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A Culture of Cooperation: Making the Journey the Destination

“We must recognize that underneath the superficial classifications of sex and race the same potentialities exist.” (*Margaret Mead*)

Abstract

This chapter subjectively examines the experience of five members of the *Future of Education* project group at the International Women’s University (*ifu*). Their voices reflect the multi-cultural, multi-disciplinary, and multi-generational composition of the group. It is an examination of the processes which took place in summer 2000 and describes how the group’s journey towards a tangible project outcome became an important factor in the creation of an ongoing culture of cooperation.

1 Introduction

This chapter is an attempt to deconstruct the very particular group experience of the *Future of Education* project group in the Project Area INFORMATION at *ifu* in Hamburg. By adopting a subjective approach to what is often perceived from outside as a radical feminist notion – an international university for women – we are acknowledging the continuing experimental nature of our group process. Almost a year after our period of residency, our group is still evolving and dealing with the challenges of sustaining collaborative ventures via the new digital media. To position ourselves within a static theoretical framework is to negate the ‘white-water’ metaphor which characterizes collaborations of this composition and nature.

If the authors are to define a guiding ethos of this chapter, it would be couched in the Zen belief that ‘the journey is the destination.’ While ‘living *ifu*’ – the three-month residency as members of the *Future of Education* project group (see also Kelkar et al in this volume) – the significance of the actual *process* as opposed to merely the ‘end-product,’ began to manifest itself. This chap-

ter strives to make explicit and deconstruct this particular group process by reflecting on both the adverse and favorable elements of this collaboration.

Following this, we would like to situate our discussion within the subjective realm. This chapter is, essentially, a compilation of personal and subjective thoughts by members of the *Future of Education* project group. We do not intend to offer a scientific, theoretical and statistically proven synopsis of the possibilities and pitfalls of multi-cultural, multi-generational and multi-disciplinary cooperation. This approach, we feel, also bears testimony to our ongoing experimentation with long-distance collaboration via the new digital media.

This chapter is structured in the following manner: Section 2 (The Setting); Section 3 (Puzzling the Pieces: the Group Process); Section 4 (The Pieces Fit: Results) and Section 5 (Conclusion).

Symptomatic of the nature of our interaction, it is an interesting fact that despite this chapter being the collaboration of five women, oral communication was significantly absent during its preparation. Owing to geographical constraints – we represent three continents – e-mail communication was paramount, with evolving versions of the text being stored in a community system created on the Internet (see CommSy, 2001). You will encounter different writing styles and even different ‘Englishes,’ a fact which reflects the diversity of the group.

2 The Setting

We were wedded together on the basis of mutual work and goals.
Judy Chicago

The International Women’s University (*ifu*) and its Project Area INFORMATION, residing at the University of Hamburg from July 15 to October 15, 2000 (cf. Virtual *ifu* 2000), gave us the unique opportunity to share lives, ideas and emotions with over a hundred women from all over the world.

Fifteen of these women, representing thirteen nationalities, were assigned to the project group *Future of Education* on the basis of their own choice and interest. This interdisciplinary team initially thought to examine developments and trends in higher education, focusing on their effect on women throughout the world, and to come up with some kind of final representative result (for the initial outline of the group compare *vifu* INFORMATION 2000). The ‘director’ and ‘facilitator’ of the group were, respectively, Cheris Kramarae, Professor at the Center for the Study of Women in Society, University of Oregon, USA, and