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Introduction

Globalization in the Humanities and the Role of Collaborative Online International Teaching and Learning

Alexandra Schultheis Moore and Sunka Simon

This book is proof and demonstration of a sea change in higher education. No longer are digital tools applied as content-delivery vehicles or simple enhancements of existing pedagogies and discipline-based methodologies; rather, faculty and students at institutions of higher learning all over the world are partnering with one another to create globally networked learning environments (GNLEs) in order to promote collaborative online international learning (COIL) based on and embedding digital technologies. The internationalization of learning that began with pen pals and study abroad and that continued with computer-supported collaborative work in the 1990s has morphed into a multifaceted integration of inter- and intracultural educational labor. From course planning through implementation and assessment, globally networked courses impact and transform not only all aspects of teaching and learning but also their institutional parameters in the process. Recent research has examined these learning environments and their attendant pedagogies through a variety of lenses and methodologies, including quantitative and qualitative studies of online and distance education, Web 2.0 technologies, international education, and field-specific inquiry, most notably in the area of foreign language learning (e.g., Guth and Helm 2012). This volume takes a different approach through theoretical and qualitative analyses of the role of globally networked courses in the humanities. With attention to the challenges and limitations of globally networked courses, as well as their rewards, the contributors to this volume—teachers, scholars, students, administrators, and instructional designers—collectively demonstrate how COIL courses can foster participatory and transformative student learning grounded in critical inquiry, cross-cultural awareness, and discipline-specific and interdisciplinary content. To introduce the various perspectives our contributors offer, we briefly situate humanities courses and their pedagogies in the context of the fraught relationship between higher education institutions and globalization.

GLOBALIZATION AND THE HUMANITIES

One of the arguments made by advocates of GNLEs is that they meet the need of higher education institutions (HEIs) to globalize curricula in

order to prepare students for their futures in an interconnected world. This sentiment—often translated into institutions' vision and mission statements, as well as resource allocation for research and curricular development—calls forth competing visions of globalization and the contemporary HEIs' necessary relationship to it. From the perspective that Torres and Rhoads (2006) term “globalization from above” (10), such rhetoric and priorities denote a troubling link between globalization and entrepreneurialism, wherein colleges and universities face increasing pressures to corporatize their missions. Students become client-consumers, who should in turn be trained to see the world as a market in which they must compete and should strive to dominate and in which faculty are positioned as “providers of a saleable commodity such as a credential or a set of workplace skills” (Giroux 2014, 16). In conjunction, the institution itself rewards efficiency, accountability, accreditation, and competitiveness (Torres and Rhoads 2006, 10) in attracting and graduating students as well as in obtaining grants and star faculty. Giroux (2014) argues further that neoliberal pressure on higher education “fosters a mode of public pedagogy that privileges the entrepreneurial subject while encouraging a value system that promotes self-interest” (1; see also Giroux 2012). These critiques of neoliberal influence on HEIs in the name of globalization correspond to analyses by Verger (2009, 2010a, 2010b), Bassett (2006), Marginson (2007), and others of the World Trade Organization General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) that classifies higher education as one of those core services, to be traded across open markets, as opposed to a public good whose worth cannot be wholly determined by market forces (see also Wilson 2010). Although Verger rightly refuses an easy division between education and trade, his research investigates the ways in which the trade ministers who negotiate agreements under the GATS umbrella can use “education as a bargaining chip that can potentially open up new overseas markets for their national industry” (Verger 2010b; see also Knight 2002).

From another perspective, globalization as an institutional and student-centered priority aims to teach students to think in nuanced ways about their own multilayered, shifting global contexts and to recognize the value and viability of worldviews different from their own. Globalization in this view is often attended by concepts such as global citizenship, planetary awareness, and intercultural understanding, although these worthy aspirations have themselves been subject to rigorous critique for the ways in which they mask structural inequalities and conferred privilege (e.g., Marciniak 2010; Agathocleous and Gosselink 2006). Perhaps because the humanities can accommodate those critiques, these disciplines have traditionally offered a site for wrestling with issues of global importance in the context of local specificities. Giroux describes the role of the humanities as follows:

They . . . provide the knowledge, skills, social relations, and modes of pedagogy that constitute a formative culture in which the historical

lessons of democratization can be learned, the demands of social responsibility can be thoughtfully engaged, the imagination can be expanded, and critical thought can be affirmed.

(2014, 19)

The values and skills Giroux highlights demand a pedagogical approach that fosters participatory and dialogic learning, critical thinking, and the possibility of knowledge production as opposed to mastery.

GLOBALY NETWORKED COURSES AND THE COIL MODEL

The GNLEs featured in the chapters that follow embrace this pedagogical model, which is distinct from that usually associated with earlier international distance learning initiatives, which “relied largely on reproducing established institutionally bound courses in digital environments, lacked cultural sensitivity, and disregarded the need for pedagogical innovation to re-envision learning in a globally networked world” (Starke-Meyerring 2010, 127). Through their emphasis on student–student and student–teacher engagement, COIL courses also take a very different approach from massive open online courses (MOOCs) (de Wit 2013). Although the research on MOOCs is mixed in terms of their completion rates and learning outcomes (see, for instance, reports in higher education media by Kolowich 2014 and Lederman 2013), MOOCs typically broaden access to courses through economies of scale achieved through top-down delivery. The proliferation of MOOCs has galvanized innovations within, as well as alternatives to, this model. In the U.S., for example, eight colleges formed the Liberal Arts Consortium for Online Learning (LACOL) to integrate online learning into existing institutional structures and values. LACOL cites as its mission the following goals:

- Developing teaching tools that our current and future students want and will expect
- Enabling our faculty to devote more time to intensive interaction with students
- Expansion of individual campus curricula (e.g., broader course offerings)
- Creating so-called porous classrooms that will draw in diverse student, faculty, and other voices through online exchanges
- Shared access to greater stores of data about student learning (both processes and outcomes) and the impact of teaching innovations. More broadly, the consortium will promote joint exploration of applications of learning theory.
- Faculty development opportunities
- Improving on-campus learning outcomes in residential settings

(Penprase and Nixon 2014)

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These principles reflect a concern with the need to balance the capacity of courses to reach broad and diverse student publics with the need for the “intensive interaction” between teachers and students, which is central to the mission of liberal arts colleges, in order to meet learning goals.

In keeping with that model, although applicable to courses at different kinds of HEIs, the very structure and purpose of GNLEs are based on studies demonstrating the importance of interactive conversational types of communication for transformative learning to take place. As Pea argues:

The initiate in new ways of thinking and knowing in education and learning practices is transformed by the process of communication with the cultural messages of others, but so, too, is the other (whether teacher or peer) in what is learned about the unique voice and understanding of the initiate. Each participant potentially provides creative resources for transforming existing practice, in going beyond the common body of knowledge of the field in their inquiries and the conceptual tools developed to sustain these practices.

(Pea 1994, 288)

In the current convergent media age, such conversations take many forms, and educators and students worldwide are code-switching among reader, user, and maker at increasing speeds. In 2005, Siemens proposed “connectivism” to describe a new way of learning through a network strengthened by the diversity of its participants, information sources, digital tools and types, interdisciplinary approaches, and the process of decision making. Connectivism’s emphasis on knowledge production through interaction and interdisciplinarity offers a valuable approach to humanities courses that interrogate how knowledge is produced and that take place in part or in whole in a digital environment.

Connectivism also underpins COIL courses, as defined by the Center for Collaborative Online International Learning at the State University of New York (COIL Center), which was awarded a three-year grant from the U.S. National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) to support globally networked learning in 2010 and which provides a point of intersection for all of our contributors. The COIL Center promotes “teaching and learning that bring together geographically distant instructors and students from different lingua-cultural backgrounds to communicate and collaborate through the use of online communication tools” (COIL Center 2013). More specifically, its model of bringing together equal partners from two or more HEIs who are geographically distant from one another to team-teach course materials focuses on

interactive shared coursework, emphasizing experiential learning[,] and gives collaborating students a chance to get to know each other while developing meaningful projects together. This broadens and deepens

their understanding of course content while building cross-cultural communicative capacity through academic and personal engagement with the perspectives of global peers.

(COIL Center 2013)

This book not only features a closer look at 12 of these partnerships across different humanities disciplines, but it also includes chapters by the COIL Center's director and program director, a senior higher education administrator, an instructional design team, students, and a data security analyst. It thus features insight into GNLEs from all partners involved in their design, construction, and delivery.

The COIL fellows (the fellowship teams from each partner institution included faculty, administrators, and instructional designers) and their students are uniquely situated to contribute to this volume, having both offered and reflected upon a wide range of humanities-based courses. The fellowship included team-based planning through a conference and online commons, regular participation in the commons through course delivery, and, finally, a capstone conference. Contributors demonstrate that globally networked learning environments can take many forms: a wholly online course involving students located in two or more countries; a blended course design that combines face-to-face instruction with a collaborative, international component; courses in two or more countries that share a common syllabus and linked assignments; those that come together for a single assignment or partial semester; those that integrate collaborative work among students across national boundaries or those in which students do individual work, yet meet online for discussion. Across these different forms, the courses we feature share a commitment to combining intercultural understanding with content knowledge, and the chapters provide strategies for balancing those two components through course materials and the technologies of delivery. More specifically, regardless of the length of collaboration, the courses share a fundamental structure, based on prioritizing meaningful student interactions across the partnerships: icebreaker activities to introduce students to one another and begin to develop discursive norms, multiple forums for synchronous and asynchronous communication (to address problems in coordination across time zones but also to provide students with many points of entry into collaborative engagement), and a progression or scaffolding of academic assignments whose final outcomes depend on the integration of course content and the negotiation of differing perspectives. In addition, because the courses drew on many different technologies for connecting students and for sharing work—including shared text and video editing and other content- and skill-oriented software—the chapters offer an overview of the many different approaches to designing COIL courses, including the benefits and drawbacks of online and face-to-face pedagogy, specific digital tools, and their alternatives.

COIL COURSES' POTENTIAL, LIMITATIONS, AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Globally networked teaching and learning offers a complementary option to other internationalization strategies such as increased study abroad, foreign language requirements, increasing numbers of international students, and global markers for core or required general education courses. It also democratizes internationalization in that not every student has the opportunity to study abroad, despite the benefits that such immersion experiences may provide (see Chapter 7 for a fuller discussion of how GNLEs serve students who are marginalized by socioeconomic and other factors), and therefore broadens access to international experience to students variously positioned within their own institutions and communities.

At the same time, one risk of globally networked courses is that they might provide only superficial engagements with difference in which students compartmentalize their experiences, separating cross-cultural literacies and understanding from content-driven learning. In those cases, the dynamic potential of such courses to alter students' understanding of their place in the world may, in fact, encourage the retrenchment of their local worldviews. At their best, however, according to Starke-Meyerring and Wilson (2008), these kinds of courses, especially when combining face-to-face instruction and internationalization through technology, can promote active or experiential learning, new forms and processes of knowledge production, and interaction (and with it, inter- and intracultural understanding) across traditional boundaries of institutional demographics, language, and nation-state, among other groupings. The chapters that follow discuss the ways in which the different contributors to and participants in COIL courses achieved these three goals—active learning, new forms of knowledge production, and new forms of cultural literacy and understanding—in the context of subject matter ranging from diaspora studies to cinematography to foreign language acquisition to human rights; equally important, the chapters detail the places where communication, partnerships, and cultural literacies broke down.

Regardless of intention, COIL courses and the technologies that make them possible, like any educational model, are not culturally neutral (Hewling 2005; Nye 2005; Reeder, Macfadyen, Roche, and Chase 2004). Thus, the objective of equality between institutional partners is often thwarted by the pragmatics of course delivery and institutional power. For example, the NEH fellowships that supported the development of many of the courses described here could be used to support only U.S. participants' travel to the COIL conferences that bookended the courses, not for international participants. The COIL Center worked to overcome this imbalance by providing videoconferencing with international partners and scheduling sessions at times to make videoconferencing feasible. In addition, some U.S.-based partners benefited from the strong material support for the courses from international cohorts.

As the preceding example indicates, achieving the larger goals of COIL partnerships requires close attention to the power dynamics that determine how, when, and to what extent collaboration can take place.

In addition, as Farrah, Guth, and Helm (2012) discuss, GNLEs often unwittingly replicate the hegemony of English as a global language (their article also addresses important issues of cultural and technological hegemonies). In Chapter 2 of this volume, Guth and Rubin outlines alternatives that either replace or decenter English as the de facto language of collaboration; however, the partnerships described here all adopted English as the shared course language. In this area, too, practitioners' close attention to the need to balance the relative linguistic power of their students can foster cross-cultural literacies in new ways (Guth and Helm 2011; Simon and Yervasi, this volume).

Finally, we note the importance of further research in understanding the legal issues that attend GNLEs in general. Drawing on the research of Rife (2010) and others, Wilson charts some of this ambiguous terrain in Chapter 5 of this volume. We note a gap between, on the one hand, course practitioners' desire to foster collaboration through sharing texts and perspectives, often in relationship to challenging and controversial topics, and, on the other hand, awareness of the difficult issues of educational fair use and copyright (especially when making published material available to students through a shared learning management system), intellectual property, antiplagiarism, and data security legislation, all of which often call forth competing national and international standards (Rife 2010).

ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

Section I—Designing and Developing COIL Courses works alongside this introduction to chart major conceptual, structural, and logistical facets of COIL courses, from designing institutional and course-based learning goals and choosing the technologies to support them to seeking international partners to considerations of security and privacy in online communications. It provides a broad overview of key aspects of GNLEs, as well as the more specific features of COIL courses in the humanities and the pedagogies tied to them.

Section II—Building a Borderless Class: Theories and Practices in the Humanities turns to qualitative reflections and analyses of specific courses in a variety of disciplines. As discussed at the start of this introduction, the move toward internationalization and globalization at many HEIs puts pressure on faculty and administrators to find innovative and cost-effective approaches to meet goals that are subject to debate and interpretation. Much of the existing research addresses the pressure to globalize from the standpoint of international education as opposed to theories of understanding and knowledge production that are integral to the humanities disciplines themselves (e.g., Hovey and Weinberg 2009; Skelly 2009). In contrast, the chapters in

Section II take up the challenges and rewards of COIL courses in the very terms through which practitioners in the humanities understand their work. Framing their chapters with theories of learning as well as the theory that grounds their specific disciplines, contributors—international faculty partners and students—analyze the ways in which new technologies and pedagogies can promote humanities-based learning for the future and with it the broader essential skills of intercultural sensitivity, communication and collaboration, and critical thinking. In addition, chapters in this section argue that teaching and learning in a GNLE inevitably loops back onto knowledge organization, theorization, and content in the target disciplines, formulating a critical and practical intervention into disciplinary paradigms in the age of globalization.

Section III—Creative Knowledge Production in COIL Courses addresses the performing arts to better understand how international collaborations might fuel and challenge students' understanding of the creative process. This section explodes the confines of the content delivery system by showcasing how career goals in a globalized economy make collaborative communicative and creative skills not tangential but central to a reworked intercultural humanities curriculum. Working in an ad agency or for film and television, for Netflix and Amazon Prime, is a collaborative global venture, whether one seeks employment as a cinematic storyteller, an actor, or a distribution agent. Composing and performing jazz in a GNLE highlights and utilizes jazz's roots on the African, North and South American, and European continents. It allows its practitioners to trace and reconnect with these roots historically, stylistically, and technologically, making the genre viable for the generations of globally connected artists to come. Connecting artists with diverse ethnic, racial, class, gender, and sexuality backgrounds through a collaborative project with a performance-based outcome cultivates listening skills, raises awareness for layered cultural and geopolitical nuances, and turns the conflicts with and understanding of these into a creative product. Not just talking about but making a potentially publishable or marketable product in international cooperation fosters the social, ethical, innovative, and technological intelligence without which a contemporary university degree should be unthinkable.

Together the three sections aim to open for further investigation key issues at the nexus of globalization, higher education, and the humanities. Contributors support COIL courses not as a panacea to claims that the humanities are increasingly irrelevant or to pressures to embrace globalization in any form. Rather they argue that COIL courses provide one educational model that demonstrates to students how their active engagement shapes their knowledge of the humanities in a globalized world.

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