Internationalizing Teacher Education Coursework: Professors and Students Reflect on Their Purposes, Projects, Processes, and Perspectives

SUNY COIL Conference 2016
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SUNY Geneseo: Prof. Jennifer King, Emily Arko, & Janine “Jay” Rossi
Our world is becoming increasingly internationalized through migration, digitization, and globalization. Current conversations in education include global competence and internationalizing the curriculum (Mansilla & Jackson, 2011; West, 2012; Zeichner, 2010). Therefore, it is important that teacher educators integrate global perspectives and experiences into coursework so that future teachers develop knowledges and sensibilities about various cultures and educational systems around the world.

As teacher educators, we know that our teacher candidates will likely teach in very diverse classrooms. Therefore, we are committed to integrating culturally relevant pedagogy into our teacher education courses. We are also committed to integrating instructional technology in our courses to foster student engagement and learning. COIL is a great way to accomplish these goals. Personally, we are both also interested in study and travel abroad and learning about other cultures. COIL bridges our professional and personal goals and interests.
Fall 2015 Semester

**FIRST CONTEXT:**
Universidad de Monterrey (UDEM), México
Profesora Beatriz Gómez
“Introduction to the Education Sciences”
two sections (23 + 23 students)

**SECOND CONTEXT:**
SUNY Geneseo, U.S.A.
Professor Jennifer King
“Dimensions of Teaching”
two sections (15 + 11 students)

**THIRD CONTEXT:**
two virtual classrooms
combined morning sections (38 students) & combined afternoon sections (34 students)
engaging in COIL

connectivity & productivity through online, digital tools (e.g., Skype, Messenger, Google apps, etc.)
**Digital Tools Used**

- For **videoconferencing**: Skype, FaceTime, Facebook Video Chat
- For **messaging**: Facebook Messenger, email, Whatsapp
- For **online discussions**: Edmodo
- For **creating documents & slides**: Google Apps (Docs, Slides)
- For **sharing files**: Google Drive, Edmodo
Icebreaker

- 2 to 3 students per group

Students posted information about themselves

  E.g., name/nickname, nationality, place of origin, likes and dislikes, interests and pastimes, course of study

Students also posed a question to be answered by the other small-group members

  Ex., What is a country that you would like to travel to?

Concluded with a whole-class Skype session

  free-flowing discussion
  focused on building relationships and intercultural exchange
The Icebreaker Activity was really beneficial for us because it allowed us to begin communicating with each other on a digital platform that was easy for us to use. (Emily)

After sharing and learning basic information about ourselves, it was easier for us to begin working together. (Emily)
This first activity allowed me to get to know my peers, those who I will be working with and be able to learn a little bit about their background which will help us set up a good and pleasant environment. 
(Margarita)
**Project & Processes: COIL Activity #2**

**Comparative Education Project**
- 4 to 7 students per group

Purpose: for students understand the overall educational systems in each other’s home countries, exploring schooling from early childhood through university
- Small groups participated in a videoconference to have an open, unstructured discussion about this topic
- Each group prepared a 5-8 minute presentation comparing the educational systems in Mexico and the USA
- Each group presented its presentation during our second whole-class Skype session
- Each student wrote a 1-2 page reflection paper in their native language about what they learned from this activity
Voices of the Students: COIL Activity #2

- Prior to the videochat, I expected to have more differences in our educational systems than similarities -- but I was proven very wrong! (Emily)
- Examples of similarities: public schools do not have religious affiliations while it is more likely that a private school would and the duration of the school year is roughly the same as well. (Emily)
- Examples of differences: lesser importance placed on extracurricular activities in Mexico than the U.S. and it is more common for U.S. students to continue on to college than the Mexican students. (Emily)
- We found that there was much overlap, but the differences were very interesting to learn about. (Emily)
- We learned that students from both countries take tests when applying to colleges.
- It was a great opportunity and experience where I got to communicate the educational system we have in México and compare it with the one the US has as well as clarifying any doubts I had about their system and the way it functions. (Margarita)
- As it was a great way for the students to learn about the other country’s system, it was actually very difficult to understand through whichever form of communication due to glitches and language barriers. (Jay)
Project & Processes: COIL Activity #3

Research Project on a Current Topic in Education

- Each class brainstormed a list of potential topics
- Instructors then provided students with a list of a dozen or so topics from those suggested by the students
- Research groups consisted of the existing groups for Activity #2
- Each small group conducted a videoconference to discuss the topics and select one to research

Project requirements:
- Develop 2-3 research questions
- Obtain 5-7 sources to inform the research
- Write an APA reference and 1-paragraph summary/critique for each source
- Combine these references and summary/critiques to form an annotated bibliography
- Created a visual presentation of 8-12 slides using digital tools such as Google Slides and Prezi
- Create a 1-page précis to supplement the presentation
- Share your project with your home class members
  - NOTE: This change in presentation delivery was a result of feedback from the students that it was awkward trying to present to both classes simultaneously via Skype.
Voices of the Students: COIL Activity #3

I got to learn a lot about this activity not only in the content related to it but, the importance of having a constant and clear communication with your group in order to accomplish what you are requested to perform. (Margarita)
Perspectives: Instructors

- The COIL experience can be meaningful even when one group is from a high school (Prof. Gómez’s afternoon section) and the other from a university (Prof. King’s afternoon section).
- The motivation to participate is different for each group, but both can engage with the activities and be interested to know each other.
- Technology is not always reliable, so be prepared to be flexible, and try to have at least one backup plan when trying to connect and collaborate.
- The process of planning and implementing COIL activities is very time consuming, but also very rewarding. We developed meaningful friendships and did great work! We encourage other faculty and students to embark on the COIL journey.
Perspectives: Students

- The students...
  - Learned that they were not so different as they expected
    - Most of them value education, enjoy spending time with friends and family, and like to socialize
  - Were surprised to discover many commonalities between the educational systems in both countries, to include similar problems facing teachers and students
  - Collaborated to learn about a number of contemporary topics in education within the USA and México
  - Preferred to have a semi-structured discussion in whole-class Skype sessions, rather than deliver formal presentations
  - Preferred to Skype in small groups, rather than as a whole class
We still struggled with problems regarding language barriers, technology, and even some disinterest expressed by the students.

One of the groups had a UDEM student who only spoke and understood Spanish. Given that the Geneseo students only spoke English, this meant that extra time was required to translate conversations.

- Very tedious
- Some ideas and messages were lost in translation
- Translation means repetition

Geneseo Spanish Major, Jay, would attempt to speak to the only Spanish speaker, but the other Geneseo classmate would not understand what Jay said.
Technological difficulties:
- In class Skype calls did go through, but the image and sound were very low quality.
- Using an external microphone helped
- Individual groups found that FaceTime and Facebook Chat were a lot more helpful

Students' disinterest:
- Not all students appreciated the value of COIL
- Some students did not engage in the assignments
- The majority of Geneseo students spoke little or no Spanish
- The generalized idea that the United States is ethnocentric was manifested through some of these students
- On the other hand, there were non-Spanish major Geneseo students who were genuinely interested in our assignments
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