

Infusing a Collaborative International Online Learning Experience into the Curriculum: A United States and Mexico Collaboration

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Abstract:

Globally competent people have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to understand and to find lasting solutions to global issues and problems using multiples perspectives. They understand interdependence and interconnectedness of global systems, cultures and communicate effectively with diverse people around the world. The purpose of this paper is to discuss how Collaborative International Online Learning (COIL) enhances our awareness of different perspectives and cultural diversity, the challenges facing humanity and the world, and our role as globally competent citizens. In particular, this paper discusses the design and implementation of COIL to promote global learning between two higher education students in the United States and Mexico. The paper uses global competency as the pedagogical framework for teaching and promoting global learning within the context of global competency.

Key Words:

Global Competence, Global Learning, Multicultural Online Collaboration, Cross-Border Delivery of Education.

Introduction

Global learning is the process of diverse people collaboratively analyzing and addressing complex problems that transcend borders (Landorf & Doscher, 2015). It embodies international collaboration and engagement to address global challenges. Global education, seen as a curriculum, provides the content and strategies for global learning. Global knowledge, skills and understanding are needed to engage people, especially young learners, in the effort to make the world a better place. Collaborative online learning is becoming a legitimate way of teaching global learning. As the global community becomes more open and transparent and racial, ethnic, cultural, economic

and political conflicts escalate around the world, there is a need to find a modality for global expression.

The deepening global diversity within nations highlights the world's complexity and interdependence among nations. At the same time, a current backlash against globalization and the rise of nationalism, more than ever presents to higher education institutions the need to provide to students the ability to engage in meaningful engagement experiences with other cultures and perspectives.

Global Learning promotes critical and reflective discourse and the engagement of simple and complex dialogue, which often leads to practical and structural action at the local, national, regional, and global levels (Abdullahi, 2010). Pike and Selby (1995) proposed four-dimensional model of global learning: spatial; issues; temporal; and inner dimensions. In the spatial dimension, concepts such as interdependence and interconnectedness at multiple levels including intrapersonal, interpersonal, international, regional and local issues and problems are explored. In the issues dimension, the focus is on key global issues, problems, and themes. In the temporal dimension, the focus is on giving the future the central place in the educational discourse and process. In the inner dimension, the examination and re-examination of self and relationship with others are explored within the context of self-identity, self-knowledge and self-discovery (Abdullahi, 2010).

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) affords students opportunities in different countries and cultures to learn quickly about issues and problems impacting people and endangering the planet. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the implementation of COIL between American and Mexican courses to enhance cross-cultural awareness, a key disposition for global learning. We used global competency as the pedagogical framework for teaching and promoting global learning.

COIL and Global Competence

Many universities and colleges in the United States and around the world are developing centers and institutes to provide a platform for engagement, activism, advocacy, partnerships, and international collaboration. The COIL Center at the State University of New York (SUNY) provides a more intensive, friendly, and innovative environment to design a curricular internationalization effort through the use of online technology. COIL "encourages and supports the development and implementation of collaborative online international courses as a format for experiential cross-cultural learning" (SUNY COIL, 2017, p. 1). It seeks to build bridges between study abroad, instructional design, and teachers through team-taught courses. In the process, it promotes, integrates, and enhances international, intercultural education, (global education, education for global citizenship) experiences across curricula (SUNY COIL, 2017, p. 1).

Consensus has been reached today about the need for students to develop global competencies to face challenges of the 21st century (Partnership for 21st Century Learning, 2014; OECD, 2016). Global competence is defined as a disposition, "a way of thinking and doing and as a value" (Reimers, Chopra, Chung, Higdon, O'Donnell, 2016, p. xxxii). Global competence promotes a lifelong learning and inquiry-based attitude, directed to not only promoting the understanding of the local and global issues

relationship, but also to engaging students in working to find solutions to global challenges. Having a global competence, thus, embraces a disposition to inquire about the world (e.g., engaging with questions of significance, exploring local-global connections, and seeking information beyond familiar environments). Boix-Mansilla (2016) described three dispositions global thinkers should have:

1. A disposition to understand multiple perspectives, others' and their own;
2. A disposition toward respectful dialogue (communicating across difference appropriately, listening generously, and sharing courageously); and
3. A disposition toward taking responsible action (being inclined to see and frame opportunities to improve conditions, collaborating with others, and mobilizing themselves to act) (p. 13).

COIL, as a content and a global pedagogical framework, promotes cross/multicultural understanding between students in different countries through online collaboration. In the context of online collaboration, Law and Nguyen-Ngoc (2010) identified three dimensions: social; cognitive; and affective. These dimensions were designed to influence the quality of cross-cultural interaction. It is important to recognize these dimensions are not only aligned with the dispositions of global competence but are also embedded in what the COIL concept represents. The COIL framework enhances students' social (cross-cultural communication interaction), the cognitive (through the analysis of content area through different lenses), and the affective (through self-reflection and online discussion cross-culturally) fostering a holistic disposition toward global thinking and competence. Furthermore, it offers a pedagogical framework for a global learning and internationalization of the curriculum (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Iuspa, 2014).

COIL Pre-Instructional and Instructional Planning

The COIL experience was infused into the cross-listed courses Developing a Global Perspective (SSE 4380 & SSE 5381) offered at the Florida International University (FIU) in the United States and an undergraduate course (INR 4000) at Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua (UACH) offered in México as part of their pedagogical international activities.

The involvement with COIL started during the summer term of 2016, when FIU was invited to participate in the US-Mexico Multistate COIL Program (MCP) organized by SUNY. The program was an eye opener and rich in global content and curricular design. The goal of the program was to "increase inter-university collaboration between Mexican and US academic institutions through COIL-enhanced courses linking students, professors, and staff, contributing to greater intercultural understanding and cross-border dialogue" (SUNY, nd, para. 1). The professional development program provided 180 hours of professional development. This online program, offered in four phases (as well as a workshop in Mexico), led the participants from a gradual learning path of what COIL is, to the matching and selection of university partners between the US and Mexico, and more course specific COIL planning and development experience between the US and Mexico partners.

UACH is a public higher education institution located in Chihuahua, Mexico. From the outset instructors developed a close working relationship and were committed to the design of a rewarding COIL experience for our students. After several online meetings, discussions, and reflections on how to infuse and harmonize a COIL experience for our respective students, the instructors decided to focus on the student learning outcome (SLO): students will develop awareness of US and Mexico perspectives on global issues. The instructors collaboratively selected the content from a variety of articles related to the following global issues: population trends in the 21st Century; climate change; and terrorism. They decided on these topics given the similarity in content across both courses.

After the pre-instructional planning, the instructors engaged in the instructional planning of the COIL experience. The seven COIL weeks' modules were developed and delivered through the Learning Management System (LMS), Schoology. Schoology allowed students and professors from both universities to have access to a content without being restricted by the respective universities' student access to Blackboard or Moodle. Instructors worked together on the COIL modules' set up (incorporating resources and activities instructions) as well as instructors' introduction video (see Figure 1).

The screenshot displays the Schoology interface for a course titled "COIL: Spring 2017" at the "Universidad Autónoma de Chihuahua". On the left, there is a sidebar with navigation options: Course Options, Materials (selected), Updates, Gradebook, Badges, Attendance, Members, and Analytics. Below the sidebar, an "Access Code" is shown as "NXSST-3KFPQ" with a "Reset" button. The main content area shows the course title and university name, followed by "Add Materials" and "Options" buttons. A list of materials is displayed, including an Excel spreadsheet "COIL groups_ Mexico and US_Updated_2_9_17.xls" (38 KB) and five weekly modules: "COIL Experience Week 1 Introductions - Feb. 6 - 12, 2017", "COIL Experience Week 2 - Feb. 13- 19, 2017", "COIL Experience Week 3 - Feb. 20 - 26, 2017", "COIL Experience Week 4 - Feb. 27 - March 5, 2017", and "COIL Experience Weeks 5 and 6 Final Project". Each module has a gear icon for settings.

Figure 1. COIL Schoology Modules

COIL Strategies and Activities

The seven-week COIL experience (see COIL Design Model in Appendix A) was offered to the respective US and Mexico students during the Spring 2017. Students were engaged in the cross-cultural analysis and discussion of global issues. The rationale for the COIL cross-cultural online activities was they “must provide opportunities for dynamic and reciprocal communication, interactions, and

collaborations that facilitate knowledge co-construction” (Chen, Caropreso, Hsu, & Yang, 2012, p. 25) among the students. The activities were developed in relation to the three dispositions of developing global competency (See Appendix A):

- Recognition of multiple perspectives;
- Respectful dialogue; and
- Responsible action.

Lessons learned

Implementing COIL in the classrooms was a transformative experience worth taking. We started our journey with the goal to engage our students in a valuable cultural learning experience. During our 7-week journey, learning took place at faculty and student levels.

As a faculty, our goal was to design a learning environment where content and cultural awareness would not conflict with each other. Thus, our Fall 2016 semester planning led to a very structured COIL experience. However, we quickly learned despite all the planning, students experienced some challenges in:

- Time getting to know each other;
- COIL Activities and Global Learning;
- Group work and number of students in the groups; and
- COIL Overall student reactions.

Time getting to know each other

Based on the students’ feedback, the one week we gave them to get to know each other was not enough. Students in both classrooms, felt rushed to get to know each other. Students perceived this activity as the first activity to worked on. In a sense, they need to complete the assignment hindered the quality of the time spent to get to know each other. For example,

“While I was working on activity 1 part 1, some of the challenges I encountered was effective communication with group and being positive with one another. This challenge occurred when the assignment was close to being due and people were getting anxious to make sure that it was submitted on time. The time difference was where the confusion was coming from”

“While working in activity one, a major challenge was to agree on a day and an hour with eight people to do the video conference.”

“While working on activity 1 part 1, the real challenge was trying to come together as a team to meet online and discuss. I found that to be a challenge because I was at work, others had to miss class, and time changes interfered. As a team, we were still able to come together and have the meeting. I was able to attend the meeting while working. I was unable to use the video or microphone to speak due to the nature of my job. I was, however, able to hear the discussion and write a comment. I was very satisfied with the finished product because it shows the U.S. and Mexico COIL team's perspectives about different issues in a concise and easy to understand manner.”

Reflecting on students' feedback, the instructors decided to include the week before to the start of the COIL experience, a one-hour Adobe Connect meeting between both classrooms. The instructors decided to:

- First address both classes at the same time and go over via face-to-face the expectations towards COIL; and
- Allow the students to start building a sense of learning community. This is meant bringing an added value of networked interactions promoting an initial cultural, linguistic, interpersonal, and motivational development among the students (Canto, Jauregi, & Van den Bergh, 2013), and their own global competencies.

The instructors also decided to expand the getting to know each other activities from one week to two weeks. During the first week, students, as a class, will work on the getting to know each other through the Social Lounge Discussion Forum. To do this, each student will be asked to post a 10-second snapshot addressing:

- His/her name;
- Country of origin; and
- His/her favorite place on earth (and why?); and
- asked to review and comment on at least two classmates. During the second week, students will work with their assigned teams on the Getting to Know Each Other Activity Venn Diagram and the group's golden rules of communication.

COIL Activities and Global Learning

The COIL activities were designed to foster in students a high level of interaction between both cultures. The variety of activities from discussion forums, videos creation, synchronous and asynchronous meetings required each student to leave their comfort zone and approach the activities with a level of creativity and openness to new perspectives. The activities underlying factor was students' cross-cultural engagement would promote communication with sensitivity to multiple perspectives (OECD, 2016) as well as the dispositions needed to be a global citizen as described by Boix-Mansilla and Jackson (2011).

The final project, *the Advisory Role Project*, presented students with a scenario in which each group was part of an advocacy, non-profit organization. Their task was to present US's and Mexico's perspectives on a global issue of their choice, and to present a recommendation for both nations to work together. The final project presented to American and Mexican students, a pedagogical task of active engagement to complete. In this task, group participation and communication were key elements of the project delivery. At same level, both instructors expected communication challenges would emerge given the language differences. Cross-cultural communication was the factor students talked about on their reflections.

It was challenging to be separated and not know the progress other group members were making on the project. When we hadn't talked for a few days, it was impossible to know if others were still working on the project, or if they were focusing on something else. When we were able to get in touch and communicate our research/voice notes via e-mail, I felt reassured about our progress.

It was very satisfying to be able to share the workload, but still produce a unified project that represents some input from everyone.

In the final project there were a couple of difficulties to choose the topic, but we finally decided terrorism and I had to help with the voice notes since my classmates have more difficulties with English language. To have a good communication to be able to agree in a topic. Being able to practice English language and having communication with people from United States. I learned that there is no limit to keep learning, every day you can learn something new.

We encountered a lot of issues when dealing with our final project. We had a lot of communication issues, especially with people not answering and not wanting to contribute. Our group solved them by just working with the people that were communicating. We can't do much about the people who did not want to help, so we just decided to work on it with the people who wanted to contribute. We had a huge issue with communicating who was going to turn it in, so that made our submission late. I honestly did not find anything satisfying about completing the final project, other than the fact that it was completed.

The biggest challenge I encountered while working on this project was by far communication. Working with students with very busy schedules in different time zones was quite challenging, but it made the finished product all that much rewarding.

We created a WhatsApp group to communicate and it allowed for everybody to see comments and messages at their own leisure.

I thought that our video was very well put together and in fact, quite informative.

After the completion of this project I learned that I really needed to make a difference in helping the environment and doing my part to slow the rate of global warming.

As part of the self-assessment, students were asked at the end of the COIL experience if had helped them re-define their definition of a global citizen, and whether or not they still considered themselves global citizens. Students' reported their COIL experiences had given them a certain understanding of their own global citizenship as in the following responses.

For a long time, I thought that a global citizen is a person who can live in different parts of the world, who speaks more than one language and who has friends in various regions of the world. After the coil experience, I realized that just meeting people and traveling does not make a person global citizen. I learned that a global citizen is an individual who takes the time to learn, respect and have empathy for other cultures. A global citizen is a person who is open to change and has an unbiased perspective on the global problems that our planet carries.

The COIL experience allowed me to realize that being a global citizen is much more than knowing and understanding what is going on in the world. Being a global citizen to me now means communicating with others, sharing each other's thoughts and questions, regarding the issues effecting the world. Being able to understand that an issue in one part of the world will eventually effect [sic] you in

another part of the world. After this COIL experience, I consider myself a global citizen because I was able to share my thoughts, thinking, and questions about global issues with individuals from another country. I learned their perspective and they learned my perspective.

The COIL experience affirmed my definition of a global citizen: an intentional participant in global society who considers factors beyond my immediate environment and experience. The COIL experience let me hear firsthand the environment and experiences of others and I still consider myself a global citizen.

The COIL experience made me realize how difficult it is to communicate with others. It takes plenty of patience to understand other's perspective as well to adapt to how they get things done. I believe this is part of being a global citizen. I believe I have refined my skills in global citizenship, but I still have a long way to go.

To be a citizen of the world to my point of view would be to be someone who worries for the global problems, for what if he considered me that way even.

Group work and number of students in the groups

Joining two courses and setting groups was another challenge. To promote better interaction among students, they were placed in groups with members from the US and Mexico. To accommodate all students, the COIL experience ended up with 5 groups of 9 students in each. The large number of students in the groups did not facilitate the getting together and work as a group. Issues such as time and/or schedule conflicts emerged quickly within the groups.

Smaller groups. perhaps just partners in order to have more time to video chat

Another thing that could be done is to find a way to have some sort of video between the Classes during each of the class times.

I really liked it, but I would have liked my team to integrate more.

Capdeferro and Romero's (2012) study of on online learners and online collaboration identified issues leading to online students learning frustrations as:

(a) imbalance in the level of commitment, responsibility, and effort, b) unshared goals and difficulties in organization, c) difficulties in communication/dialogue in terms of frequency, d) imbalance in quality of individual contributions, e) conflict and problems in reaching consensus; f) imbalance between individual expected mark and group mark (p. 32).

The instructors recognized students experienced some of these frustrations while working on assignments, given the number of students in the groups, with the added factor of cultural communication.

Students highlighted a key reflective point to improve the COIL experience: By limiting the number of students in groups to no more than 6 (3 from each country), students would have the opportunity to engage in synchronous "video-communications that are more static, present visual cues (facial expressions, body language, laughter), and play a crucial role in the exchanges intensifying and clarifying

meaning and contribute to enhance interpersonal relationships” (Canto et al., 2013, p.86), and decrease the level of frustration online cross-cultural collaboration may bring.

COIL Overall Student Reactions

The instructors designed the COIL experience with the learning objective, *students will develop awareness of US and Mexico perspectives on global issues*. This learning outcome aligned to the three dispositions of developing global competency: recognition of multiple perspectives; respectful dialogue; and responsible action. The overall assessment of the students of the COIL experience was welcoming and reinforced the course learning outcome:

I liked getting to meet new people from a different country. Getting to hear other opinions about America was more eye opening that I already knew it was. Stereotypes, although sometimes done with realizing it are wrong most of the time.

Communication Time difference Experience.

Working together with my country's team (we were more united than in past projects).

Hearing the opinion of students from another country --Talking about global issues from more than one perspective.

Teamwork work with people from other country practice the English.

Teamwork. Cooperation. Hard work.

Conclusion and Implications for Future Practice

Students in both the US and Mexico engaged in dialogue about global issues and problems and worked together to offer possible solutions. For a period of seven weeks, students engaged in a cross-cultural collaborative learning experiences (COIL), a global pedagogy tool, that afforded students in both countries a learning environment to explore, compare and contrast global issues perspectives between the US and Mexico. As a result, new insights and deep understanding of cross-cultural perspectives and communication emerged. A COIL experience reinforced the key dispositions of global competences of understanding multiple perspectives, others' and their own, respectful dialogue across cultures, and taking responsible action (Boix-Mansilla, 2011). As the students engaged in the COIL cross-cultural projects, students from the US and Mexico shared a space for dialogue and action. The COIL experience promoted an experimental learning experience beyond just the prescriptive content knowledge.

For the professors, this experience meant: enhancing personal global awareness, perspectives, and engagement; promoting new teaching strategies; integrating teaching with research and service; improvement in online and co-teaching skills; and experiential collaboration. For students, COIL offered: an opportunity to build diverse personal relationships; motivation to travel and study abroad; and most importantly, the development of intercultural awareness, online intercultural communicative competence, digital literacies, and working effectively in virtual teams.

Recommendations

Based on our observations and students' feedback, we offer the following comments and recommendations. Firstly, we strongly support the inclusion of a COIL experience in a course to internationalize the curriculum and enhance students' global competencies. This commitment drives instructors' self-assessments and recommendations for the upcoming offering of the COIL course with the following considerations.

1. Allow more time to students to get to know each other.
4. Provide US and Mexico students with a brief cultural introduction for each nation.
5. Decrease the number of students per group.
6. Monitor group members' participation.
7. Remaining flexible, though is best recommendation. As the COIL experience starts, the instructors will remain flexible, like in any other learning environment, to unforeseen challenges.
8. Incorporate more Mexican readings.
9. Incorporate Harvard's Project Zero Thinking Routines such as the Claim/Support/Question reasoning routine.

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APPENDIX A:

COIL Design Model

COIL Experience Week 1 Introductions - Feb. 6 - 12, 2017

The purpose of COIL week 1 activity was to help the COIL US-Mexico students to recognize and appreciate likenesses/similarities and differences in people. To achieve this, the students were distributed in groups of 9 members (from the US and Mexico) to start working on Venn Diagram Get to know Each Other activity. This activity required each team to complete the following exercises:

- With their COIL US-Mexico Team members, to decide on three ways in which they were all alike (writing those things in the intersecting areas of the diagram),
- Include an image that represents who you are as a group;
- Each COIL US-Mexico Team member writes, in his or her circle, three facts unique to him or her, as well as an image representing who him/herself individually.
- As a group develop, the group's five golden rules/guidelines for communication within the group and with other COIL US-Mexico Teams.
- Each team was asked to upload its Venn-Diagram in the Venn Diagram Get to know Each Other discussion forum for the rest of the class to review and respond.

COIL Experience Week 2 - Feb. 13 - 19, 2017 and COIL Experience Week 3 - Feb. 20 - 26, 2017

The purpose of COIL week 2 and 3 was to examine demographics trends in the 21st century and focus on Climate Change. These two topics were discussed together due to the link between population growth and climate change. Activities were divided as part 1 due on week 2, and part 2 due on week 3.

Week 2, Part 1 activity required students to read two articles, one addressing population trends and the other one on climate change and answer the prompt questions as a group.

- What are the main points/ideas of the readings?
- How are both readings related to each other?
- What are some (minimum two) different US-Mexico perspectives that emerged from your US-Mexico COIL team discussions of the two global issues?

To answer these questions, US-Mexico COIL teams were required to meet synchronously (either through Skype, Adobe Connect, or any tool of your choice) to discuss the readings and the possible answers to the questions. The synchronous meeting has a 30-minute minimum requirement and should be recorded. The recorded link for the meeting submitted to the professors under week 2 discussion forum together with group's word document answering the questions.

Week 3, Part 2 continued the discussion on population trends and the climate but more specifically to the US and Mexico. Each US-COIL team was to,

- develop a table highlighting the different US-Mexico perspectives that emerged on the global issues of demographics trends and climate change.
- identify one image (picture, photograph, icons, drawing, etc.) that represents/summarize/captures both perspectives for each global issue.
- develop a 6-minute maximum reflective video where they would explain a) why you choose that image and how the image relates to the US and Mexico perspectives, and b) how the image (you may have a different image if your 1st image does not represent your team's interactions) relates to the way the group interact it taking into account the different backgrounds.
- upload the US-Mexico COIL team video under week 3 discussion forum for the professors and classmates to watch and comment on.

COIL Experience Week 4 - Feb. 27 - March 5, 2017

The purpose of COIL week 4 was to discuss the transnational phenomenon of Terrorism. During this week, students worked on

- Developing at least three questions based on the readings to foster further understanding/discussions of the readings.
- One member of the US-Mexico COIL team would post the questions on the discussion board. Each US Mexico team should start a new thread.
- Each group was asked to post the questions by Thursday so the class and instructors would have until Sunday to respond to at least one question from each US- Mexico COIL team.

COIL Experience Weeks 5 and 6, Final Project

The purpose of week 5 and 6 was for the students to work and present on the final COIL project based on the COIL Student Learning Outcome (SLO): Develop awareness of different perspectives on global issues. The students' awareness in this respect would be reflected in their ability to recognize, discuss, and identify the different US and Mexico perspectives on global issues. The Advisory Role Project consisted on the following:

Project Scenario

Given what you know now and the possible changes in US international policy, You and your US - Mexico COIL team are advisors to a non-profit organization advocating for both nations to work together on a global issue of your choice (ex: human rights, immigration, trade, etc.).

Project Task

Each group was required to develop/create a 6 min max video or PowerPoint with recorded audio. In this task, each group's awareness on different perspectives was to be reflected in their ability to

- Identify the historical perspective of the US and Mexico on the global issue.

- Name and compare the pros and cons of the different perspectives (keeping in mind the US change in Administration).
- Come up with one recommendation on how both nations can work together on that global issue despite of the different perspectives.

Finally, students were asked to complete a self-reflection self-essay. In this essay, we asked the students to reflect on the questions as follows.

- What challenges did you encounter while you were working on the final project?
- How did you solve them or What steps did you take to solve them?
- What was especially satisfying to you about the process or the finished product?
- What did you learn about yourself as you worked on the final project?