THIRD CULTURE KIDS’ SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

Abstract

Using both asynchronous and synchronous communication tools, virtual schools have enabled third culture kids to establish relationships with other third culture kids around the world as well as with peers in their passport countries. Administering the Classroom and School Community Inventory (Rovai, Whiting, & Lucking, 2004) to students enrolled in online courses at a private virtual school, this study examined the sense of community that third culture kids are able to develop in an online classroom. The sense of classroom social and learning community and school social and learning community developed by the third culture kids was compared to the sense of community developed by those students who had spent their developmental years in one dominant culture. It was found that third culture kids experienced a lower sense of classroom social and learning community as well as a lower sense of school social and learning community than the students from one dominant culture. There was not a significant difference in the classroom and school community for students who had lived overseas differing lengths of time. The student interaction patterns, roles of the instructors, collaborative learning activities, and collaborative communication tools utilized in the selected online English courses were examined. The students primarily communicated through e-mail and the course discussion board. Students with a higher sense of classroom community communicated more frequently and utilized a variety of asynchronous and synchronous communication tools. Prompt, encouraging, helpful, available, and personable instructors were desired in the online courses. To encourage a sense of community in the online
classroom, the instructors desired to get to know the students on a personal level and encouraged teacher-to-student interaction and student-to-student interaction.