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Online International Learning

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Collaborative online international learning (COIL), sometimes also referred to as Globally Networked Learning (GNL) is emerging, as improving technology becomes easier to use worldwide. COIL is fast becoming a field of practice on pedagogy, and is also adding to the research by becoming its own field of study, producing scholarly work in such areas as collaboration and cultural competencies (Taras, 2013). Specifically, COIL involves the coordination of classrooms across international borders to teach online and/or to offer blended classroom experiences for students.   According to Ximpher, "Allowing students to virtually experience higher education abroad without leaving campus is a deeply innovative concept that is taking shape and putting down roots across the United States (U.S.) and internationally" (Connell, p. 34).

Examples of COIL in action include work by a number of universities. For example, beginning in 2010, the University of Carolina at Greensboro ran a business course where 460 students form the U.S., along with Japan, Lithuania, Pakistan, Poland, Slovakia and Turkey worked together to design multinational corporations (Connell, 2014), and this work has continued to grow to 2,500+ with students using free, online tools such as "Google Docs and Hangouts, Drop box, Facebook Groups, GoToMeeting, Prezi, Skype and video chat" (p. 26,). At East

Carolina University, freshmen learn World Cultures through upwards of 20 Global Understanding classes across disciplines. One example of a class highlights efforts of three faculties that utilize numerous countries in there teaching via real-time video conferencing and Internet Relay Chat. Students "visit" one country at a time, switching every five weeks. For example, students have had the opportunity to collaborate with students from China, Japan, Mexico, Peru and Russia (Chia, Poe, and Yang, 2011) about each other's culture. Empire State College (2012) in New York and Beirut offer a five-week module on Gender Equity woven into a course where students look at challenges women face in the workplace in the U.S. and Lebanon.

According to Hans de Wit (2013) this type of education is driven by individual faculty and is in the development phase, not systemically driven by universities where internationalization is embedded into the curriculum, yet the use of COIL is producing subject specific learning as well as gains in cultural competencies. Additionally, this work can be challenging, with some "kinks" along the way, such as language challenges and semesters and time zones not aligning, however, it is the right attitude, more so than tools that drives success with COIL (Connell, 2014).

Although emerging in higher education, COIL seems to be more entrenched in the K-12 classroom than in higher education. Examples of program in being offered in the K-12 classroom are in Table 1.

Table 1 Example of K-12 International Programs

Books as Bridges: a pen pal program for students using videoconferencing tools such as Skype. A U.S. classroom is linked to a classroom abroad, and

communication is exchanged via e-mails, letters, and packages of books and cultural artifacts. (Retrieved, http://www.intlbookproject.org/books/index.php
Bridges to Understanding: uses digital technology and the art of storytelling to empower and unite middle and high school youth worldwide, enhances cross-cultural understanding and builds global citizenship. The Bridges Global Citizens Program connects middle and high school classrooms in Seattle, Washington, USA, India, Peru, South Africa, Guatemala and other countries. In the Ambassador Program, students share and learn with international peers through teacher-facilitated online dialogues using the Bridges website, and through creating digital stories. (Retrieved…. http://www.bridgesweb.org/
Flat Classroom Project
The Flat Classroom Project: a global collaborative project that joins together middle and high school students. The Project uses Web 2.0 tools to make communication and interaction between students and teachers from all participating classrooms easier. The topics studied and discussed are real-world scenarios based on 'The World is Flat' by Thomas Friedman. Four mandatory components for students include an audio or video introduction, a written collaborative report using a wiki, a personal multimedia response (digital story/video), and a post project reflection (retrieved, http://www.flatclassroomproject.org/About and http://www.flatclassroomproject.net/ and http://aweekinthelife.flatclassroomproject.org
MY HERO Learning Circle
The MY HERO Project, in partnership with iEARN's Learning Circles, brings together students and teachers from diverse parts of the world to collaborate on the topic of heroism through writing, digital art and/or short films. There are two sessions per school year, each lasting four months. These interactive sessions allow students to discover who is a hero to someone halfway around the world.
Project PeacePal: offers teachers a standards-based literacy and peace skills curriculum that develops their students' ability to communicate ideas, resolve conflicts and become leaders for peace. PeacePals are international friends who write letters to create a connected web of compassionate young leaders practicing the art of peace in daily life. Students are asked to write three thoughtful hand written letters each school year.
RESPECT International (Global Letter Exchange Program): is a refugee education sponsorship program. Their global letter exchange program puts refugee students in written communication with non-refugee students. It seeks to raise awareness of refugee issues, to build bridges between refugee and non-refugee students, and to encourage students to raise awareness of refugee issues. Classrooms correspond with a refugee or internally displaced persons in another country to meet one or more of these three goals.

Rock Our World: connects students and teachers to collaborate in composing original music, making movies, and meeting each other in live video chats. Using Apple's Garage Band, each country creates a 30 second drum beat. Every Friday, that drum rotates to another country, where the bass guitar is added. It keeps getting passed along, from country to country. At each stop, one more instrument is added. When it comes back to the original country, it has touched students from all over the world! While the music is moving, students are meeting each other in live video chats to discuss various topics of curriculum.

World Affairs Council: Online Exchanges and Global Collaborations for Every Classroom (Pdf_overseas_connect COIL K-12 pdf) Retrieved August 12, 2014.

What these projects have in common is they all use Web 2.0 tools to communicate across classrooms. "With the explosion of Web 2.0 tools, they offer possibilities for students who are not physically together, immediate ways to reflect, report on, share, and discuss their experiences with each other in a way that is familiar to them" (Yu, Tian, Vogel, & ChiWai Kwok, 2010).   The technology, in most instances, does not require a huge budget, and is becoming accessible in more parts of the world. The teachers involved focus on what they want their students to learn and then incorporate technology into their classroom bringing those skills and knowledge in via a global activity.

At West Chester University (WCU) in PA a number of Web 2.0 tools (i.e., Pinterest, Twitter, Glogster and Voice Thread) are presently in use within and across different formatted classrooms (i.e., traditional, blended and distance) and it is projected that this author, while on sabbatical in spring 2015 will work to pilot at minimum, one of these Web 2.0 tools in collaboration with faculty and students from the U.S. and Latvia. These tools were chosen both for their features, ease of use and access and flexibility, along with their use (and potential use) in the K-12 classroom. They are tools that future educators could incorporate into their

teaching. Those assignments that are presently being implemented within and across classrooms at WCU will be described below.

First, one of the authors of this paper (with a colleague) utilizes Glogster EDU (an online platform for digital learning) across two undergraduate traditional format classrooms to engage students in the concept of inclusive (nonsegregated) classrooms for K-12 students with disabilities. For a low annual cost, teachers are able to assign students to developing what is called a glog. A glog allows students to develop an online interactive multi-media poster. The specific assignment for this author's class is described in Table 2.

Table 2. Assignment Format: Challenge Based Learning-Inclusion using Glogster

1. Complete research on the controversial topic of inclusion to include in a Glogster Poster. Choose a position on inclusion (For Inclusion or Against Inclusion) and clearly state your position. This is your idea/opinion. There is no right or wrong answer.
2. Defend your position by supporting only one side of the controversy. Your presentation must be based on sound research and defended by multiple examples
3. Develop a Glogster Poster. Sign up for an account on Glogster.com (choose the Glogster EDU option. Sign up for a student account and use the following for the educator code: **64D424**). Please make sure that you only sign up for one account. If you signed up for an account during a previous semester, please sign up for a new account.
4. Choose a poster glog template to create. There are tutorials on the website that will help you to create your poster.
5. Media References: Your Glogster Poster must include a minimum of 5 media references/links (video, audio, graphic images, etc.) that help to convey your understanding and philosophy of inclusion and inclusive practices. You must have at least 1 video/video excerpt. Include URL links for all of your media.
6. Graphic Design of Glogster: Glogster Posters are expected to be creative, professional, and easy to follow/read.
7. When you are finished with your glogster, you should save it as Finished Private.
Glogster Poster Presentation
You will present your poster in class. Your presentation should be no

more than 4-5 minutes and highlight what you feel is the most important information from your poster.

Be prepared to answer any questions that your classmates may have.

Presently, research is being conducted on the student's use of the technology as well as their understanding of the concept of inclusive classrooms. Students' glogs across international classrooms could easily be shared and commented on, helping students to understand how children with disabilities are treated (or not) in the countries respective classrooms.

Twitter is another Web 2.0 tool presently being used in this author's distance education classes at WCU. Twitter is a free micro blogging tool that students sign up for an account. It allows for the use of publishing brief online text (approximately 140 characters), which can be edited and accessed online, or as SMS, email, or via instant messaging (Grosseck and Holotescu, 2008). "While a Google search of Twitter in education will yield literally hundreds of articles and blog posts espousing ways to use Twitter inside and outside the classroom, a search through academic databases indicated that peer-reviewed research regarding the use of Twitter is just beginning to emerge" (Domizi, 2013, p. 44).

Research has shown that Twitter may be used to promote student's course reading via instructor opening an account and requiring students to become followers. Students reply to questions and can also make a certain number of replies to others. Students may post comments and questions (Park, 2012). In large lecture halls, Twitter may be used for real time feed for student participation and logging of questions (Tyma, 2011). However, in the research, Twitter is also being used for creating classroom communities, collaborative writing, blogging,

collaboration across classes, schools, and countries (Markham and Belkasim, 2011); project management, research of assessing opinion, examining consensus, looking for outlying ideas, conferences, references and research, facilitating virtual classroom discussion, collecting data on students conversations, making quick announcements, office hour, and dissemination of materials (Glosseck and Holtescu, 2008)

One of the authors recently used Twitter for debate in a graduate level distance education class in Contemporary Issues in Special Education. The assignment directed students to the following: Read Issue from text: ***Should General and Special Education Merge***. Once completed students were given the following instructions for the assignment along with several supporting documents:

Scenario:

You are a member of the Pleasant Valley School District community. The Pleasant Valley School Board has proposed to merge General Education and Special Education throughout the district. Based on your assigned role, you will provide feedback on the Pleasant Valley School District Twitter feed. Your goal (based on your assigned role) is to present the strongest case you can for your "side" of this issue representing your assigned role as much as possible.

Instructions:

Review your assigned role and the background information for the debate. Then if you are not familiar with Twitter, review the "Getting Started with Twitter" information. When you are ready to join the debate, login to your assigned account on (http://www.twitter.com) using your assigned Twitter Name and password. Post your response to the proposed merger by replying to the Tweet that you see from Pleasant Valley School District. Detailed instructions for posting in Twitter are available here.

Supporting Documents:

- ***Twitter Account and Role Assignments***
  Twitter accounts were created for each role to minimize student set up time.

- ***Background Information***
  Demographic data provided for fictional school district.
- ***Twitter Information***
  Provided students with basic "how-to" information and links to more detailed Twitter support and documentation.

Data was taken on this assignments student's thoughts on the use of Twitter, as well as number of tweets, and debating skills related to content.

Pinterest, and Voice Thread are two other Web 2.0 tools also being used in the same graduate level distance education class. Pinterest is a popular visual Social Bookmarking tool. Social bookmarking tools allow users to gather resources in a common space to share ideas online. In recent years, Pinterest has gained popularity in the K-12 education community with many teachers collecting resources and ideas for their classrooms. Pinning boards can have any theme. Some common boards that educators on Pinterest have are "Back to School Ideas," "Classroom Decoration Ideas," and "Craft Time Activities".

The site can also be useful for educators looking for a little inspiration within their own subject. English teachers can pin their favorite books to share with other teachers and students on Pinterest, and math teachers can create boards centered around teaching times tables using creative math games, for example (http://www.nea.org/tools/52865.htm). In addition to organizing resources, teachers can also follow other teachers and educational leaders and see the resources they are pinning.

Pinterest was used to have students collaboratively build a dynamic toolkit that is available to them long after the course is over. Students commented on

each other's PINs as an extension to an assigned reading in class. The assignment asked students to post two resources (pins), not duplicating a resource posted by a classmate and to provide a brief summary (500 characters or less) of the resource added.

Voice Thread is an online tool that allows users to have multimedia asynchronous discussions. A teacher can upload a single prompt or an entire presentation (narrated power point, video, text, etc…) and invite others to comment at any point within the presentation/prompt/video. Students can comment via text, web-cam video, or audio. Voice Thread was used to have students comment on a particular reading. For the assignment of one of the author's classes, students were asked to respond to the following prompt, "A scholar presents an encyclopedia of characteristics, causes, and interventions for the several conditions that are all very real attention deficit hyperactivity disorders. An author and journalist, believes that "hothouse parenting" and "over parenting" have created children who overreact to life events because they have not been allowed to develop naturally". They were then directed to Read issue from text, as well as the article, Why French Kids Don't have ADHD – Part 2. Psychology Today (http://www.psychologytoday.cto haeom/blog/suffer-the-children/201209/why-french-kids-don-t-have-adhd-part-2. Students were instructed to create a free account at http://www.voicethread.com and use your WCU email ID as the email address for Voice Thread (e.g. vmcginley@wcupa.edu). The account would become their Voice Thread user name making it easier to identify students for grading purposes. Students were asked to make sure to add their picture, as since

a face is needed for this assignment. Students had to respond to the Voice Thread: https://voicethread.com/share/3895441/ using text, webcam, or voice.

These Web 2.0 tools can be used to facilitate learning and collaboration across institutions and countries. The asynchronous nature of the assignments described here eliminates the logistical problems of coordinating across time zones. The use of tools that allow for posting video, images, etc. addresses potential language barriers that may exist across cultures. The assignments described in this paper are only one example of how each Web 2.0 tool can be used; there are many other ways in which these tools can be incorporated for collaborative online learning. Much more research needs to be done in this area to address the impact of learning across cultures and the technology that supports such learning.

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