

COLLABORATIVE ON-LINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING (COIL) PROJECT FOR PRE-SERVICE TEACHER BILINGUAL TRAINING ON NATURAL SCIENCES DIDACTICS IN PRIMARY/ELEMENTARY EDUCATION DEGREE

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Abstract

This project has been carried out in the context of an international, on line, multidisciplinary teaching innovation project at University of Oviedo (UO, Spain) in collaboration with Glenville State College (GSC, West Virginia, USA). Participants in the whole project accounts for 180 in different teaching modules belonging to different Degrees in the field of Social Sciences and Humanities. One of the courses in this multidisciplinary project has been focused on Natural Sciences Teaching (taught in English Language) and another on communication skills for English Language Teaching as Second Language in the Degree of Primary/Elementary Education at UO.

The project is based on two theoretical frameworks: Project-Based Learning (Bender, 2012) and International Collaborative Online Learning (COIL, 2016). The methodology follows the collaborative, international teamwork as proposed by SUNY COIL Center, (New York, USA), supported by web-based education systems (Moodle or Blackboard). The modules including COIL elements allow participants to acquire intercultural learning experiences developing meaningful collaborative projects. Participants explore new opportunities to increase mutual knowledge, acquiring higher degree of empathy, sharing common learning interests from different cultures and backgrounds. Each lecturer at both Institutions completed specific online training on COIL methodology before starting the project. Collaboration was established between partners lecturing in the same field of knowledge to design and prepare learning goals, contents, activities and assessments in each course, to be carried out in 4-6 weeks.

COIL courses integration in the curricular programs at Higher Education is an advantage for participating students (Moore & Simon, 2015) supported by ICT. Common benefits for COIL participants are: Development of communication skills (English Learners as Second Language in the case of UO students); Critical Thinking; Interpersonal skills and negotiation skills; Development of empathy towards other cultures; Acquisition of deeper intercultural knowledge; Implementation of contents learned in the course; Design and presentation (oral and written) of learning products in Virtual Learning Environments (VLE). In addition, after participating in this project, many students showed greater interests in taking part in international mobility programs at Higher Education Institutions.

In the Natural Sciences Teaching course, GC students were enrolled in the Moodle System managed by UO, to form the internationally-mixed groups, guidance provided by both lecturers. Students at both Universities learned about their different cultures, daily life at University, learning methodologies and experiences, and common interest for their future professional careers. Then, students were divided into small internationally-mixed groups to facilitate engagement in learning activities. Assignments included: sharing a photo/video introduction, online discussion forums, small-group videoconferences, group activities dealing with the content issue (notebooking skills for Natural Science Teaching) and final conclusions (written and/or video reflections). After successful completion of COIL assignments students earned a certificate of completion issued jointly by Glenville State College and University of Oviedo. Students valued positively the COIL course and the intercultural experience for learning Primary/Elementary Natural Sciences Didactics.

Key words: Natural Sciences Didactics; Pre-service teacher training; Virtual Learning Environment; Interculturality; COIL