Global Classroom

Postdigital Connecting Across Continents

Siobhan Brownlie

Abstract *This paper discusses a module entitled 'Global Classroom'. There are three participating universities: Le Mans Université, France where the module is part of the Masters in International Cultural Studies; the University of Pretoria, South Africa; and Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado, São Paulo, Brazil; participants from the latter two universities are fourth year students in political science. In order to facilitate communication, the module operates via the video-conferencing platform Zoom. Each week focuses on a particular topic, for example, green action, media and misinformation, democracy in action, national elections and youth attitudes, with guest speakers, student presentations and discussion. The paper defines and is structured by four concepts/practices: "small cultures", "postdigitality", "virtual exchange", and "postdigital critical cosmopolitanism". The Global Classroom module is analyzed through the prism of these concepts/practices. With respect to virtual exchange and postdigital critical cosmopolitanism, it is found that the module partially equates with these concepts/practices. It is suggested that in future iterations of the module, particular choices with respect to topic and task design could better allow students to develop intercultural skills and self-reflection.*

Keywords *Global Classroom; Small Cultures; Virtual Exchange; Postdigitality; Critical Cosmopolitanism*

1. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present a case study that contributes to the critical examination of digital forms of global education that allow the creation of hybrid spaces connecting people, and knowledges internationally. The chapter discusses a university module titled "Global Classroom" that involves stu-

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dents from three continents and whose main aim is to broaden the students' knowledge, understanding, and outlook with regard to a range of political, social, and cultural issues through the encounter with different perspectives. The virtual exchange takes place via synchronous online classes. The Global Classroom module was set up by the University of Akron, Ohio, USA, and has been running since 2018. For the 2022 edition, which I took part in as a lecturer/facilitator and report on here, three universities collaborated: the University of Pretoria, South Africa; Fundação Armando Alvares Penteado (FAAP), São Paulo, Brazil; and Le Mans Université, France.

In this chapter, the module is examined through the prism of four concepts/practices: small cultures, postdigitality, virtual exchange, and postdigital critical cosmopolitanism. With regard to the latter two concepts/practices, virtual exchange and postdigital critical cosmopolitanism, I will focus on the extent to which the Global Classroom module reflected these concepts. In terms of research methodology for the study, there are several aspects. As a contributing teacher at Le Mans, I undertook participant observation for the duration of the module from March till May 2022 and subsequently reviewed the recordings of the classes. I made use of an earlier report on the module covering 2018–19 (Henwood & Thuynsma, 2019). This report was written for the purpose of application for a teaching excellence award at the University of Pretoria and as such focused on the establishment of the Global Classroom module in 2018–19 as an innovative pedagogical initiative. Finally, I undertook an anonymous survey with the 2022 group from Le Mans that asked students about their learning, experiences, attitudes, and suggestions.[1]

2. Small Cultures

Small cultures is a concept that applies to all social groupings and which was developed by Adrian Holliday (1999). A small culture refers to habitual patterned activities, behaviours, and understandings that emerge in specific ways

1 Ideally, the whole cohort of students from the three universities should have answered the questionnaire. However, the questionnaire actually played a dual role: It was not only undertaken for research purposes, but also in order to collect opinions from my students, the French students, who had expressed some concerns about the unit. Although there was a limited number of questionnaire responses (ten students answered out of eighteen in the group), they provide valuable insights into student reaction to the module.

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in a group. The initial impetus is a need for group cohesion; members of the group contribute information and influences to create meanings and rules; routinization of group activities occurs; the small culture is thus formed; and products such as artefacts are produced (Holliday, 1999, pp. 241, 249).

The Global Classroom participants comprising teachers, guest speakers, and students created a small culture that traversed continents, countries, institutions, disciplines, and languages in cyberspace and that devised and adopted practices to overcome any potential obstacles to teaching and learning collaboration in this hybrid digital space. The partnership of universities from South Africa, Brazil, and France meant that English, Portuguese, and French were the native languages of the students. As the participants were fourth year students, all had a proficient level of English, and so English was chosen as the lingua franca for the module with occasional use of the other languages. The interdisciplinary aspect stemmed from the fact that for the University of Pretoria and for FAAP, the students were from the discipline of political science (mainly majoring in international relations), and the students at Le Mans were enrolled on the Masters in International Cultural Studies which has a focus on literature and media. Given this disciplinary mix, it was decided that the unit would not be focused on theory, but rather on topics of current political and social interest that could be approached from various perspectives. Each week was devoted to a particular topic with the following titles: "Green Action: The Politics and Possibilities," "Media, Misinformation and Society," "Democracy in Action," "Public Services: Myth or Fact," "Elections 2022: Is Anyone Listening?", and "Actions Speak Louder than Words: What Have we Learnt About Good Governance?" (2022 syllabus).

In order to promote knowledge exchange and student participation, the format decided on for each session was a talk by a guest speaker on the weekly topic, student presentations on current events in their country that related to the weekly topic, and questions and discussion. Within this framework, the emergent nature of practices was evident in the on-going negotiation among staff and students concerning content and activities. For example, the topic relating to national elections evolved into a student-led discussion on youth attitudes towards participating in politics. Of course, for online teaching, effective and reliable technology is essential. In addition to e-mail for communication and a google drive for sharing and storing documents, the practice of video-conferencing was used for the synchronous online classes. In the early days of 2018 when the module was first devised, the use of video-conferencing platforms had been highly innovative, but by 2022, and the changes initiated

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by the Covid pandemic, the use of Zoom (and similar platforms) had become a normalized part of academic life.

For international classrooms, it is commonalities across nationalities and educational and peer experiences that are the building blocks for a new small culture (Holliday, 1999, p. 249). Staff and students collaborating on Global Classroom brought similarities in knowledge with regard to institutional, academic, and digital practices. It was noticeable, for example, that directly from the first class where a guest speaker addressed the group on the topic of the environment, all of the students took to using the Zoom chat function in order to ask questions, thus demonstrating their joint familiarity with this practice in digital (learning) cultures.

3. Postdigitality

Let us now consider the concept of postdigitality that raises central issues for an online module today. In its colloquial use, digital refers to computational electronic devices. Rather than "post" signalling an 'afterwards' or a completely new period, postdigitality signifies rather a fundamental continuation in the same manner as terms such as postcoloniality (Cramer, 2015, p. 15), but with differences in experience and perspective. One feature of postdigitality is that our fascination with digital information systems has become historical, because digitality today has become a normalized part of everyday life where the online and offline are almost seamlessly intertwined. Certainly, in the Global Classroom module, this was apparent in the phenomenon of the hybrid classroom which was experienced simultaneously as a 'normal' physical classroom with teacher and students face-to-face, and as an online experience where we communicated with students and staff overseas who appeared on the Zoom platform screen in the classroom.

Cramer (2015) points out how postdigitality involves hybrids of older and new media technologies where older technologies (e.g. newspapers, movies, television, radio) are remediated – that is embedded and repurposed via the Internet (p. 20). User creation is at the heart of these postdigital activities, giving the impression of assertion of agency, although we are always part of systems. Every week for the Global Classroom, small student groups, one from each university, made a presentation. The students usually used Canva as a tool that facilitates online collaborative work. For the end of semester project, student groups (one per university) were required to produce a video based on

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individual students' self-filming (via smartphone), that linked the theme of being an active global citizen to one of the weekly topics they chose to review. Embedded in the digital presentations and videos were traces of older media technologies: graphic design, texts, photographs, drawings, mathematical graphs, extracts from television programmes and films, music tracks. What is interesting to note is that all of the students had already acquired the technical and artistic skills to make these products, demonstrating how digital design is now a competence firmly established in educational (and extra-educational) environments internationally. Postdigitality has both transformed the experience of learning through opening up new possibilities of virtual relations and activities and had an impact on formal educational procedures: As evidenced in this module, the old traditional form of assessment through individual written assignments has been replaced by collaborative digital audio-visual productions.

Another important feature of the postdigital era is adopting a more reflective critical stance than previously with regard to the digital. Focussing on education, Knox (2019) takes a critical approach along three lines: He points out how digital technologies rely on hidden exploitation of labour and natural resources, how the influence of digital technology is increasing the mechanical metrification of institutional quality, and how the economic rationales that underpin digital technology, as seen in corporate platform models and the data-driven technology industry, are encroaching on teaching and learning. Global Classroom is reliant on using the Zoom video-conferencing platform. While the module could not operate without such a tool that allows efficient interpersonal and international connection and communication, use of the platform incorporates the module into the model of subjectivity and identity linked to the profit-seeking data-driven economy of 'shareveillance'. This is largely hidden since no privacy messages appear upon opening the platform. Nevertheless, the Zoom privacy statement (Zoom, 2023) reveals that cookies on Zoom share data with third party partners for the purposes of advertising, marketing and analytics. For Knox (2019), the postdigital era must acknowledge assumptions associated with digital technologies, and ideally build public collective ideals into digital systems.

The critical focus of postdigitality may be used to analyze the Global Classroom module in further ways. Hall (2019) argues that the Internet can be conducive to democracy, as it allows decentred and non-hierarchical communications where a networked public connects to wider public spheres vertically (through timespace) and horizontally (by reaching different publics) (pp. 412–413). It is true that the Global Classroom module allows students and

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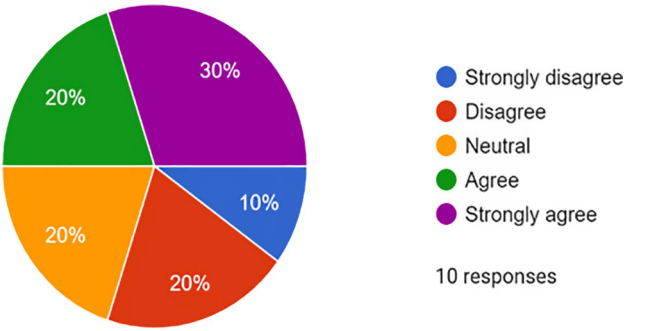
staff to interact with their counterparts in other countries whom they normally would not have met. However, as is well-known, the Internet also harbours what one might call anti-democratic tendencies: It fosters homophily in the form of virtual communities that are socio-spatial enclaves (our restricted group of staff and fourth-year university students), and, as mentioned above, it is subject to a state-corporate surveillance apparatus that extracts and commodifies data (Hall, 2019, pp. 408, 412). Furthermore, information that appears on the Internet may be propagated beyond the original intended recipients. As such, the democratic value and practice of freedom of speech may be hampered where Internet users are concerned about confidentiality of the content they produce. In the questionnaire undertaken with the Le Mans students, I provided a series of statements to which the students had to react in terms of level of agreement. The following statement concerned freedom and openness of speech:

Fig. 1: "I am careful about what I say in the digital classroom, since recordings of the class may potentially be seen by people outside the class participants."



The results are quite diffuse, showing a lack of uniformity of response among the students. Nevertheless, 50 % of the students agree with the statement that they are careful about what they say in the digital classroom. In addition to the matter of cookies, the Zoom privacy policy reveals that content (such as recorded class sessions) may be provided by Zoom to judicial or regulatory authorities when requested (Zoom, 2023). It is the porousness of the Internet environment that arouses the students' distrust, and therefore their

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self-surveillance of expression. Of course, in face-to-face communication, we also survey what we say, but a digital environment that involves uploaded recordings of sessions increases this phenomenon. Where students (and staff) are possibly not voicing their opinions openly and honestly, this is problematic for a university module whose aim is to foster open communication across national boundaries.

Another area of critical reflection that relates to democratic potential and that is relevant for the Global Classroom module is the issue of the digital divide. Although across the world access to the Internet has greatly improved, there are still disparities. With regard to the three countries whose universities collaborated in the Global Classroom module, according to Datareportal in early 2022, the Internet penetration rates were: France 93 %, Brazil 77 %, and South Africa 68.2 %. One factor related to Internet penetration is age: Older people may not have adapted to this technology. But what explains the difference between the three countries is the level of poverty.

During the course of the module, we became directly aware of the difficulty of living conditions in South Africa: We often saw our colleagues and the students in South Africa plunged into darkness, as they were subjected to load-shedding, rolling electricity cuts due to rationing of the electricity supply that does not meet demand. Of course, the Global Classroom participants represented a privileged sector of their country's population, as university students and staff generally do. In the case of FAAP (Brazil), this is a private university, so the issue of an elite is compounded even further. In their presentations, Brazilian and South African students mentioned the issue of poverty but tended to do so in a distant and statistical way. No images or videos were shown, for example. This gave the impression of masking inequality and, together with the elite nature of the bubble of tertiary students, meant that this Internet-based module was somewhat lacking in horizontal connections reaching out to certain publics (Hall, 2019, p. 413).

4. Virtual Exchange

However, discussion surrounding the concept/practice of virtual exchange provides a different perspective and even a partial counterargument to the charge of elite staus made above. Previously, to the turn of the century, internationalization of higher education study programmes was associated with student and staff mobility, that is, physically moving to a different country,

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which was limited to those who had the financial means for such travel. Contemporary information and communication technologies allow internationalization at home to occur, that is, the provision of opportunities through virtual exchange for international and intercultural contacts, connections, and learning for all students, not just the mobile elite (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). With regard to the French students on the Global Classroom module, for example, a number come from modest socio-economic milieux, for which study abroad in distant countries in the traditional physical sense could not be afforded. Thus, although actually travelling to a country provides a very enriching experience, the international virtual classroom has the advantage of widening participation.

Virtual exchange can be defined as "an experiential approach that harnesses technology to engage students in online international exchanges in order to foster the development of global and intercultural competences or citizenship" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). Other terms have been used for this teaching format such as globally networked learning, collaborative online international learning (COIL), telecollaboration, and online intercultural exchange. The curriculum of a virtual exchange module may be prepared, and the module organized administratively by an organization such as Erasmus or the Sharing Perspectives Foundation, or it may be co-designed when two or more educators from different national contexts collaboratively design and implement an exchange. The Global Classroom module follows the latter model. In principle, virtual exchange espouses a social constructivist view of education whereby it is considered that all knowledge develops as a result of social interaction and language use and is therefore a shared experience. A constructivist learning approach attaches as much importance to the process of learning as it does to the acquisition of knowledge. In parallel, the aim of virtual exchange is not only acquiring subject-specific knowledge, but also acquiring intercultural skills in terms of relating to people of different backgrounds (Helm & Guth, 2022).

The first element of the definition of virtual exchange is an "online international exchange" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). For Global Classroom, the digital environment allowed collaboration across different universities in different countries that the students were unfamiliar with, creating a new experience of intersubjectivity through these connections. Virtual international study experiences can indeed cover a wider geographic scope than physical student mobility programmes that are restricted to a particular region (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 272), such as Europe (Erasmus). The Global Classroom module was

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an exceptional experience in terms of the students' programmes. One could even liken it to the concept of life-wide learning: learning which takes place in a variety of spaces that are not necessarily organized or formal (Aoki, 2020, p. 42). The space created by the module is formal, but it extends learning spaces beyond what is usual for the students through its inter-continental character. The diverse international nature of the module was highly appreciated by the students, as revealed in the questionnaire. Here are some of the students' responses when asked what they appreciated about the module: "I like the fact that every week we are discussing a common subject while being from different countries," "Learning about other countries and their cultures, especially from other continents," "Having the point of view of people from other countries" (student survey). Another aspect of extension beyond the students' normal academic experience was working with students from different disciplines, namely political science and cultural studies. Generally, university students are confined to their particular disciplines that can be seen as separate small cultures (Holliday, 1999), so the module offered the perhaps challenging but interesting possibility of interaction with students specializing in different disciplines. As Henwood and Thuynsma (2019) note in their report about the module (p. 11): "Weekly discussions and student-led presentations display different disciplinary, political and socio-cultural slants […] We embrace this as essential for the aim of self-development."

The second element of the definition of virtual exchange provided by Helm and Guth is fostering "the development of global and intercultural competences" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). An important question regarding Global Classroom is whether acquiring "global and intercultural competences" is part of the objectives of the module. In the aims for the module, Henwood & Thuynsma (2019) list (pp. 9, 14): "to increase international communication and understanding of political structures and sentiments prominent in the 21st century," "to promote cross-cultural understanding (students were surprised at the different perspectives that are possible in examining topical issues)," and "to foster openness to new knowledge and respect for diverse opinions." These goals place emphasis on understanding other systems and cultures, in other words acquiring knowledge. A key element of virtual exchange is indeed that it has the potential to offer students access to a rich "ecology of knowledges" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 275). In my observation of the Global Classroom module, there was definitely an emphasis on acquiring knowledge that embraced similarity and diversity both across and within national units. The knowledge emphasis was enacted through the format of the weekly classes

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which, as noted above, consisted primarily of a guest speaker from one country, questions to the speaker from the audience, and powerpoint presentations by small groups of students from the different countries on the weekly topic as applied to their country/continent. In this format, there was participation by students who were exposed to/acquired knowledge, but little student-to-student interaction.

It is useful to discuss here the concepts of cross-culturality; "cross-cultural understanding" figures as a goal in Henwood & Thuynsma's (2019, p. 9) list for the Global Classroom module and interculturality; acquiring "intercultural competences" is a goal for virtual exchange modules (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265). For some, the meaning of the two terms is interchangeable, but for our purposes a distinction is useful. Cross-culturality can be conceived as being comparison-based, focusing on conceptual knowledge (Fries, n.d.). It is a matter, for example, of making comparisons between different cultural or political systems in different countries. This certainly occurred in the Global Classroom module. A notable occasion was the discussion of national election systems where we discovered that in Brazil voting is compulsory but not in South Africa and France, and furthermore that voting ages are different: The minimum age is 18 in South Africa and France, whereas in Brazil young people can vote at 16. Such comparisons gave rise to interesting reflections and debates that would not have taken place if students had been restricted to their own system. So, exposure to new knowledge occurred, comparisons sometimes sparked reflection, and concomitantly, it is presumed that openness to diverse ways of thinking and being, and respect for differences in cultural systems and for different points of view were fostered.

In contrast to cross-culturality, interculturality can be defined as involving interpersonal or small group interaction. For Zhu (2013), interculturality occurs when in the course of an interpersonal or small group interaction, elements of cultural similarity or difference among the interactants become salient, in other words, these differences/similarities become an explicit matter of verbal or non-verbal communication. What then is the relationship between interculturality and "global and intercultural competences" (Helm & Guth, 2022, p. 265)? In Mike Byram's well-known model of intercultural (communicative) competence, knowledge is one component. Other competences are skills of interpreting and relating, skills of discovery and interaction, attitudes such as curiosity and openness, and skills of critical evaluation. For Byram (Hoff, 2020), "these interlinked competences may not only help the intercultural speaker to achieve effective exchange of information, but also to

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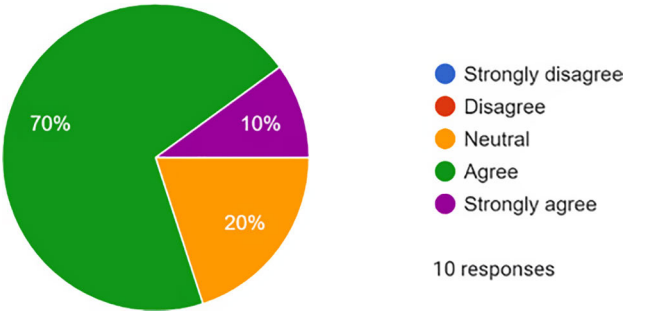
establish and maintain interpersonal relationships based on mutual respect and understanding" (p. 57). Achievements in terms of interpersonal relationships are thus a key outcome of intercultural (communicative) competence. In order to develop the latter, there must be opportunities for interpersonal or small group communication with cultural others. In the case of Global Classroom, there was only one occasion when students were separated into break-out groups on Zoom to allow small group interaction, and otherwise there were no opportunities for interpersonal interaction across the students from the three universities. Here are the results with regard to two relevant questions from the survey (students were asked if they agreed with the statements):

Fig. 2: "As a result of doing the Global Classroom module, I learnt something about South Africa and Brazil."



Concerning knowledge acquisition regarding different countries as a result of undertaking the module, 80 % of the students responded affirmatively and no students disagreed. In contrast, with regard to obtaining experience and skills of interaction with people from different countries during the module, 40 % of the students disagreed and 50 % agreed. These results confirm from the student experience point of view that the focus of the module was on cross-cultural comparison and knowledge acquisition, rather than on the development of intercultural interpersonal competence through experiences of interculturality, interpersonal or small group interactions where cultural issues become salient. The module catered for the acquisition of knowledge and the fostering openness that are included in definitions of intercultural competence, but it did not fully correspond with the aim of virtual exchange for students to

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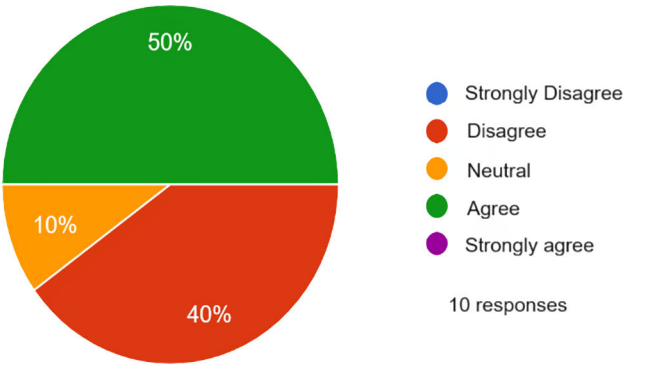
develop a range of intercultural skills in dealing with cultural others. Of course, if the teaching aim is to enhance intercultural competence, it is not sufficient simply to bring students from different countries together in small group arrangements. Care needs to be placed into the design of targeted pedagogical activities. As O'Dowd writes: "To develop skills in communicating and collaborating with people from different cultures, it is necessary to provide students with interculturally challenging tasks which require high levels of negotiation and collaboration" (O'Dowd, 2021, p. 218).

Fig. 3: "As a result of doing this module, I gained experience/developed skills in interacting with people from different countries."



5. Postdigital Critical Cosmopolitanism

Continuing on with the issue of outcomes of the module, our final concept/practice remains postdigital critical cosmopolitanism. The term cosmopolitanism generally signifies cultural links and empathic feelings of solidarity beyond the national level (Lenehan, 2022, p. 16). The Global Classroom module fostered links beyond the national units where the three universities are based, and as discussed above, these links led to the gaining of knowledge of cultural others. Feelings of solidarity cannot come into existence without knowledge of the lives of others. During the module, some student questions indeed revealed empathy for those in other countries, notably following the talk where we learnt about state capture in Africa by business

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interests and warlords which has reinforced suffering of the populations. Critical cosmopolitanism is a more specific term/concept coined by sociologist Gerard Delanty that places emphasis on a particular process, namely self-transformation through coming into contact with the other:

> Transnational movements, cultural diversity and hybrid cultures do not in themselves constitute cosmopolitanism, […] More important is the critical moment in which changes in self-understanding occur as a result of global challenges. […] A cosmopolitan perspective does not simply involve accepting the views of the Other but requires a problematization of one's own assumptions, as well as those of the Other. (Delanty, 2009, p. 16)

Lenehan extends the notion of critical cosmopolitanism to the digital. There are clearly downsides to the contemporary Internet that is in thrall to global North-dominated algorithmic capitalism, and is ethically neutral such that it can foster global solidarities of racism and extremism. At the same time, post-digitality provides a world-wide contact zone brimming with benign possibilities for intercultural encounters, discussions on matters of local and global concern, and thus changes in self-understanding. The Internet is viewed as a space for potential dialogical processes leading to self-reflection and transformations that may be individual or collective (Lenehan, 2022, pp. 22–25). The term transformation could apply to learning new information, enriching one's knowledge. However, Delanty's (2009) thinking goes beyond this. It is not simply a matter of amassing new knowledge, but of putting one's existing belief systems into question. Here, the notion of transculturality is useful to illuminate Delanty's ideas. As mentioned before, cross-culturality can be defined as the cognitive comparison of cultural systems, and interculturality involves cultural similarities/differences becoming salient in the course of interpersonal interaction. These types of processes are necessary for but do not necessarily give rise to self-reflection and change, whereas transculturality describes processes of change subsequent to encounter. It signifies permeation, negotiation, interconnectedness, fusions and mixes, ongoing transforming dialogues, moments of self-estrangement of one's cultural assumptions, plural affiliations and fluidity (Dagnino, 2012). Thus, creation of newness and transforming of thinking.

In the survey, students were asked if Global Classroom had led to a change in their thinking on particular issues. Here is how they responded:

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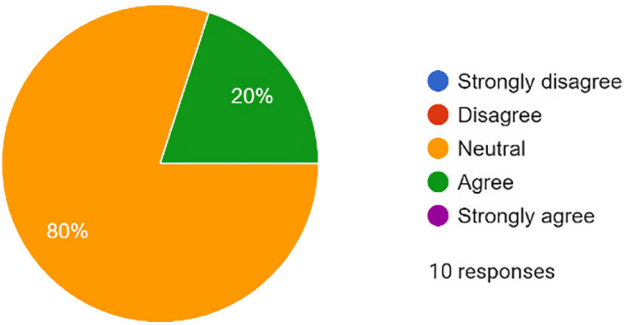
Fig. 4: "As a result of doing this module, I changed/developed my thinking on some issues covered during the classes."



In terms of (postdigital) critical cosmopolitanism, the key occurrence for the individual must be self-transformation. Here 20 % of the students reported a change or development in thinking on topics covered during the module, whereas 80 % provided a neutral response to this question. Clearly the unit did not achieve critical cosmopolitan aims. However, just as we noted before how targeted task design is essential in promoting the goal of acquisition of intercultural competence (O'Dowd, 2021, p. 218), so too may the pedagogical choice of topics of discussion be crucial with respect to critical cosmopolitan goals. Particular topics that juxtapose highly contrasting views across the participants may challenge their thinking. Each year that the Global Classroom module is offered, weekly topics differ. In earlier iterations of the module, the topic of identity was covered. Henwood and Thuynsma (2019, p. 9)) report the following:

In the discussion on identity, some students' perspectives changed. French students moved from an assumed non-racial approach to embrace individual racial identities as a sign of respect for different cultural heritages rather than seeing a derogatory connotation associated with a race label.

In France, the republican ideology taught since childhood in the national education system is that the primary identity for all is that of being a French citizen. Since everyone is deemed equal before the law as French citizens, it is considered inappropriate to consider or mention skin colour or ethnic/national origin, and a kind of colour-blindness is promoted. If the French republican ideology inculcated in the French students was challenged by the Global Classroom module, as indicated in the above quote, this was indeed an achievement.

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6. Conclusion

In this paper I have examined the Global Classroom module through the prism of several concepts/practices that have proved enlightening for the analysis. Global Classroom operates as a small culture. A framework for the module was set up by the group of cross-university teachers from the start in terms of the basic content and teaching format. But what emerged during the course of the module in a more spontaneous way was specific content, practices and behaviours of participants. It was noticeable that participants brought with them prior knowledge of educational and digital practices that were then embedded in the fabric of this new international small learning culture. The Global Classroom module corresponds perfectly with the concept of postdigitality whereby the entanglement of the online and offline has become a normal part of life. For some sessions, students from France were in the classroom, and for others they connected online from home; I would thus speak with students as if interchangeably in-person or online. Such technology of course does have downsides, and the concept of postdigitality also includes a reflective critical attitude towards the digital. One issue is the difficulty of keeping digital communication confidential. Awareness of this was embodied in some of the students' reluctance to "tell all." The implications for free speech and democracy are worrying. Another negative aspect is the digital divide. My impression of presentations from South African and Brazilian students was that the poverty of sectors of their countries whose population has no access to luxuries such as the Internet was a subject that was mentioned abstractly and, thus, downplayed.

The concept/practice of virtual exchange was found to correspond partially to the Global Classroom module. Certainly, Global Classroom allowed staff and student groups from three different countries and continents to collaborate in an international exchange via means of electronic communication, in particular a video-conferencing platform. The module allowed students to discover information and opinions from their counterparts in the other countries, and comparison of different national systems led to some interesting discussion. Enrichment of knowledge was achieved, and through the students' exposure to different perspectives, it is possible that openness towards cultural others was fostered. Such openness is typically considered to be a feature of intercultural competence. However, the aim of virtual exchange units to enhance intercultural skills in interacting with cultural others was not fully taken on board by Global Classroom, because developing such skills normally requires opportu-

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nities for interpersonal or small group interaction. In the iteration of Global Classroom observed, these opportunities were lacking.

A greater amount of student-to-student interaction across the three universities could also have fostered the students' sense of forming a unified group of global citizens, a sense of cosmopolitanism enabled through postdigitality. The key feature of (postdigital) critical cosmopolitanism is that through contact with the other, one challenges one's own thinking as well as that of the other, with the result that some self-transformation occurs. For Global Classroom, it was found that transformation did not seem to take place to a significant extent, but that this may depend on the topics studied. Thus, whether it is a matter of fostering the development of intercultural skills through specific targeted activities, or choosing particular topics for discussion and study that might lead to transformation in thinking, some careful activity planning by the pedagogical team is essential.

To conclude, we will consider what might be ways forward in planning further iterations of this module. The module involves a teaching team that incorporates cultural and disciplinary diversity: Staff some from the South African, Brazilian, and French educational systems. Several staff are from the academic discipline of political science, with one teacher from history, and one from languages and communication. This diversity is enriching but may also necessitates more time in reaching consensus on the module's on-going goals. One topic for discussion concerns representativity and power differentials: To what extent has coverage of issues been representative of all socio-economic sectors of each country? Because we, staff and students, tend to originate from an elite sector of society, does this prevent us from providing a broad view?

There are also questions to be discussed concerning trans/inter/cross-culturality. Transculturality (transformations in thinking subsequent to contact with a cultural other) may not be appropriate as an explicit module goal. However, a question that needs to be asked is: Should cross-culturality (knowledge sharing and comparison) continue to be privileged, or could there also be room for interculturality (interpersonal interaction and negotiation) such that developing intercultural interpersonal skills could be added to the explicit goals for the module?

With regard to student recommendations from the survey for future iterations of the module, the French students made two main requests. Firstly, they supported the idea of greater disciplinary integration, specifically the inclusion of more cultural studies-oriented topics in relation to politics. Secondly, they were strongly in favour of more student interaction in the form of small

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group student-to-student discussions, and some students also supported the idea of a small group cross-university assessment. Given that students would like more opportunities for interpersonal interaction, there is support from the student body surveyed for the practical conditions necessary for interculturality which targeted pedagogical activities can enhance in order to develop intercultural skills. Since the practices of a small culture are always dynamic and shift in accordance with changing circumstances (Holliday, 1999, p. 248), it is to be expected that Global Classroom will evolve in its aims and content.

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