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To cite this article: Suzan Kommers & Mariëtte de Haan (2021) 'Going global': comparing access to global learning experiences in the online social networks of Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, and native-Dutch youth, *Intercultural Education*, 32:2, 194-211, DOI: [10.1080/14675986.2020.1860908](https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2020.1860908)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14675986.2020.1860908>



Published online: 08 Mar 2021.



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'Going global': comparing access to global learning experiences in the online social networks of Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, and native-Dutch youth

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the potential of online environments as spaces for young people to develop intercultural competences by studying how otherness is created online and how this holds potential for learning. While online communication is an increasing part of young peoples' lives, not much is known about how young people use their online social networks to connect with culturally diverse others and whether such interactions create opportunities for learning. Using social network analyses and discourse analyses of self-reports, we compared Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch and native-Dutch youth regarding: 1) the geographical dispersion and ethnic diversity of their online social networks and 2) how they reported on their online interactions and the opportunities for global learning. Young people from these communities differed in how they connected online and how they reflected on interactions in which they were confronted with different perspectives. We suggest a re-examination of the notion of global learning, paying more attention to the highly varied experience of 'global' youths' perception of interactions with different others, as well as what the learning potential of 'going global' entails.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 June 2018
Accepted 16 September 2019

KEYWORDS

Global learning; online social networks; cross-ethnic comparison; mixed methods; intercultural interaction

Introduction

With increased globalisation, our knowledge economy has become more internationalised through greater ease of communication and access to information (Bash 2009). These developments emphasise the need for people to become capable of communicating and collaborating with people from different cultural backgrounds (Gibson, Rimmington, and Landwehr-Brown 2008; Trede, Bowles, and Bridges 2013). Simultaneously, online communication enables people to be exposed to languages, traditions, and other cultural expressions across the globe (Gallagher and Savage 2013; Ito et al. 2010). While this potentially provides opportunities for people to connect regardless

of their geographical location, limited research has been conducted on how technology can provide opportunities for people to gain intercultural learning opportunities (Perry and Southwell 2011). This paper addresses the potential of online environments as spaces for youth to develop intercultural competences by studying how perceptions of otherness are created online and to what extent this creates potential for learning. The results contribute to discussions on how global learning can be conceptualised, and how 'global' is experienced. Moreover, this paper provides more insight into what the learning potential of 'going global' entails.

Global learning is a term that describes the possibility of technology to facilitate interaction between learners from different cultures, providing learners with the opportunity to develop global perspectives (Gibson, Rimmington, and Landwehr-Brown 2008; Hull and Stornaiuolo 2010). In formal education, the use of Information and Communications Technology (ICT), for instance in mediated language learning environments, enables learners to become active in intercultural language learning communities around the globe (Lawrence 2013). However, as young people use their online connections to share ideas, ask questions, explore their peer culture, and seek affection, affirmation, and acceptance, online social networks are also increasingly being recognised as a space with the potential for global learning (Greenhow and Robelia 2009; Ünlüsoy et al. 2013). For example, online interaction in online intercultural exchanges between German and British students helped them discover that even though they were from different countries, they had a great deal in common (Peiser 2015). This realisation most likely helps students develop positive attitudes and dispel stereotypical images of their peers in another country.

While there is some evidence that online intercultural exchange can result in intercultural learning, previous research has also shown that the opportunities for intercultural interaction provided by online social networks do not automatically generate global learning experiences (Hull and Stornaiuolo 2010; Lawrence 2013). Little is known about the conditions and circumstances under which informal online interaction provides learning opportunities, and how global learning takes place in different cultural contexts, in particular.

The present study

In the present study, we take a comparative, cross-ethnic approach by investigating the use of online social networks by Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, and native-Dutch youngsters in the Netherlands. We examine if, and how, Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, and native-Dutch youngsters differ in terms of the geographical spread and ethnic diversification of their online relationships and how the three groups differ in their opportunities for global learning online. Based on empirical analyses, we discuss implications for the definition of global learning. Until now, this definition has been formulated independent of both

ethno-specific online connectivity and ethno-specific perceptions of intercultural exchange.

Theoretical framework

In contrast to individual perspectives on learning, learning is inherently relational in socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky 1978). It is derived from the encounter of the individual with the social-cultural environment, and learning is dependent on dialogical encounters with others. Within this framework, global learning is understood as a process of creating meaning and expanding perspectives in a dialogic co-construction of meaning between learners from different cultural backgrounds (Gibson, Rimmington, and Landwehr-Brown 2008). In parallel to assumed effects on intercultural understanding brought about by international exchange programmes it is often assumed that digital technology offers the global reach that is necessary to make such interactions possible while learners remain in their home countries (Gibson, Rimmington, and Landwehr-Brown 2008). Such interactions would in turn enable the development of intercultural competency – the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations requiring intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff 2006).

Overcoming the discontinuity resulting from encountering sociocultural differences is acknowledged for its potentially transformative effect, and for the development of transcending and intersecting identities and practices (Akkerman and Bakker 2011). In the development of intercultural competence, learning through interaction with culturally diverse others appears to be key. For global learning specifically, two conditions are described that are essential for this type of learning to take place (Gibson, Rimmington, and Landwehr-Brown 2008). First, the definition implies that online communication connects learners with culturally different others. Second, the connection between culturally diverse people would result in an interaction in which global perspectives arise. While this definition provides clarity on the notion of global learning, it is easy to imagine that either of these assumptions might be experienced differently for youngsters of different cultural backgrounds, especially in a global context. The notion of global learning is based on the idea that interacting with a culturally different ‘other’ can lead to learning. In most research on intercultural interactions and global learning, the focus is on the interaction between people of different nationalities (Gallagher and Savage 2013). However, who represents a different other or what is seen as a culturally different practice is dependent on the perceptions of the learner. For instance, migrant and native youth might differ in terms of whom they perceive as culturally different and how they act upon these cultural differences for their learning.

Reconsidering cultural boundaries for global learning

As people are increasingly mobile, identities are less tied to a particular place but are a result of individual histories of travel (Clifford 1997). Geographical boundaries of a country are therefore less distinctive for the variety of cultures that exist within them than before (see also Gallagher and Savage 2013). Moreover, crossing geographical boundaries is not always equivalent to the crossing of a cultural boundary. For example, migrants can experience certain boundaries within the country they live in and, in ways, experience the existence of boundaries when interacting with people in their country of heritage. Cultural boundaries, therefore, have become difficult to pinpoint, and are dependent on the migration history and identity of the individual learner (Vasalou, Joinson, and Courvoisier 2010; Borghetti, Beaven, and Pugliese 2015). More importantly, as Borghetti, Beaven, and Pugliese (2015) point out, interculturality is not a clear-cut pre-defined condition of encounters between learners from different cultural backgrounds, but should be seen as a situated phenomenon that is dependent on the potential co-construction between learners, no matter how different their backgrounds are 'objectively'.

In sum, geographical and cultural boundaries do not always align, and interculturality does not per se align with cultural backgrounds. When studying global learning – a concept that puts cultural boundaries at the centre – we cannot take for granted who is considered the 'cultural other'. Instead, we should take into consideration various ways of defining who is considered to be different and how this impacts learners' opportunities to develop intercultural competences or understanding. Earlier research has shown that youth with different ethnic identities differ in how they perceive learning online or experience boundaries on the internet (Holmes and O'Neill 2012; Haan et al. 2014). However, to our knowledge, there is little empirical work that studies how youth perceive cultural boundaries online and considers the implications for how we conceptualise global learning.

Methods

This study uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate how the use of online social networks enables global learning for Turkish-Dutch, Moroccan-Dutch, and native-Dutch youngsters (Creswell and Clark 2007; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). For the quantitative approach, the geographical dispersion and the ethnic composition of the youths' online social network were examined. For the qualitative approach, self-reports of participants were analysed to gain a deeper understanding of how youth reflected on their interactions online in relation to their learning. The findings of the quantitative and qualitative analyses were combined to create insight into

how youth in the three groups perceive encountering others and how, according to these youth, these encounters can potentially lead to global learning experiences.

Quantitative approach

The quantitative approach was based on a survey measuring a wide range of behaviours, attitudes, and preferences of youth's internet use, as well as the structure and composition of their online social network.

Sample

The survey was carried out in 2010 among 1,408 youths attending seven secondary schools in the Netherlands. Youngsters and their parents were informed about the aims of the survey and had the chance to withdraw. Youngsters in the total sample were of eight different national backgrounds, as indicated by the parental country of birth. Because of the comparative aim of the study, 960 participants were selected for the final dataset, 18% of whom were Turkish-Dutch (14% first generation and 86% second generation), 36% were Moroccan-Dutch (19% first generation and 81% second generation) and 47% were native-Dutch. These indications represent a simplification of the descent of these youngsters as ethnic background often entails a more complex history with multiple origins involved, for instance youngsters of Kurdish descent amongst the Turkish-Dutch or youngsters of Berber or Arab descent amongst the Moroccan-Dutch. For practical reasons we hold on to these commonly used indicators. The sample consisted of 53% girls and 47% boys between the ages of 10–21 ($M = 14.5$, $SD = 1.58$). For more elaborate information on the sample, see Hirzalla, de Haan, and Ünlüsoy (2011).

Instrument and analysis

In the survey, participants were asked about the physical location and the ethnicity of their five most important contacts. Geographical dispersion of the online social network was based on the geographical closeness of the five most important connections in network, ranging from 'the same house,' 'the same neighbourhood,' 'the same city,' and 'somewhere else in the Netherlands' to 'outside the Netherlands.' The ethnic composition of the network was indicated by the language the connections were speaking at home. In the Netherlands, this is a reliable proxy for ethnic background for migrants in the Netherlands.

Using IBM SPSS software, Chi-square tests of independence with adjusted p-values (Bonferroni method) were performed to compare the native-Dutch, Turkish-Dutch and Moroccan-Dutch youngsters on the geographical dispersion and the ethnic composition of their online social network. Missing data were treated using listwise deletion.

Qualitative approach

The qualitative approach was based on interviews in which the participants were asked to reflect on their online network relations and the opportunities these interactions offer for learning and identification.

Sample

A total of 79 interviews were conducted with youth from native-Dutch (25), Moroccan-Dutch (29), and Turkish-Dutch (25) backgrounds. See Appendix 1 to view the interview schedule. An individual informed consent procedure was followed in which youngsters and their parents were given the opportunity to withdraw from participation. It was ensured the sample was not biased regarding educational level, age, and gender as compared to the larger sample.

Instrument and procedure

The interviews were semi-structured and included mapping the participants' networks. Interviews lasted one and a half hours each. The participants received a voucher for their participation. The instrument was piloted with four youngsters prior to implementation to check their understanding of the questions and was redesigned where necessary. Given that the ability to communicate with others from different cultural backgrounds is a key concept in the notion of global learning, we investigated perceptions of same- and otherness by examining the criteria participants used for describing themselves, similar others, different others, and the groups to which they felt they belong. These findings were used to investigate how these identity markers relate to the way youngsters build their social network and their experience of cross-cultural boundaries. Moreover, self-reports were analysed by examining how youngsters reflected on confrontations with different perspectives online and how these interactions were perceived as global learning experiences.

Data analysis

The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. NVivo was used to create meaningful categorisation of the reports following the method of inductive content analysis (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). The analysis focused on a) the criteria youngsters used to describe sameness and otherness, b) how conceptions of self- and otherness played a role in how they created boundaries in online interaction, and c) how youngsters reflected on these possible boundaries in their online interactions in terms of their online learning (e.g. strategies of overcoming possible boundaries). Using an inductive approach, the prevalence of recurring categories and themes between the three ethnic groups was compared to identify how the groups could be characterised. Findings were discussed among the authors until consensus had been established. Peer

debriefing was used to assure trustworthiness and credibility of the analysis (Spillett 2003).

Results and findings

We first report our quantitative results, describing the opportunities youngsters' online social networks offer for global learning. Second, we describe our qualitative findings to consider how youngsters make sense of boundaries online and how these opportunities in youngsters' online social networks are perceived as learning.

Geographical spread and ethnic composition of the online social network

From the analysis of the five most important contacts in youngsters' online network, it became clear that native-, Moroccan-, and Turkish-Dutch youth differed in the geographical dispersion and ethnic composition of their networks.

Geographical dispersion

The youth in the three ethnic groups differed significantly in the geographical dispersion their online social network ($\chi^2(8) = 231.77, p < .001$). While the size of the effect was relatively small, as indicated by Cramer's $V = .17$ (Rea and Parker 1992), migrant youth had significantly more global contacts and fewer national contacts than native-Dutch youth. From a visualisation of the data shown in Figure 1, the differences were strongest in the number of connections that lived outside of the city or town, but within the same country. Native-Dutch youth

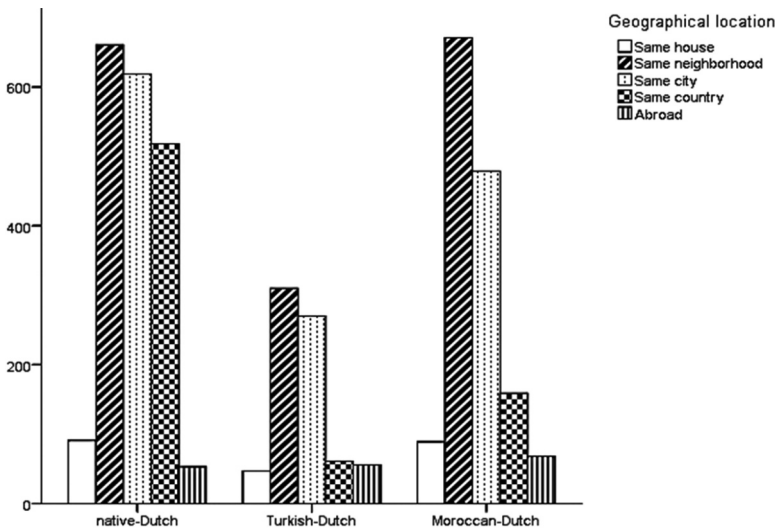


Figure 1. Total number of contacts per geographical location for Turkish, Moroccan, and native-Dutch youth.

had a larger proportion of such connections compared to Turkish and Moroccan-Dutch youth. Moreover, differences were observed in how many connections were living abroad. For the two migrant groups, the figure was larger than native-Dutch youth: 4.6% of Moroccan-Dutch youngsters' contacts and 7.5% of Turkish-Dutch youths' contacts lived primarily outside the country, while this was only 2.7% for native-Dutch youth. This is in line with what would be expected based on the migration history of the Turkish and Moroccan-Dutch youth.

Even though migrant groups connected more often across national boundaries, this does not necessarily mean that these youngsters experience cultural differences in their online interactions. When studying migrant youth, national boundaries do not always correspond with cultural boundaries. The geographically dispersed contacts of migrant youth might therefore be culturally similar as these contacts might speak the same language and share the same cultural background. This indicates the importance of getting a better understanding of the ethnic composition of the online social networks of the participants.

Ethnic composition

The three groups differed in the ethnic composition of their online social network ($\chi^2(6) = 3653.45, p < .001$). The effect size can be classified as large with a Cramer's $V = .67$ (Rea and Parker 1992). The ethnic composition of the networks is in line with the results on geographical dispersion, indicating that native-Dutch youth had less diverse networks. As visualised in Figure 2, native-Dutch youth connected most with other native-Dutch youth. Moroccan-Dutch youth exhibited the most ethnically diverse online social network. Specifically,

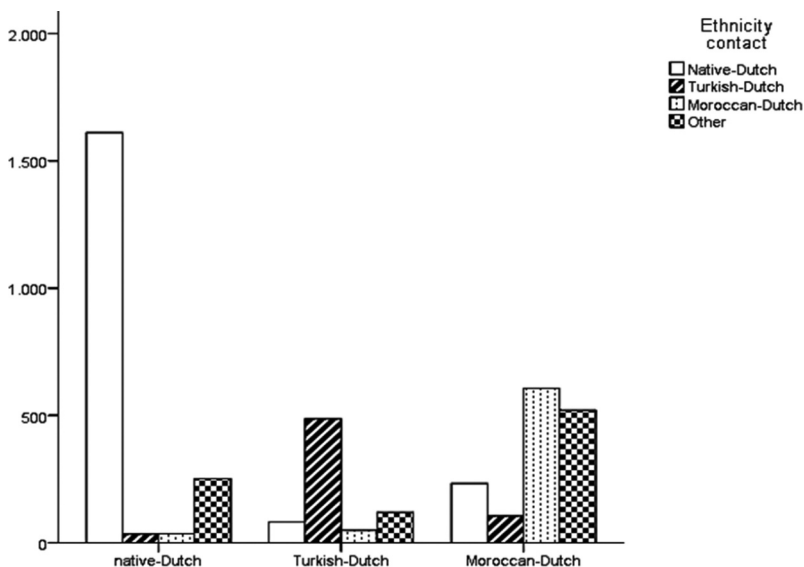


Figure 2. Total number of contacts per ethnicity for Turkish, Moroccan, and native-Dutch youth.

for native-Dutch youth, only 41.4% of the contacts were ethnically diverse, as compared to 66.0% for the Turkish-Dutch and 83.4% for the Moroccan-Dutch youth. Moroccan-Dutch youth also ranked highest on interactions with contacts that were neither Turkish, Moroccan-Dutch, nor native-Dutch, again indicating that this group had the most ethnically diverse network.

While the geographical dispersion and ethnic composition indicate the potential for boundary crossing in online interaction, it does not indicate how potential learning takes place. The interview data provide a better insight into the types of interactions of the youth and what this means for young people's informal learning.

How youth create and experience boundaries in online interactions

Building on the descriptions of the social networks, interviews provided greater insight into how the online interactions afforded participants opportunities to learn about diverse cultural perspectives. Results of the analysis of self-reports showed that youth differed in how they created and experienced boundaries in online interactions. This is best indicated by their criteria for same- and otherness and by their reflections on intercultural interactions online.

Criteria for same- and otherness

Almost none of the youth reported ethnic characteristics as a criterion to describe who they were and who they felt 'the other' was. Nevertheless, in their extended description, migrant youth reported that their preference for culturally similar others was related to feeling better understood by the other person and feeling more at ease. For example, a Moroccan-Dutch girl mentioned religion as an explanation for why she connected more easily with ethnically similar others: 'I think religion is the most important, and I feel very much at home with these people.' Similarly, Turkish-Dutch youth expressed that they valued belonging and conforming to a group. For them, virtues like care, trustworthiness, and modesty were directly or indirectly referred to as important to their community. Turkish-Dutch youth often mentioned (mostly cultural) differences as a reason to stay within the boundaries of their own social space. For instance, certain culturally informed values were mentioned as a reason to stay within their own community, as illustrated by the following example, in which a Turkish-Dutch youngster described a confrontation with someone he perceived as different, because this person had done something in the past that he considered to be 'not right':

I am different from him because he did something that is very wrong; that is why I don't talk with him anymore. I don't know if this can be OK again; maybe, but I am not sure if I will ever forgive him.

Acting against the values of the community, as in this case, was creating an obstacle to further interaction.

Native Dutch youth mostly formed their social networks to meet with others online who had similar interests, both locally and across national boundaries. In their interaction with culturally diverse others, these youth mainly focused on similarities and did not mention confrontations due to differing perspectives. Instead, they tended to downplay cultural differences by reporting that ethnicity, and any resulting cultural differences, did not require much effort to overcome. For instance, a native Dutch boy reported that online gaming helped him develop his English language skills: 'With gaming you start talking to people and then you learn just by doing.' In contrast to the native-Dutch youth, Turkish-Dutch youth recognised culturally or otherwise diverse social spaces, even within their extended family networks. Since their family members had migrated from different national contexts, Turkish-Dutch youth were confronted with various (second) languages, habits, and traditions. Their online social network was perceived as a space where the same rules and values applied as in their offline social space. In their interactions with others (non-family), Turkish-Dutch youth often limited themselves to recognising culturally or otherwise diverse social spaces, while at the same time keeping a distance from these spaces, referencing to the values they deemed important.

Reflections on intercultural interactions online

The youth in our study not only differed in the way they constructed and approached social boundaries online, but also in how they acted upon these boundaries and what these meant for their learning. When confronted with differing perspectives, native-Dutch youth reported that these were very difficult to overcome. This can be illustrated by the comments of a native-Dutch boy, who noted a confrontation with others:

I sometimes have discussions with somebody who is very religious, and if you disagree with them on things, they think you are discriminating [...] I won't hide my opinions, and this is why she thinks I am discriminating. OK, so be it. This is something you just have to accept.

The boy accepted the fact that there were conflicting opinions and that he was perceived as someone who discriminates. The Moroccan-Dutch youth, on the other hand, appeared to leave their cultural environment and seemed more aware of the cultural differences they might face in their online interactions. They acknowledged that, through their social networks, they were exposed to culturally different perspectives and opinions within those communities, which allowed them to escape certain culturally informed restrictions. For example, Moroccan-Dutch girls reported getting in contact with boys online since they were often not allowed to interact with them offline. A Moroccan-Dutch girl noted that the internet provided ways to contact others in ways that would not

be possible in real-life due to cultural restrictions. Instead of avoiding cultural boundaries that would have been the case offline, Moroccan-Dutch youth used online spaces to traverse different socio-cultural environments.

Moroccan-Dutch youth not only recognised the existence of varying cultural perspectives, they also actively explored them by participating in online communities. For example, one Moroccan-Dutch girl explained that she knew there were not many Muslims on a particular forum and that she therefore did not acknowledge her Muslim identity:

I learned to think before you say something, because you can hurt many people [...] I think, [what] I have said there [at the online forum], [I have said] from a different position [compared to] what I would do if I would talk from the position of a Muslim. [I expressed myself differently from] ... what I would say if I would be a Muslim because in Islam, homosexuality is taboo.

The reflections of this girl indicate that she was fully aware of the fact that she was transcending cultural contexts, enabling her to move between different cultural spaces and to understand the influence of cultures and the opinions of others.

Discussion

Our understanding of how global learning takes place for youth from various ethnic backgrounds is critical in supporting them to 'go global' and develop an understanding of diverse cultural perspectives, an indispensable aspect of flourishing in our continuously diversifying societies. The findings of this study offer insight into how global learning is affected by the perception of boundaries and how this creates or limits opportunities for global learning. Results pertaining to how online social networks enable global learning differently for youth from diverse cultural backgrounds inform how to engage with the notion of global learning. Particularly, we discuss how we can: a) understand differential perceptions of online boundaries, b) think about access to global networks and boundary perceptions for global learning, and c) better understand the global learning of youth.

Perceptions of boundaries

Ethnicity was a more salient identity marker in the construction of boundaries for Turkish- and Moroccan-Dutch youth when compared to native-Dutch youth, who did not experience the internet as a bounded space and did not consider ethnicity to be relevant boundary marker. Those with immigrant backgrounds saw ethnicity as a relevant boundary marker in how they perceived the self and others and, consequently, how they experienced online interactions. While this difference can be partly attributed cultural differences

between the groups (de Haan et al. 2014), it can also be understood in the context of offline exclusion of minorities and the related power dynamics of majority-minority relationships. Digital spaces and their boundaries are not simply neutral external backdrops of identity information, but are embedded in an intersectional web of power relationships and differentiated along ethnicity, race, gender, and other identity markers (Leurs 2015). This point was also illustrated in our study when Moroccan-Dutch youth expressed that they felt they had to express their opinions forcefully to prevent others from dominating them. As Dervin (2014) has argued, people can create an understanding of the other perspective in intercultural interaction, yet, at the same time, defend their national and ethnic identities. Negative stereotyping and the vulnerable position of youth with an immigrant background might impact how they create otherness online, resulting in the experience of a more explicitly divided and explicitly ethnically marked online space for members of youth with an immigrant background.

Opportunities for global learning

The comparative social network data, in combination with our data on the perception of boundaries, also showed that unequal access to global networks (either in geographical or in ethno-cultural terms) does not translate to unequal access to opportunities for global learning. Opportunities for global learning are clearly defined by how boundaries are perceived, how they are given meaning and acted upon, and if and how these, in turn, are perceived as opportunities for global or intercultural learning. Especially as the online interactions between dominant and minority cultural groups are subject to inequitable distributions of power and privilege, this can be a reason for learning to stagnate. Socio-political contexts related to minority-majority relations might play out in the interactions between cultural groups, potentially impacting the extent to which these interactions allow for global learning. In our view, how these boundaries are part of minority-majority dynamics are insufficiently taken into account in the definitional work relating to studies on global learning.

When evaluating the learning effects of global encounters, diverse perceptions of boundaries should be considered as an important mediator. This is in line with a more general need to understand how objectified forms of boundaries, such as access to resources, relate to symbolic ones, i.e., the conceptual distinctions and interpretive strategies for how people make sense of these boundaries (Lamont and Molnár 2002), which builds upon earlier discussions of the relational nature of ethnic boundaries (Barth, 1969). While the perception of the other is often considered in studies relating to the learning effects of intercultural dialogues (e.g., Pilecki and Hammack 2014), this issue is relatively unexplored in studies on global learning.

Learning potential and perceived disagreement

An important observation from this study is that all three groups did not seem to have much interest in crossing (ethnic) boundaries. In general, youth did not seem to develop a shared understanding or to co-construct meaning, as might be expected based on the definition of global learning that we adopted. Instead, interactions were characterised by disagreement with the others' position or opposition instead of understanding or bridging differences. Given that this study focused on adolescents, it is possible that the youth in our study needed to grow into a more mature stage of intercultural understanding in order to demonstrate global learning as we defined it. In the intercultural maturity model (King and Baxter Magolda 2005) and the model of intercultural competence (Hammer 2011), attitudes that do not acknowledge the perspectives of others are described as indicators of the first stages of intercultural understanding. However, as the youth in the study were mostly second-generation, they might have been in a developmental phase where they were more distant from their parents' network, and there might have been less of an incentive for the youth to engage in the types of interaction with their families abroad that enabled significant learning.

Although we cannot exclude this explanation, we would like to present two alternative explanations, which acknowledge, in part, that there are alternative ways in which global learning might take place that is not based on reaching a mutual agreement. First, the mere fact that there is lack of agreement in the confrontations with diverse and unfamiliar perspectives does not mean that there is no learning involved. This can be further explained when considering the definition of inter-subjectivity as discussed by Matusov (1996). Matusov argues that the traditional definition of inter-subjectivity as 'a state of overlap of individual understandings' (p. 25) overemphasises agreement and deemphasises disagreement among participants in joint activity. Inter-subjectivity, in his definition, is a process of coordination of participants' contributions in joint activity and, therefore, can also be reached by acknowledging the other's perspective and agreeing to disagree.

Second, the literature on how boundary crossing can result in learning (Akkerman and Bakker 2011) points out that there are multiple ways in which learning can take place and that agreement or overcoming difference is not necessary as an outcome for learning to take place. In other words, when boundaries are encountered and reconstructed, this does not necessarily lead to overcoming disagreements. The learning potential resides in a renewed sense-making of different practices and related identities. From this perspective, acknowledgement of differences as we encountered in the accounts of the Turkish-Dutch youngsters, is also a potential resource for global learning to take place. This is in line with perspectives on how learning occurs in studies referred to as Third Space Learning (e.g. Moje et al. 2004). According to this

perspective new perspectives become possible in so-called contested, third spaces, when dominant perceptions are challenged, opposed, and not taken for granted.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion of perceived boundaries, opportunities for global learning, and perceived disagreement, we suggest a re-examination of some of the assumptions held in the notion of global learning. We want to encourage scholars that examine global learning to in their future research:

- Consider the fact that crossing ethnic boundaries and accessing culturally diverse spaces online in order to be 'exposed to and collaborate with people with different cultural backgrounds' is nothing but straightforward.
- Take into account that cultural boundaries and interculturality are not as 'fixed' as is often assumed.
- Acknowledge that perceptions of ethnic boundaries are highly subjective, contextual, and need to be considered against the background of specific meaning making in online connectivity.
- Reconsider the variety of ways in which learning is enabled in such online contexts.
- Broaden their ideal version of global learning in order to include versions of crossing boundaries that includes contesting or rejection next to agreement or the adoption of the viewpoint of the other.

There is no doubt that the observations in this study are dependent on their context in terms of geographical location and time and that there are multiple other factors, not addressed in this study, that define how youths' othering develops online. Besides the fact that ethnic background itself is complex, youth differ in terms of their online experiences and migration histories, possibly impacting their online experiences and corresponding informal learning. However, the implications for how we need to think about the notion of global learning as shown in this study can guide educators, educational administrators, and policy makers in implementing innovations directed at preparing youth to thrive in culturally diverse digital spaces.

There might be variation in different country contexts, the specific ethnic groups represented in them, and their related power and cultural dynamics (Haan and Leander 2011). However, our finding that we need to pay attention to such dynamics when considering the mechanisms and effects of global learning holds irrespective of the specific nature of these dynamics. The majority-minority power dynamics and its implication for othering found in this study are thereby not exclusive to the Dutch context. Although global learning experiences depend on these dynamics and extends the local context, it is

important to pay attention to the specific intergroup dynamics in order to support the learning of specific underserved groups.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Vandana Gill and Genia Bettencourt, who generously provided us with comments and feedback on the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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Suzan Kommers is a PhD student at the University of Massachusetts Amherst and specialises in internationalisation of higher education. She is passionate about researching how students can be supported in broadening their perspectives to become interculturally competent citizens and learners.

Mariëtte de Haan is full professor Intercultural Education at Utrecht University. A recurring theme in her research is how normative traditions of learning and education relate to more spontaneously created environments for learning, including those in digital worlds.

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Appendix 1. Interview Schedule

1. General questions about informal learning activities offline and online and pointing out learning relationships.

- (i) What is learning to you? (create awareness that learning is something that also happens outside school).
- (ii) Evoking informal learning activities in which youth are currently involved in (both online/offline)
- (iii) Information about learning as a process over time
- (iv) Asking the interviewee to link the learning activities to people from the network
- (v) Relationship between geographical location and learning; How does being located at X has an impact on how you share/learn/produce?

2. General questions about Identity and identity relations

- (i) How the interviewee sees his/her identity
- (ii) Identifying specific Identity relations
- (iii) Social identification based on sameness/proximity or othering
 - (a) 'Identity nodes' When you look at this picture of your network, can you indicate people who you think are the clearest examples of a specific 'type' of person?

(b) Social identification based on difference/distance

(c) Identity affirming/encouraging relationships

How does being located at X place(s) has an impact on how you are able to feel the same/different?

3. Identifying Informal learning & Identity relations in clusters

(i) Informal learning in clusters

(ii) Identity relations in clusters

(iii) Can you identify these clusters and what they mean in terms of identification as well as in terms of learning?

4. Transitions or boundary crossing between network clusters and learning & identity work

(i) To what extent are each of these groups separated from your offline relationships?

(ii) Do you do anything to keep your online and offline relationships separate? Why? And how? Or do you try to combine them somehow? Why and how?

(iii) What do you need to do in order to step from one to the other? Are you good at this? What skills do you think you need to be able to do this?