



Constructing Intercultural Dialogues Case Study # 12

Transcultural Education in Context

Mohammed Guamguami

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY MOHAMMED PREMIER, OUJDA, MOROCCO

Context

Globalization is a complicated phenomenon influenced by politics, culture, law, and society. Advances in technology, communication, transportation, and trade have empowered globalization and will continue to fuel its growth creating a more closely interconnected world, even at the transcultural education level.

In this frame and in reference to the Memorandum of Understanding between University Mohamed First, Oujda, Morocco and the State University of New York, USA, signed in 2017, the two institutions agreed to co-teaching a series of joint modules, and abiding by ten *Articles* pertaining to rationale, attendance, participation, assessment and surveys, and grading.

Participants

40-45 Moroccan university students collaborated with 20-25 US community college students at least one term per year from 2017 to 2021. The collaboration falls within the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project. The following chart summarizes the model:

Two teachers (alias COILers)	One course/module
Two cohorts of students (alias COILees)	A shared content
Two institutions	Co-teaching
Two or more cultures	Co-learning
Two or more languages	An effective collaboration



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Case Study # 12

The COILers agree on a tech tool to accomplish the modules either synchronously or asynchronously. In the collaboration, students from the two institutions collaborate to fulfill practical project-based tasks related to the content modules co-designed by their respective COILers. Through interactions with one another, cultural similarities and differences are discovered, thus increasing their cultural awareness and competency.

The COILees are subdivided into mixed sub-groups to respond to a set of cultural icebreakers. Then, they collaborate on the tasks given to them by commenting interactively through online/offline responses and feedback. Comparing the latter, even cognitively, leads to dialogic outcomes in due course, either synchronously or asynchronously.

Description

Moroccan students (cohort 1), studying English, and US students (cohort 2) studying Principles of Communications and Management, bring their own learning styles and strategies. All of them are preparing for full-time employment in this interconnected world through internships and will undoubtedly discover employment opportunities at home, abroad, or perhaps as a member of a global virtual team. In order to develop positive interpersonal relationships leading to professional success, students need to become familiar with the communication styles and practices of other cultures, and also to better understand their own.

The COIL content modules for the two cohorts are these:

Term/year	Content module
Spring 2021	Soft Skills from a COIL Intercultural Lens
Spring 2020	Virtual Impact on Learning in Applied Collaboration Contexts
Fall 2019	Cross-Linguistic/Cultural Transfer in a US/Moroccan Online Collaboration Context
Spring 2019	Transnational Education: Connecting Moroccan and US Students through COIL Project
Fall 2018	Going Global from Within: Cultural Styles and Strategies Examined through COIL Interactions



Constructing Intercultural Dialogues

Case Study # 12

Spring 2018	Cross-Cultural Communications and Applications in Humanities and Marketing
Fall 2017	The Examination of the Influence of Culture in Communication Styles

Since the essence of the COIL modules is collaboration, the COILers check attendance and guide discussions and activities both in class and online with their counterparts from the other country, as well as with local colleagues. Adherence to deadlines is crucial so that posting and collaborative work can be completed in a timely manner.

The intended student learning outcomes are:

- To explore cultural differences and similarities between Morocco and the United States;
- To examine cross-cultural communication patterns regarding employment documents and practices;
- To create an e-Portfolio within a cross-cultural framework showcasing artifacts representing both professional and other achievements with opportunities for reflection.

The COIL model does not merely promote courses where students from different nations share an online classroom; rather, it advocates for the creation of co-equal learning environments where instructors work together to generate a shared syllabus based on solid academic coursework emphasizing experiential and collaborative student learning from two different cultural contexts.

Specifically, the COILers usually collaborate asynchronously. They start with icebreakers, move through tasks, and conclude with follow-ups. At each stage, assignments are given for feedback and reflection. All the participants synthesize answers to the content questions set by the respective COILers. The latter intervene now and then to guide students. They also supervise the discourses (written in synchronous meetings; oral when asynchronous) to avoid any sign of misunderstanding, euphemism, or distraction. The contributions are either recorded and then posted or instantaneously posted on the agreed upon tech tool. The COIL project community can revisit the content as it is archived on the platforms. They can add, retrieve, and edit, as well.



Constructing Intercultural Dialogues

Case Study # 12

Dialogic features

COIL is dialogic par excellence: two cohorts of students, two contents, two or more languages, two or more cultures, and two professional systems in interplay. The continuous bicultural/bilinguistic interaction assures sustainable negotiation and conversation, leading to mutual achievement, collaboration, and intercultural communication. The online and offline meetings, comprising icebreakers, sharing culture, working together, solving scenarios, and reaching compromise, all go through heterogeneous discussions, hence they are appropriately described as dialogic.

The time difference – 5 hours – is quite challenging, especially when scheduling synchronous meetings. Also, there is the problem of equilibrium in terms of number and language: typically there are more Moroccan students than American students participating, and linguistically competence in English varies. This affected the intercultural communication and knowledge balance, creating a hegemonic discourse every now and then on both sides.

Lessons learned

Collaboration is a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle; when learners collaborate in an intercultural context – be it virtual or in real – they become responsible for their actions and discourses and respect the contributions of their peers. Therefore, dialogue is the only bridge which can achieve such an aim. Co-teaching and co-learning a content module becomes an intercultural knowledge hub for both instructors and learners. Cross-cultural sharing practices, anecdotes, and information all provide an undeniable advantage. Mobilizing campuses and their faculty and students promotes advocacy pertaining to innovative research and pedagogic expertise.

Training for participants as to norms and expectations in communicating virtually with cross-cultural peers turned out to be essential. Since experience with cross-cultural communication varies among the participants, basic training always should be provided in advance.

Thanks to the COIL model in transcultural education, internationalization is at hand. Indeed, it should be sought as a means, not as an end or outcome. Theoretically, virtual or online collaboration is a truly instrumental approach toward internationalization; practically, the COIL project has oriented the discourse of internationalization to national and institutional levels – including internationalization at home.



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References

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