four left the programme in the middle, (ahm) six have graduated so half of them have actually graduated, two are still in the..(ahm)..they still gonna finish their research-papers. But of those, it was more men that gone through, the two white men who were there got trough. I think that both of those white men are not married and don't have children. The two black woman, who haven't finished yet, have children, carrying family responsibilities..(ahm). So it's a tiny little group but you can see some gender- and colourpatterns. I think the over-layer of gender and race is fairly strong."

But problems of balancing life were mentioned by men as well:

Male student:

"I work at night. Luckily I am able to operate on 4-5 hours of sleep. I just work at night, and if I am really tired I take one or two days of. But, ja...that is basically how it works. Spending time with the children is very important..I don't...change that."

Male student:

"I balanced life mostly through negotiation. I had to give up some personal interests, such as hiking and long distance running, or reduce them. My family and partner sometimes got annoyed with me. I had to plan the time I was going to spend with them."

Of all my informants it was actually two men who talked loudest about their problems of balancing life. One of them had dropped out from the course and showed both anger and bitterness over this "failure". For the other man, his problems seemed more related to access and workload than family-responsabilities although he had two minor children. When I asked how he managed to balance his life he answered:

"To be honest it is quit demanding. Quit demanding. That is also why I am here, to catch up with my course. OK, when I was introduced to the

course it was stressed that it was important managing time. Hmm, but coming back to the reality...(inaudible)..it is very, very tuff. For example, we were told initially that we have to go on-line two times a week. But I mean, here we have computers that are easy to use. At home I don't have that access. At times we can be without Internet for two-three weeks ..(inaudible)..And the connections are very, very slow. In the winter I was disconnected for a month. So you can imagine, once you are connected again, you go to the Blackboard and you don't even know where to start. Aaah, it is tuff, I am telling you. And this years orientation-programme, when I got home and learnt that my brother..he had a stroke and he has been at the hospital. And my brother is like a father to me. He helped me with my studies. So it is very hard to balance. At times you feel like...you end up loosing things. When I can't participate on equal terms, I fall behind. I feel the lack of participation. But maybe the problems that I encounter, sometimes it has more to do with my work. It is so demanding.

4.4 Learning in a global world

So, why does one register for an Internet-based programme when access is so expensive or hard to reach? The possibility to combine studies with work seems to be the most important reason. But how important is the globalization-perspective and the possibility to communicate with people in other parts of the world? Well, according to the informants the global outlook was not unimportant when signing up. But it is interesting to see that the global dimension seems to make more sense and widen in importance once the communication and cooperation has begun. Both differences and mutuality starts to be evident.

Male student:

"I think globalization is more or less the same around the world, which means that migration, whether you migrate as a businessman for three days or you leave your country to get another one, will be easier to a certain extent. The other side of globalization is a little bit scary. Because there is an agreement upon what global standards are. Whether you agree on them or not, you will be subject to it."

Male student:

"And the students of this course, they are so supportive. They are always willing to help. You can really feel you are part of a family, a four-continent-family. You don't have to feel you are alienated."

Teacher:

"The networking, to get insights into other cultures and their learning, that is, actually, the big advantage with Internet-based courses. The

paradox of ICT-educations is that the students get very close, even on a personal level."

Later on in the interview she returns to the power of networking:

"Globalization is networking. The possibility to understand how things are in other parts of the world without necessarily go there."

Male student:

"The fact that we come from diverse cultures is a huge advantage. The fact that we come from different countries, different traditions, different languages, I think is one of the strengths of this course. Now we can get an absolutely global perspective, and that for me is a plus. So as far as I am concerned, the diversity of cultures is actually a huge incentive for me to do this course.

....

I didn't realize that my interest for globalization would be sparked as it has been by this course. I am extremely interested in globalization, to learn from others and implement that knowledge into my own practice. But globalization, for me, is learning how the world is dominated by one super-power."

Female student:

"The main advantage (of the global dimension at ICM) was the exposure to the educational situation in the continents involved. Main disadvantage is that the exposure was limited and of a cursory nature. Very little was done in real depth not even the discussions on globalization, which was a real pity.

Later on in the interview she returns with her criticism towards the content:

"The course material was too Eurocentric, not enough effort was made by the course conveners to include material from Africa, Asia and South America. The impression was created that there were no scholars writing in the areas we were studying which was largely an erroneous view and only reflected the bias of the course conveners."

Female student:

"The main, most amazing, experience for me, has been to be able to read about the experiences of people in other parts of the world. And sometimes you think your situation is unique, but when you hear people in north of Sweden talking about the situation that is happening on your door-step and you realize it is exactly the same thing happening, I think that is the richness of a virtual classroom. We have had student from Russia, she is studying in Sweden but she is relating to her experiences from Russia, from Mauretania. So you get to hear about those things that you never have been exposed to before, but still based

on a topic that you all can relate to. So I think that has been the most amazing experience for me."

Female student:

"I like to meet people, finding out about their countries and cultures and also to just develop myself, not only academically. To broaden my perspective in the world. I hope that in the end, I will be able to implement what I have learnt into my profession."

Male student:

"So my expectations is really to go to a place where I am being challenged but also my knowledge since I have been working in the business for twenty years and that's exactly what happens. The challenge is a lot in structure but it is a good challenge. So..I don't feel that I have to satisfy the professor, but I really feel that I have to work with my group, you know, and that's wonderful. And also within the group, and its dynamics..and I find it very exciting. Because, you know, people are on the other side of the world. And in fact, I am in more communication with my Canadian study-partner than I am with those who are here."

.....

"When we started with this orientation in the global world, it was easy for us because we immediately saw the differences. There was one student talking about her studies. I said to her: "You must remember this is a third world country so you can't really compare with Canada." She said: "Well, I can't really see the difference." In a third world country you could have 70 pupils in a classroom and one teacher. They can be from 7 to 17 in the rural area. So you see, those who are 7 and those who are 17, both of them are losing. So it is very difficult to say to you, what is applicable in Canada, is applicable here. In Canada or Sweden, they say: "We don't have that issue because here education is free." And I say: "Hold on, I'm sure you will have issues with the inuits and in Australia with the Aborigines". I don't know about Sweden but it could be the immigrants from Turkey or Jugoslavia who have exactly the same problem because they are marginalized, not by law but by language. They don't speak the same language, so...these are the global issues."

And it is vital to remember that the cooperation between continents involves not only the students but teachers as well.

Teacher:

"And I think that....often I found that I have more to do with my ICM-colleagues than I do with the colleagues across the road. Because in fact it is structured, you have to be together for certain number of days. And you never with your own colleagues, you know for so many days, you know, in the same place, talking about the same thing."

Another teacher:

"We are all being challenged by the ICM because of its different notions of learning, what counts as knowledge. In terms of a formal, traditional, university, higher education there was a very narrow view of what that kind of meant. But I think that within all higher education, at the moment, these boundaries are being pushed. A new understanding of things and that we can learn from each other."

Language is an issue, for all students at ICM. Those who have English as their native language have, of course, an advantage.

Teacher:

"We can see that those who have English as their native language are also those who do well at the course. This year we have many more Australian and Canadian students and it is obvious that they dominate the discussions at the website. "

But the informants talked less about the grammatical/semantic issues and more about the differences between the written and spoken word, the academic/pragmatic polarization and/or the North-South-divide.

Male student:

"It's one way to do it in academic writing, because it's very formalized, and another one is to actually say. And that's where you can see the feedback you get..at the beginning there were more misunderstandings of what you had to say. Like language, you know, we say certain words in South African English which the Canadians don't do. (Ahm)..And the Swedish partner is in London, and she also battles sometimes to express what she wants to.. So there was a lot of that..so because you don't sit with a person it's more difficult to say: "Sorry, what do you mean?" It takes time. But there are other issues, all that affects the discourse..with our other students in Sweden or...I think it is less with the Europeans than the North-Americans. Because I think in Sweden..by definition you are more interested what is happening in the world. Whereas North-Americans are..(ahm) exclusive, not because they want to, but because their system is exclusive. So they think Africa is lions and Indiana Jones."

Female student:

"I think that, for me, the Internet creates that equal playing-field. I have categorized people, but mainly into the kind of pragmatic and academic. (laugh.) So I have taken some of these high-fluted people that are talking academic and I have put them into my own category. But generally the website does allow for the level-playing-field....But when I am completely confused, I found it more easy to speak to (name), cause we come from the same cultural back-ground. And we can help each other

to put this into context, to explain what it is all about, and then I can take it and put it out."

Male student:

"..You see, the others come from first world countries, we come from a third world country. Others, they don't understand when we have IT-problems, they ask "What are the IT-department doing?"....You try to make them understand, "this is the situation", but... That impedes negatively. I believe so."

One of the teachers expressed her concerns for the S-A-students in the global context as:

Teacher:

"All you know about the students is actually what they tell you and, of course, a little bit of their background on the, you know, a little bit, a little sketches they give. But you don't know anything else. So you make huge assumptions and they make huge assumptions about who you are, and what you are and what you're doing. Now I think that the big challenge for us is to...find a way of...at least we have put it in one of our curriculum review, is to test ourselves ..on how far we are able to build in this continual reflexion on the cultural sensitivities and sensibilities.

.....

If you talk about global course, you can't talk about a global course or talk about global learning without having the third world being very present. Now..one of the concerns, I suppose, has been from the beginning to make sure that the African students, that means us, all of us (ahm) have the confidence to engage, no matter what their colour, no matter what their gender, what ever, that they need to engage....And the fact that black South Africans have been so oppressed, silenced and so on, it was an added concern that black South Africans will be on the course and that they would feel..confident enough to participate."

Teacher:

"We want the students to have different back-grounds. That we use as a resource within the programme. We take their personal experiences into the course and use them as learning-material"

.....

"The South-African students carry a heavy legacy and therefore feel a strong need to show that they also are able. That they are as competent and professional as their fellow-students in other countries."

Female student:

"Our capability, our competens have been shaped by being a part of the developing world. I don't think that we have made the same strives, the same progress, as people from Northern based countries. So it's a difficult thing..one can not interpret it simplistically, but I do think that

people from the North have an advantage that technology, this kind of technology, this way of learning, has been part of knowledge-based countries much longer than it has in that part of our part of the world. But at the same time, if you look upon it purely from that point of view, it would prevent you from participate as fully as you can. I think despite the advantages that people have had in terms of technology, and their ability to access and..even software and certain things that are much more advanced..even so..(ahm)..it's the use of the note. We are equal but..."

Teacher:

"I think that the universities in Linköping, British Columbia and Sydney, they are very much first-world-universities..most of their students are urban and have good access..I think that the UWC-students do bring a different reality. You know, in this last course we have talked a lot about HiV/Aids and other students weren't so aware of what an issue it is here and how people...really it is a day-to-day issue here for people. Not only something you read about in the paper...A lot of them said that the international part really exposed us to new ideas and new understanding of how different priorities are made, for instance feminism was raised specifically."

Female student:

"Sometimes I have had problems with the lecturers. Where we just were not seeing eye to eye. The points that I was making, from a South African perspective, they could not see in the academic points that they where making, I couldn't relate to. So sometimes you do find that.. I think this is an academic/pragmatic conflict and not a cultural conflict."

But later on in the interview she returns to communication problems that she consider to be North-South-related:

"We always say that South Africa is ten years behind most of the first-world countries. And what has come through in this course is that some of the students are more advanced. So when it comes to the academic stuff, you know, you read some of these things and you think "What is this person on about?" Because they just have such a grasp of it and that leaves you outside of the process. I just see that they are ahead of us when it comes to understanding of certain things. So when we still are trying to grapple and understand, they have already done this or are just further ahead of us in terms of what they have done. So this is both a benefit and a disadvantage in that if you are not there, you can be left behind very quickly in the process....I have a friend that..she is more withdrawn and she definitely does feel a lot more exposed on the website. She will take longer to put a posting down. And maybe in a week she will put one or two postings. So it definitely can break you down in that way because you can see that these people are so far ahead that you don't have confidence in your own contributions. So I think it definitely has to

do with how you see yourself, and how risk-taking you are prepared to be."

Female student:

"Personally, for me, the intercultural dimension makes you think twice before you type things. Because you don't know how that person will take it. If I express something and it might be..you don't mean anything wrong with it but in another culture that might be something offensive. You tend to think a lot about what you say and how you say it. But I mainly see it as an advantage, because it also helps you to..it makes you more aware of other cultures. For example, in our culture, you don't take a mans hand but in another culture, if you don't take a mans hand that is offensive. We will se how it will develop but I think it will help you to know how you deal with people from other countries. But sometimes..again to a certain degree...it limits your freedom of speech. You..(ahm)..because you need to be so careful about what you say, so sometimes you are being to careful so that idea of yours will be lost. You are being so sensitive to others..I feel..not reluctant but...I think at time the group will develop an understanding for each other."

Another aspect of the global context for ICM is differences in learning-styles and expectations between students and teachers related to culture.

Female student:

"The thing that has been interesting for me as the courses have moved between the different countries, from Sweden to Canada, Australia to SA, all the different styles, almost different learning cultures that comes through. The Swedish seems to be a lot more removed and relaxed. Whereas the tutor will put something down, and if you do it you do, and if you don't he can't be bothered. And he is not going to follow up and police you, whereas on the other side of the world, in S-A, the lecturers styles are very different. It is a lot more rigid and directive, like policing. They put a million questions down for you on a continual basis to keep you engaged. Whereas the Swedish lecturer will put something down and if you are there you are there, and if you are not that's also fine."

Teacher:

"You know, also, just from what I've seen from the students, the way students get taught in different countries, that is how they react. You know, we tend to be more directive (in S-A) and much more controlling. And, I think, in Sweden the teachers are much less visible. And I think the students, therefore, they react differently to..When a tutors put out a request, the South African students all jump up and respond and the Swedish say: "Oh, well, I don't know" (laugh). That is definitely a cultural thing but I think it is linked to the history of how they got educated. And what they been taught to expect, you know, how student behave."

As previous evaluations have shown, group-assignments on the web are as difficult for the ICM-students as for everybody else.

Teacher:

"I do think from the comments that we have got in various evaluations, the group-assignments are probably the least successful and whether that's a cultural issue, whether that's a time-space-issue...or whether some students just take over and dominate so that other people step back, I don't know."

One of the students, in fact the person who had most difficulties to follow the programme was at the same time the most enthusiastic global citizen of all the informants. He said:

"We are living in a global village. That means we have to talk to each other. For me it is like...how should I put it.(hmm) . For me globalization is like the sunrise which is going in all its directions. It spreads everywhere. I mean you can feel it going in all directions. Even if I am living here in Eastern Cape, I am able to share my experiences with people all over the world. And I learn from other people..this is how they do things in Sweden, this is how they do things in Australia. Politically, economically, in adult learning. To compare with, in terms of development."

5. Discussion

Before leaving for S-A a couple of questions occupied my thoughts. I knew the South African ICM-students, more than the others, had to handle technological obstacles such as direct access and time-space-related problems. I also knew that there were conflicting priorities between studies and personal and social conditions and demands. But what was unknown was if these obstacles for participation and communication were heavier for the female students than for the male students. There was nothing about gender in the prior reports. My prime interest was to find out if gender within Internet-based education is an issue or not. I also wanted to know if Internet-based distance learning creates real opportunities for female South Africans. Is Internet-based distance learning, which enables more flexibility for the individual, a useful tool for higher education for women? On the other hand, being mainly responsible for the social and domestic tasks, what do South African women have to sacrifice when attending an Internet-based education?

I was also curious of how the intercultural perspective of the course was received by the South Africa students. Globalization can be many things but what does it mean for an African student, born and raised in a country with an extra-ordinary history of racism and closeness towards the rest of the world.

Research about women and Internet-based education, points in different directions. It could be a better option for women who usually are silent in the classroom or just unable to go to regular classes due to domestic responsibilities. For those reasons, some scholars emphasises Internet-based learning as especially suitable for women. But on the other hand, it is proven that women do not have equal access to Internet and some studies have also showed that women, more than men, suffer from the loneliness in Cyberspace.

Although the ICM evaluation-report³⁸ does not ask specifically after social/family responsibilities as a factor for giving up the programme, most students argued that the "rhythm of the course" is the most important reason for leaving the course while the content of the ICM-programme is the most unlikely factor for giving up. One conclusion would be that the students of ICM are satisfied with the content but find it hard to follow its pace. But to

³⁸ Watters (2004)

keep up with the rhythm you must have both time (to study, communicate and participate) and access.

When interviewing both students and teachers I noticed an ambivalent, and sometimes gender-blind, approach. I do think that some of the informants felt this to be an important issue, but not as important as those of class and race. Sometimes I got the feeling that gender was looked upon almost like a “luxury”-problem and I was also advised by one of the South African teachers, prior to my departure that I might have to re-think and re-focus before doing the field-study. Since the racial and social problems are so present in South African society, gender is a subordinate issue. But in the interviews, instead it was the teachers that seemed to re-think. One teacher actually said:

“It is embarrassing to admit but I actually don’t know if our female students have a harder time following the course. We have, up until now, been gender-blind. We have had big issues, like the North-south-perspective, to deal with and lost the gender-perspective along the way.”

And, before I returned to Sweden again, I heard the head-teacher actually summoned all staff to read the ICM-curricula from a gender-perspective. Those were, of course, good news.

On the question of how to balance life, the interviews gave unexpected answers, indeed. The problem of keeping the pace, and the fear of falling behind, was revealed by women as well as men. And the female students I interviewed seemed as determined and focused as their male counterparts, maybe even more focused knowing that discipline is crucial for the outcome of their studies. In the interviews I never put the gender-issue upfront to start with. Instead I asked if the informant could identify a group, or groups, of people (related to age, geography, gender, race, religion or whatever) that might have to face more problems than others when attending an Internet-based course. Often the informant thought of race and, therefore, social status and not gender. But when asking about their personal situation, how they balanced life, between the lines the gender-differences started to appear. Women described how they strive to make sure that their studies do not interfere or disturb for their families. Most men, on the other hand, talked more about problems that were job-and/or ICT-related. And one of them was fortunate enough to have full back-up from his (also working) wife.

Even though all students found it difficult to balance studies, work and family-life, none of them wanted to change to a traditional class-room. The convenience of being independent of

time and space was put forward in several interviews as a necessity for taking the master-course at all. If the South African, adult women do have access, Internet might be her only solution to further and higher education. But I am very aware of that my informants were not totally representative. After all, most of them were privileged and financially secured.

So, for the ICM-students I met, the advantages of Internet-based learning did exceed the disadvantages. Independence of time and space was one important factor that was emphasized, the same reason for probably most Internet-students all over the world. But there was another advantage mentioned, that could only be accountable for students in a third-world-country; the access to first-world researchers and teachers. The higher educational system of S-A has its shortcomings and qualified teachers are scarce. Internet can provide high-quality-education for those who, otherwise, would not easily come in favour of it. Even if we talk about an "elite" among third-world-citizens; the sharing of resources is important for social and democratic reasons. It is also a matter of access.

After the hardships of balancing life, loneliness and technical problems seemed to be the greatest obstacles for the South African students. In combination with lack of self-confidence, the loneliness of the virtual classroom becomes even greater. One student expressed:

"..it is difficult to put questions when you don't know what to ask."

To overcome the back-lashes of loneliness in cyberspace, both teachers and students make sure they meet IRL. According to all informants and teachers, the physical meetings are very important, and for different reasons; social, pragmatically and academically. The orientation-programme provides support, both mental and technical.

From the few interviews I did I can't say if the orientation-programme is more important for female students, meaning preventing pre-coming study-failures due to computer-illiteracy or lack of confidence towards learning in an academic, virtual and global environment. Most of the students seemed to have equal access to Internet but more female than male students talked about uncertainty towards the media. They talked about their fears prior to the course-start and used words as "affinity", "anxiety" and "stress". One of the reasons that women are less familiar with computers and Internet, according to the

informants, would be less time and interest for ICT, time that they have to use for other, social and domestic, tasks.

On the other hand, I also met women talking about how easy they managed the Blackboard and men who revealed their fears and access-problems. Still, I think the female students use Internet more pragmatically, just for this certain purpose. The one informant who talked about the computer as a toy, was a man, and he also had the time to “fiddle around” as one of the female informant called it.

The ICM-programme has a number of aims defined in the syllabus. As a student you are, for instance, supposed to learn how to learn and teach globally, use global connective technologies, understand globalization discourses and develop cultural sensibilities and sensitivities and develop an equality perspective on learning. But what is globalization for a South African student? What does cultural sensibility mean? Why do students sign up for this course and what are the expectations?

The reason for signing up for the ICM was not as much the global outlook as the possibility to combined work with education. But it was interesting to see that the global dimension of the course seemed to make more sense and widen in importance once the communication and cooperation has begun. For some, the globalization-dimension was mentioned as a very important reason for signing up but, as I saw it, for unselfish reasons. The South African students simply do not see themselves working abroad or teach in an international context after they graduate. Instead they want to use best-practice of the first-world and implement it on a local level. They want to participate in the development of their country, to build a knowledge-based society of the young democracy South Africa. The relationship local-global was, for the S-A-students of ICM, something positive. Or, was it?

The other dimension, the North and South-divide, was indeed present for most of the students and they seemed to have ambivalent feelings towards it. Language, for one thing, is an issue, for all students at ICM. But when the informants spoke I felt they talked less about lack in communication due to grammatical/linguistic problems, and more about language as a cultural expression. They also mentioned the “academic-pragmatic”-polarization as a cultural difference. Several S-A-students saw themselves as pragmatics, opposed to “those” academics (in the North?).

Many talked about the richness of intercontinental communication and to learn from other cultures. But there were also feelings of inferiority shining through which inhibited the communication and the exchange of knowledge. The fact that communication on the web is done through the written word and not orally was also a challenge, expressed by several. One example was this student who, instead of asking the teacher or student what they meant by their contributions, questioned her own capability to comprehend and preferred to discuss the matter with a fellow-student from her own culture. Another one talked about of S-A and its people as “10 years behind”.

Internet as a neutral space, where participation and communication is taken place on equal terms, is highly questioned by some scholars. But the fact is that many of the students actually felt quit comfortable and equal in this setting. This was also confirmed by the ICM-evaluation where 86% of the students felt encouraged by the instructors to participate and that they had the freedom to proceed according to their own interests.³⁹

The view upon Internet as an equal playing-field was, in fact, the reason why almost everyone said they addressed their fellow-student and teachers equally, almost surprised by my question. But again, the informants seemed to have a one-way-perspective at the global learning. They talked a lot about taking knowledge, experiences and best-practice from “the others” and implement these at home. Despite the teachers ambitions to create a meeting-point and a learning-environment where everybody’s experiences is to be used as learning-material, the students talked less about what they can offer the first-world, the South African contribution in the knowledge-building process. Here, again, the feeling of inferiority shines through. One student actually criticized the course for being too Eurocentric. She would give Selfe/Hawisher right in their criticism of Internet as being a too culturally reductive and Western-orientated. Even Castells⁴⁰ himself talked about “the culture of virtuality” as a construction by the constructors.

All and all, I think that the South African students, and especially the female students, consider Internet-based courses as a possibility for them to educate themselves and be a part of the global world. They were very much aware of the challenges

³⁹ Watters (2004)

⁴⁰ Castells (2001)

involved, but the obstacles did not prevent them from signing up. More important; they were also determined to stay on the course.

The more liberal view upon globalisation talks about a de-centralised phenomenon. That globalization is extending the basis of cultural exchange and communication by open up new lines between different groups, crossing national and cultural borders, gives people access to information and ideas and that globalization, therefore, have a dimension of empowerment. I believe Internet-based education is one good example of empowerment through networking and mutual learning. But there are still questions left to be answered that would deepen the understanding of this phenomenon, especially from a South African point of view.

- How do students, and particularly women, in poorer areas, such as Northern and Eastern Cape, manage at Internet-based courses? How do they balance life? Is ICT a realistic and useful tool for education and life-long-learning?
- How do students and teachers in the first-world look upon the North-South-dimension and what does globalization mean to them? What do they learn from the third-world?
- Why are the physical meetings so important? If the S-A students did not meet IRL - what would the consequences be?
- The ICM-facilitators had not thought of the gender-issue before I asked about it. Is it common within intercultural education to merely focus upon cultural differences?

Epilogue

I started this report by quoting Prof. Sørensen from Denmark:

“- The possibility to interact and exchange experiences is a democratic right whether status or individual situation. Cooperation, dialogue and reflection are fundamental human needs and therefore key-issues for Internet pedagogy.”

Now, one year, a lot of reading and a field-study later, I still agree with her but I am also aware of the complexity of the virtual, intercultural, learning environment with its huge potential and special problems. I do not claim that I have reached any definite answers to my questions. I have merely presented a picture of how South African students, and especially female students, perceive their participation, endeavours and high-lights at an Internet-based, intercultural, higher education. I know that the virtual classroom is crowded with needs for human communication and exchanges of experiences but also problems of access, feelings of inferiority and conflicting priorities. An additional key-issue for Internet pedagogy would therefore be the individual student's prerequisites, to make sure that the student actually is able to participate and deliver to the knowledge building community on his/her terms.

This intellectual and physical journey has given me new insights which hopefully can inspire others to continue where I left of. Again, many thanks to all of you who made this report possible.

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Seminar

Els-Beth Sörensen (April 2003), Seminar about Internet-based learning, Linköping University, Sweden

Appendix 1.

Interview with students at the ICM-program

1. Who are you? (educational, professional and social background, family)
2. When and how did you hear about the ICM-programme the first time?
3. How long have you been studying at the programme and why did you sign up for it? (personal goal, special interests, expectations)
4. Has the programme met your expectations so far?
5. Have you met any of your fellow-students IRL? If yes, when and how was that?
6. How often, and for how long, do you normally log-on to the course-site? (per day/week)
7. Do you log-on and participate as much as you need/want to? If no – why?
8. Do you feel you have enough computer/Internet-skills to follow the programme properly?
9. Do you find the web-platform, Blackboard, easy or hard to use? Develop the answer..
10. When visiting the course-site – what do you primarily do?
11. Do you feel that you attend and participate within the programme on equal terms (as your fellow-students)?
12. If no – why and what are the consequences as you see it?
13. Do you work beside your studies? Alt. How do you find balance between work and studies?
14. Do you know if students, who need this, can get extra support from teachers (for instance individual study-plans, counselling)?
15. You have fellow-students and teachers in different countries in the world. Would you say that you address them equally or differently? (Depending on if they are students or teachers and where they come from). Try to develop the answer..
16. What do you consider as the main advantages and disadvantages with Web-based, distance learning?
17. If you have to choose; traditional face-to-face learning or web-based learning?
18. What, would you say, are the main advantages and disadvantages with an intercontinental education?
19. What do you want the ICM-programme to give you on a personal and professional level?
20. Where do you picture yourself 10 years from now?
21. Finally: what does globalization mean to you?

Appendix 2. Interview with teachers at the ICM-program

1. Who are you? (professional background, role at the ICM-programme, previous experiences of WBI)
2. Can you tell me about the ICM- programme? Its purpose and structure, physical meetings etc?
3. How do you inform about/market the programme to find students? And what kind of students do you want to address?
4. What kind of students do you actually have at the programme? (profession, ethnical and social background, sex, etc)
5. The programme has been going on for three years now – does the cooperation function between the partner-universities? Would you say that all partners are engaged in the cooperation on equal terms? If no – why?
6. Would you say that you, all partners, have reached consensus concerning the core and purpose of the ICM-programme? Its content and pedagogical methods?
7. Research points out that there are more distances to bridge than the geographical ones within Web-based distance-learning. From your experiences, can you comment on that?
8. You have, in your research of the ICM-programme, seen that South-African students have more obstacles to deal with when it comes to interaction and participation at the course-site, than, for instance the Swedish students. But does less participation also have an impact on the study-results?
9. Can you see similarities or patterns between students who are less active at the site? (sex, social back-ground etc)
10. How many students drop out from the course every year and are there any similarities between the drop-outs? (sex, social back-ground etc)
11. Do you provide students, who need it, extra support (for instance individual study-plans, counselling)?
12. You have, in your mutual paper (Making the invisible visible) described that the individual students socio-cultural situated identity have an impact on the relationship towards fellow-students and teachers – could you develop that?
13. After a few years experience of Web-based teaching and learning – what do you consider as the main advantages and disadvantages? For teachers and for students?
14. What, would you say, are the main advantages and disadvantages with an intercontinental education? For teachers and for students?
15. What do you want the ICM-programme to give its students?
16. What, do you think, are the main motifs for students in S-A to study at the ICM-programmet?
17. Finally: what does globalization mean within the ICM-context?