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# *International Education, the Internet, and the Three Kings Experiment*

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*The current project linked students in three universities in a guided discussion of the movie, Three Kings. The goals were to assess the viability of having students from three different courses, in three different universities, in three different countries find common ground to have intellectual discussions via the Internet and to assess how responsive students would be to answering structured questions as a stimulus for intellectual discussions. We also wanted to understand how the Three Kings was perceived by students in the United States, England, and the Netherlands. Overall, there were 19 students who contributed a total of 217 conversational threads (distinct entries). Conversations were lively and interactive. Content analysis revealed that race relations within the United States, U.S. policy in Iraq, and the depiction of American values were the "big" global messages of the film.*

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**Keywords:** *Internet; World Wide Web; dialogue; international education; international student discussion; pedagogy; international exchange; Three Kings; Hollywood; Gulf War*

International education has entered the 21st century with great momentum and urgency. It appears that the slow and steady work on internationalizing higher education that characterized the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s has brought the field to the top of the academic roller coaster, and we are embarking on the ride of our lives. New ideas, programs, themes, and activities are sprouting up every day on campuses all around the world. The paradigms are becoming more sophisticated and easier to articulate. There appear to be at least three discernible developmental stages that build on one another, as institutions evolve international education programs for undergraduates.

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### **STAGE 1: PROGRAMMATIC MODELS**

The first stage, in most institutions, when developing international education, is to develop programmatic models that are easy to implement, cost-effective, and attractive to students. A task force is developed to explore options, an office may be instituted to oversee the development of programs, and organizational structures are developed to disseminate or deliver the programs. The focus is on providing students with structured experiences, most notably student exchanges, university-to-university linkages, travel abroad, and now, Internet liaisons across different countries. The task of the university is to create meaningful structures that allow students to flow into and out of a variety of international experiences.

The creative development of international programs and experiences can be hampered by a variety of institutional factors, including disagreement over the societal purpose of the program, government constraints, burdensome institutional structures, theoretical arguments about curriculum, and confusion over how to assess student learning (Bonfiglio, 1999). Although programmatic models provide the backbone for international education at most universities, they quickly become institutionalized and limited to the specific parameters that were developed at their conception (e.g., linkages with specific institutions in specific countries).

### **STAGE 2: SKILL-BASED MODELS**

When a program has been instituted, it is important to specify the skills and competencies students should master by being in the program. In this second stage, the pedagogies used by the faculty and the competencies that must be mastered by the students mature, evolve, and become layered according to the vigor of the program and the readiness of the students. Developing the skill-based models, educators strive to elucidate the pedagogical goals that students should achieve by actively partaking in the structured opportunities. Leask (2001), for example, suggested that there are three basic skills needed for an internationally literate person: (a) an international education, (b) multicultural knowledge, and (c) recognition of international issues. Yershova, DeJaeghere, and Mestenhauser (2000) proposed a similar, overlapping set of skills, stressing (a) comparative thinking, (b) intercultural competence, and (c) critical thinking. Many others have suggested that a second language is essential (Rhodes & Christian, 2002). All these scholars agree that educators need to operationalize a core set of interpersonal and cognitive skills that can serve as academic goals for the person who is internationally educated. There is much more debate over how to assess these competencies.

### **STAGE 3: GLOBAL MODELS**

The deeper an institution goes in providing international education, the more awareness develops that there are limitations as to what any one institution with an isolated institutional identity can do to create large numbers of students who are internationally competent. The vision of a globally transferable curriculum and/or degree has attracted many supporters who realize that the process of internationalizing the curriculum must be seamless from college entry to job market participation. Just as the International Baccalaureate Degree, started by the U.S. State Department, prepared high school students around the globe to meet the entry requirements of all universities, proposals and programs are being developed for a universal core of knowledge that allow students to study in many different countries while earning an undergraduate or graduate degree. Programs such as Erasmus (funded by the European Union [EU] for member states) and agreements such as the Bologna Declaration are representative of such an approach.

The aim of the Bologna Declaration was to develop a system of easily readable and comparable degrees, separated into a series of levels from (to use the U.K. terminology) foundation degrees, through BA and MA levels, to graduate research and the Ph.D. Although implementation of the Bologna agenda has been rather slow, and sometimes linked with tendencies to bureaucratize, commercialize, and even McDonaldize the university (Ritzer, 1993, 1998), transparency has a role to play in widening participation and raising the profile of international education. The stated purpose of Erasmus is

to improve the quality of higher education and strengthen its European dimension. It does this by encouraging transnational cooperation between universities, fostering the European mobility of students and teachers, and contributing to improved transparency and academic recognition of qualifications and studies throughout the European Union. This includes mobility grants to thousands of students and teachers but also the enhancement of the European dimension in studies for those students and teachers who do not directly participate in exchanges. In this context, intensive programmes, the development of new and/or improved curricula through transnational cooperation and the development and consolidation of pan European thematic networks are strongly emphasized. (Coyne, 2002, p. 1)

One of the strengths of Erasmus has been its creation of EU-wide exchange structures (direct student exchanges and also the intensive programs that bring together in the same location for a short period students and teachers from different member states). These programs have inspired decentered and local approaches to interna-

tionalization. Erasmus has also slowly begun to develop a course credit system where students could easily transfer credits earned at one university to another university in a different country, facilitating a truly international education. Of course, the development of such infrastructures does not take place outside economic and social relations of dominance and inclusion/exclusion. However, these crucial issues aside, it remains clear that global models of education can evolve only when an institution has well-developed programs (Stage 1) and clearly stated goals for skills and competency acquisition (Stage 2).

Guided international Internet projects can be an important Stage 1 technology in helping achieve Stage 2 and 3 goals. Although many students will never go overseas, become proficient in a second language, or befriend an international student on their own campus, the Internet has the ability to link students all over the world. Of course, there are a number of special interest chat rooms where students can have discussions with an international audience. Yet these narrow interest chat rooms rarely help students achieve the goals of intercultural competence or comparative thinking.

Most educators realize the Internet has enormous potential for furthering international education but are still discovering which projects with which pedagogies in which courses provide the best learning formats. Kopka, Laurence, and Madjar (1999), from the University of Maryland in Towson, did a very innovative project by having their students work via the Internet with a group of students from Sofia University in Sofia, Bulgaria, on setting up a business in Bulgaria. Students gained an understanding of the opportunities and restrictions of the free enterprise model. The lessons were cultural, political, and economic.

#### **Four Trends in Higher Education That Promote Socratic, Internet-Guided, International Student Dialogues**

There are four trends in higher education that are fertilizing the seeds of guided, international student dialogues. The first relates to the theoretical paradigms of education that have emerged from recent debates over the function of the university. Internationally the goals of the academy have been defined according to two very different if broadly defined projects: (a) to discover and create new knowledge and (b) to preserve and transmit eternal truths. Globalization and technological change have decisively privileged the former. As the creation and application of new knowledge has skyrocketed, the university has become the forerunner of ever-changing technologies and new information. New technologies are introduced every few years, for everything from moving proteins to studying black holes. This makes faculty and students colearners much of the time. Increasingly, new perspectives are vital to solving problems,

and pedagogies that travel across cultures seem poised for success. Guided Internet discussions help maximize the cross-fertilization of ideas between students and faculties while minimizing irrelevant or misdirected avenues of discussion (Levine, 2003).

Second, technology has moved from the back office to the front office of the university. Universities first embraced computers for the complex tasks of student enrollment, payroll, and faculty communication. It is only in the past 10 years that educators have turned toward computers to facilitate the learning process. Now, educators are exploring the value of the computer as a pedagogical device to be used in self-directed, programmed learning experiences; global Internet searches for information; and worldwide networking of students concerned about similar issues (Pittinsky, 2003).

Third, there is a renewed focus on pedagogy and learning outcomes. At most American and European universities the question is no longer "How well can Professor A teach?" but "What did Student A learn?" This shift in outcome through which the student occupies a central role amounts to a paradigm shift from learning by listening, epitomized by the lecture, to more interactive and exploratory modes of learning, exemplified here by the Internet dialogues. Teachers retain their vital importance but are increasingly valued for their ability to orchestrate first-person, international learning events instead of only summarizing the life learning of others. Discussing and learning through guided Internet discussions are well placed for this new emphasis on student discovery and learning outcomes (Pittinsky, 2003).

Fourth, there are economic pressures to serve new enrollments and new markets. The world of guided Internet discussions holds potential for increasing the reach and relevance of university offerings. Long-distance learning that involves reading articles on the Internet is fast becoming a dinosaur, and new, more interactive methods of learning are edging into the foreground (Pittinsky, 2003).

## **CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS**

Each of these trends potentially has a negative side that is most succinctly understood in terms of the pressures being brought to bear to turn the university into an institution of consumption, characterized by the deskilling of academics, predetermination of outcomes, and displacement of symbolic exchange by exchange values (Baudrillard, 1976; Ritzer, 1998). Moreover, the very ease with which the Internet facilitates international academic discussion can be deceptive. On one hand, virtual debate can often be too virtual; digital technology can instrumentalize and commodify education (Ritzer, 1998). On the other hand, the Internet is very good at giving the impression of acting as a neutral bridge

between constituencies without necessarily doing anything to empower previously marginalized groups either materially (in terms of access to technology) or discursively (in terms of licensing their situated knowledges). Our purpose in the *Three Kings* project was to foster discussion that is genuinely intercultural and fully dialogical. To do so, we chose a powerful and ambiguous cultural text, the 1999 Hollywood film *Three Kings* (written and directed by David O. Russell), and utilized a guided discussion format based on Socratic questions.

### **The Socratic Model for International Student Discussion on the Web: Introducing the *Three Kings* Project**

The specific goals were as follows:

- to assess the viability of having students from three different courses, in three different universities, and in three different countries find common ground to have intellectual discussions via the Internet (Blackboard);
- to assess how responsive students would be to answering structured questions as a stimulus for intellectual discussions;
- to understand how the movie *Three Kings* was perceived by students in the United States, England, and the Netherlands.

### **METHOD**

*Three Kings*, starring George Clooney, Mark Wahlberg, and Ice Cube, portrays the adventures of a group of American soldiers during the immediate aftermath of the 1991 Persian Gulf War. After a treasure map is found in the anus of an Iraqi prisoner, these semi-ironically soldiers named “three kings,” along with a comrade played by Spike Jones, attempt to take for themselves gold bullion that has been stolen from Kuwait by Saddam Hussein’s army. In the process of stealing the gold, they pick up a group of Iraqi refugees who then save the Americans from a gas attack. Alongside pursuing their personal interest of stealing the gold, the soldiers end up escorting the refugees into safety at the Iraq/Iran border, in defiance of orders and military policy, eventually sacrificing the gold for their safe passage.

*Three Kings* is used in many college courses focused on American studies, film, or media because of its ideological ambivalence. On one hand, the film can be perceived as a critique of American foreign policy, and the United States’ role in the Gulf, in particular. The “kings” pursuit of gold is explicitly paralleled with the narrow national interest of securing cheap oil supplies, and the cant of “liberating” Iraq exposed as an expedient lie. On the other hand, the film pres-

ents a traditional narrative of the American individual who, against all established authority, decides to “do the right thing” and save the less fortunate. Although great care is taken to avoid stereotyping Iraqis, even when most sympathetically portrayed they tend to be passive victims (especially the Iraqi women) or entrepreneurial, would-be Americans. Hence, the film can be perceived as a critique and a reinforcement of dominant American ideology.

Launched in November 2002, the *Three Kings* international discussion project brought together students on three undergraduate courses: Media and Psychology at Howard University (Berg-Cross), “America” and the Global Media Culture at the University of Amsterdam (Kooijman), and American Film: Identity and Contemporary Hollywood at King Alfred’s College, Winchester (Davies). Eight students from Howard, nine from Amsterdam, and six from the U.K. were chosen from each class to participate. The Howard students were all undergraduates majoring in Psychology or Communications; the Amsterdam students were media and culture students majoring in Television and Popular Culture Studies; and the Winchester students were in an American Studies program. The incentives in each class varied. At Howard, students were exempted from the final exam if they participated on six different occasions. In Amsterdam, participation replaced one of the three essays to be completed for the course. In the United Kingdom, participation was not for credit but served as preparation for class discussion later in the semester. All students were told that the conversations would take place for a period of 2 weeks. They were to log on and discuss the film as often as they liked. No common reading was assigned.

The University of Amsterdam offered to host a dedicated Blackboard site for the project. All students submitted their names and were given log-in names and passwords. When students logged onto the site, they found an explanation of the project from Kooijman and were directed to the discussion site. Once there, there were 14 different prompts (see Table 1) in the form of Socratic questions. Students were free to respond to as many different questions as they liked. In addition, when they read someone’s opinion to a particular prompt, they were free to respond to that person and continue the “thread” of the conversation or to make a new comment in regard to the stimulus question.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this article we focus, primarily, on the pedagogical results and implications. A subsequent article will focus on a deeper interpretation of what national and international themes and conflicts were revealed through the *Three Kings* film.



**Table 1** Participation Rates Across Schools by Socratic Question

Socratic Question	UA	HU	WK	Total
1. Introduce yourself	9	6	4	19
2. What is the significance of the title, <i>Three Kings</i> ?	5	6	0	11
3. What message does the film give about race relations in the United States?	22	11	1	34
4. What message does the film give about racism toward Arabs?	16	5	0	21
5. What are the product placements in the film and do they work?	19	1	1	21
6. Who best in the film exemplifies "American values"?	22	9	1	32
7. What insights does the film shed on U.S. policy on Iraq?	9	3	2	14
8. How are children used in the film to make political and social statements?	7	3	1	11
9. Discuss the dramatic shift in the movie that occurs when the mother is shot.	4	2	0	6
10. What do you think about the choice of music in the film?	4	4	0	8
11. What visuals had the greatest impact on you?	12	4	2	18
12. What are the contrasting images used in the film?	5	2	1	8
13. What are cultural differences in how people might view the film?	8	1	0	9
14. Discuss whether this is fiction making reality or visa versa.	4	1	0	5

Note: UA = University of Amsterdam; HU = Howard University; WK = King Alfred's University College.

### Participation Rates for the *Three Kings* Project

As this was an "experimental add-on" and not part of any standard curricula, the number of students participating in the project varied across schools, and a small number of students who were registered did not contribute. Overall, there were 9 participants in Amsterdam, 6 in Washington, D.C., and 4 in Winchester, U.K. The 19 students contributed a total of 217 conversational threads (distinct entries) over the course of the project. Although the number of contributions from each school varied according to the number of students in the project, the three universities had distinctly different participation patterns. The students from the University of Amsterdam continually had the highest rates of participation. Each student, on average, contributed more than 16 entries over the course of the project. At Howard, each student, on average, contributed more than 9 entries. At King Alfred's College, each student contributed, on average, fewer than 5 entries.

Daily participation rates varied enormously over the course of the project. Looking strictly at the 14-day period that was our predetermined conversation window, we found that during Week 1, the Amsterdam students, as a group,

logged an average of 9.29 threads (distinct entries) per day, and during Week 2, they contributed 5.43 threads per day. During Week 1, Howard, as a group, entered 2.28 threads per day; however during Week 2, the group contributed 7.4 threads per day. At King Alfred's College, the group entered 1.29 threads per day the 1st week, and .43 comments per day during the 2nd week. Keep in mind that the United States and the Netherlands had one or two students who became spontaneous leaders and entered comments on many different days that created new threads of discussion. In addition, note that students from all three schools continued discussions after the formal 2-week period, and some that were quiet during the official period got wound up in the spirit of things over time.

These different participation rates may be due to a variety of factors. The students from Amsterdam were in a media and popular culture course, and perhaps their expertise and interest in film accounted for their increased participation. Moreover, although the Amsterdam students were not discussing in their native language, the project was relatively accessible for them, as the University of Amsterdam functioned as host of the Blackboard site. Although the students from Howard University and King Alfred's College needed to obtain new log-in names and passwords, the Amsterdam students could participate within a familiar environment. There were a number of teacher and classroom variables that could have led also to the increased participation rate (e.g., enthusiasm of instructor, importance of the film to the rest of the class, etc.). The students at Howard were instructed to log on at least six different times, and if they did so, they were given extra credit. This no doubt accounts for the flurry of activity near the end of the 2-week session. The low rates of participation at King Alfred's was likely because the Internet discussion took place several weeks before *Three Kings* was scheduled on the course program, and it was not possible to integrate student participation into the assessment scheme. Other inhibiting factors in the United Kingdom were that students were relatively unfamiliar with the Blackboard software platform, and the presence of seven U.S. students in the class already, provided ample opportunities for trans-Atlantic interaction. In Amsterdam and Howard, on the contrary, the virtual discussion took place right before the students were supposed to discuss the film in their regular seminars, they were all somewhat familiar with Blackboard, and there were no students in the class from the other participating countries.

The implications of these response rates are the following:

1. Global discussions may need to be structured so that the conversations take place in a very compact period of time (2 days) or a very long period of time (1 month) so that participants have the opportunity not only to express themselves but to respond to what others are saying in a thoughtful way. Although many of the Howard students were still

responding to prior postings at the end of the 2-week period, these comments might have entered a cyberspace void because the discussion period was over. More interesting, students from all three schools continued the discussions independent of the project for at least another 10 days, indicating that there was inherent interest in knowing what others thought about one's comments and/or the need to respond to other people's insights.

2. It may be important to have a 1-week "getting to know you" period where students log on and tell a bit about themselves in relation to the topic. Many students at Howard expressed a certain shyness about going online and sounding credible. After a warm-up period, students may feel increased comfort expressing their views to the many open-ended questions posed through this type of format. So often, in college, students are still stuck in a mold where they actively participate only if they know the right answer. They become inhibited if they must think through a point of view and try to defend it with credible evidence. This is potentially one of the most important benefits of cyberspace discussions in academia for undergraduates.
3. Clearly, the incentives for this type of project need lots of additional exploration. Using extra credit was a good incentive, however, it was not structured in a way that required an even level of participation throughout the project.
4. Although difficult to quantify, it appeared that students were as likely to react to the comments of their countrymen and women as to the other global participants. This responding to ideas from home and abroad created a wonderful dynamic when reading the various comments. Encouraging students to respond to ideas should be central to all projects of this type.
5. The administrative co-ordination for this type of project is considerable. Although the three faculty involved did all the planning via e-mail, in hindsight it would have been preferable to learn about each other's courses and students in more detail before the project.
6. Rather than presenting all 14 prompts at the start of the discussion, the instructors could introduce one half of the prompts at the beginning of the discussion and introduce the others when the discussion has started.
7. Although the instructors chose to refrain from actively participating in the discussion, in the future, the instructors could be more active in guiding the discussion. They could either actively participate (as several of the Amsterdam students suggested in the evaluation of the program), or function as a discussion monitor, suggesting new prompts and directions.

### **Content Analysis of the *Three Kings* Discussion**

Table 1 ranks the frequency with which various questions attracted discussion of *Three Kings*.

Issues of race relations within the United States, racism toward Arabs, U.S. policy in Iraq, and the depiction of American values were of the most interest to students. This is understandable because these were the "big" messages of the

film, and they had been intensified by contemporary world events. Other areas of heated discussion included the meaning of the title of the film, and the use of product placements in the film. Unsurprisingly, given their situation outside film studies, this indicates that students were more able and eager to discuss the message of the film than the mechanics or technical aspects of the movie.

The implication for future global discussions is that this is a good medium for discussing global political, cultural, social, and economic problems. Students are eager to express their opinions in these areas and to hear what others, from different cultures, have to say. Moreover, the character of the discussion was encouragingly internationalist. With the exception of one exchange, students tended to acknowledge national differences as limitations on their own knowledge, and very rarely as conferring privileges of insider or outsider status.

A significant example occurred during the strand responding to Question 3. Here discussion of the implications of race relations in *Three Kings* soon focused on the depiction of racial and national differences in U.S. mainstream media. In response to queries from Dutch students, an American student from Michigan offered an anecdote, bemoaning the lack of media coverage of Canada, “literally across a bridge or tunnel.” The student’s explanation of her culture to Europeans turned on her identification with geographical marginality. Her emphasis on the insularity of mainstream U.S. television enabled several Dutch students to see *Three Kings* as a text deliberately calling attention to the need for U.S. media and consumers to engage with a variety of different cultures.

Because very little specific training on netiquette or intercultural dialogue was given, these positive outcomes could be explained by a variety of factors:

- a partly fortuitous synchronicity between educational contexts and student attitudes;
- the tripartite structure of the discussion, which forestalled potentially adversarial “us/them” attitudes;
- the format of structured discussion in the apparent safety of cyberspace; and
- the choice of a film for discussion that not only explicitly relates itself to the global reach of U.S. culture and military but also, as we remarked elsewhere, was unfortunately timely.

We should not be lulled into believing, though, that questions with less active discussion were necessarily of less interest to the students. For example, a few students offered highly perceptive critical readings of the film’s depiction of race and gender but were not followed up by others. The silent majority may have regarded such comments as definitive and hence did not respond, though elsewhere enthusiastic agreement was made explicit. In particular, one student’s dogged attempts to stimulate discussion on the racial discourse of Blackness employed by the film tended to fall on

deaf ears. It might be argued that the students' focus on what *Three Kings* suggests about the global position of the United States displaced their interest in the film's depiction of diverse U.S. identities. If so, this probably reflects most on the teaching format that was employed. Although the Socratic questions can stimulate discussions that would never have surfaced spontaneously among students, it can also serve to tunnel participants into predetermined areas of inquiry.

A second example comes from the question with some of the least activity (Question 9: Discuss the shift in the movie that occurs when the mother is shot in the head.). Many students reported learning a lot from reading the following four comments, even though they had nothing to add. (Note: comments have been edited for spelling and grammar.)

Socratic prompt: Discuss the shift in the movie that occurs when the mother is shot in the head.

Student 1 (Amsterdam): The shift in the movie goes from egocentrism and self-gain toward a Robin Hood story. What is also very obvious is that in the first half, one is continually confronted with the American flag, and after the woman is shot in the head, you only get to see the Iraqi flag. I do think that from the beginning the viewer knows that this is a critique on the way the U.S. acted in the Gulf and they know, already before the shift, that it will not be a mere gold hunt for personal gain, since the hero theme would not really be applicable in this context.

Student 2 (Amsterdam): I totally agree. At this point, the American soldiers see what the war really does to the people. The Iraqis aren't liberated at all, while they do exactly what they have to do, according to Bush. They rebel against Saddam, in hope of American aid, but that isn't coming. The four soldiers finally see what's happening with the Iraqi people, when the mother is shot in the head and see her daughter who has seen it all happening. From this moment, the soldiers change their mission, because they can't live with themselves if they now leave with the gold.

Student 3 (Washington, DC): Even though there was that shift in the movie with the mother getting shot in the head, I think from there on that the soldiers started to individually shift in their persona. Clooney seemed to have to step down from his leadership position in order to get away from the Iraqis. Wahlberg began to see that the gold wasn't as important as he had originally thought it was. Ice Cube seemed to start to question his faith a little bit. And the guy who wanted to be like Troy (I can't remember his name) began to develop an appreciation of the Arab culture, and it seemed like he stopped being the comic relief in the movie. And he just became a lot more serious within it.

Student 4 (Washington, DC): I agree. The soldiers finally realize what it is like in a war. None of them have seen action, except when Troy shot the guy waving the flag. I think their perception changed when they saw the mother shot, because they could now put faces with the war. Now they had a cause, to free these innocent people, instead of taking the gold. I also feel this was the turning point when they realized that although they

had all this gold, they could not take it back to the camp with them and expect to take it back to America.

It could well be argued that this exchange was popular because it resolved discussions that had occurred earlier of what was framed as the political message of the movie.

For the students in Amsterdam and Winchester, the inclusion of American students was particularly interesting, as the film *Three Kings* explicitly addresses the question of American ideology in a global context. As several of the international students have pointed out, they expected the American students to defend the role of the United States, as portrayed in *Three Kings*. As one student of Winchester stated,

I think what hit me the hardest about this film is the message it conveyed about how Americans see the rest of the world. Now I don't mean to offend anyone but sometimes I think Americans are completely oblivious to self-reflection, and I think that this film shows this perfectly. As a nation America cannot reflect upon itself, its uses and abuses of power and wealth abroad, in other words, most Americans are completely clueless when it comes to understanding why they are at war with another country as shown in *Three Kings*.

Whether supporting the war on Iraq or actually fighting it, most believe that the intentions of the U.S. government are purely in the interests of peace and freedom, or for the importance of national security. In a way it shows that many people (not just Americans) don't really know what is going on in Iraq, either now or back in the Gulf War.

In practice, the American students appeared to be as critical of American foreign policy as the international students. In other words, the expected distinction between "them" and "us" did not occur. For example, in the discussion on how the film has influenced the student's perspective on the (first) Gulf War, American and international students presented a similar view.

Student 1 (Washington, DC): As an American, I think the director did a great job showing such an approach that is not what I would call your "everyday" Hollywood flick. A prime example that really impacted me was when the Iraq soldier talked about how the Americans killed his newborn by a stray missile. That, along with other Americans that I talked to outside the class described that scene as something to really think about, and surprisingly most have changed their minds and now are against the U.S. going back to the war.

Student 2 (Amsterdam): As far of perceiving the movie itself, I am kind of standing in the middle. I'm not anti-American, although the army did pull out too early. Victims were made, but Saddam was still there after the war. (He still is.) But to be honest, I doubt that

if it weren't the Americans but another army, let's say the European army, I doubt if things would have been better.

Student 2 (Washington, DC): I'm gonna have to agree on the fact that they [the American Army] really didn't accomplish anything in the Gulf War. To my understanding, they were supposed to do something to Saddam but nothing ever happened . . . including in the movie. Yeah, we defeated his men, but he's safe and sound! So many unanswered questions. . . .

This lack of distinction is significant, as it suggests that the cultural differences between American, British, and Dutch students is less than expected. Although, in part, this is understandable in terms of a trans-Atlantic circle of privilege linking North America and Western Europe, real ethnic and racial distinctions between the students involved did surface from time to time and were generally defused by their being expressed as bicultural and/or migrant perspectives.

### **Implications**

The development of global student discussions is in its infancy, however, clearly, this is going to be a potent force in educational dialogues. Although we were sailing in the dark during most of this maiden voyage, the craft and supplies we chose ended up being up to the task. Blackboard provided an easy-to-use platform that took minimal instruction. Use of guided discussion questions that use the Socratic method to explore a wide range of issues led to lively discussions, insights at multiple levels, and the opportunity for students to be creative in the areas that interested them most.

Particularly for the European-based students who study American popular culture, the inclusion of American students in the virtual discussion provided an added value. At a basic level, the Europeans wondered what Americans would think or say about the American cultural objects that are being studied. By introducing American perspectives into the discussion, the international students obtained critical insight into the possible ways in which Americans experience their own popular culture. However, a more profound insight was also gained—seeing Americans debate between themselves enabled the Europeans to see U.S. culture as itself fragmented and pluralized; something in process and being struggled over, rather than a monolith to be simply embraced or rejected. Vice versa, the inclusion of international students helped American students to broaden their perspective on the way American popular culture plays a dominant role in the so-called global culture. In both cases, the virtual discussion enabled the inclusion of perspectives that without such a discussion could not have taken place.

The movie *Three Kings* engaged all the students and was unfortunately all too timely when they watched it in the fall of 2002. Future developments for global discussions would benefit from having a shared Web site or listserv concurrent with the student site so that instructors can learn from one another. Guided Socratic Internet discussions, coupled with the wealth of learning objects found on the Web and in popular culture, may prove to be a best practice that helps introduce new systems of inquiry and increase the types of information to which students are exposed.

It would be more desirable still to interpolate perspectives from outside North America and Western Europe. Without voices from other continents and subcontinents, our 2002 discussion of *Three Kings* could not yet be termed “global.” To incorporate such voices would, and perhaps should, fundamentally shift the framework of the discussion, presenting a further set of challenges and possibilities.

In terms of pedagogical theory and methodology, the guided Internet discussions can be a breakthrough technology for the new field of scholarship in teaching and learning (SoTL). Teachers who want to systematically improve their ability to help students master new material are looking for tools that allow them to (a) make their teaching strategies public, (b) allows others to easily critique and evaluate the presentation, and (c) build on the feedback that is received (Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). By using guided Socratic questioning, the building materials (the stimulus materials and the questions) and blueprint (the sequencing of questions and ground rules for the discussions) for each lesson plan are concrete and visible to all. By looking at student responses and group dynamics within a question’s conversational threads, one can give quantitative and qualitative feedback about which questions are in need of improvement. Concrete suggestions are easily incorporated and testable. In this way, the guided Internet discussions allow educators to evaluate the process and the product of scholarship. The methodology allows one’s peers, as well as one’s students, to share, in a most intimate way, the creative and intellectual work process of creating a lesson plan (Herteis, 2002).

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