UNICollaboration
Journal of VIRTUAL EXCHANGE

Exploring U.S. students' takeaways from a cross-Pacific COIL project

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Abstract

English imperialism has helped form the dominance of one-way communication from Native English Speakers (NESs) to English learners, resembled in the existing literature of international education and exchange education (i.e. study abroad programs). Such unbalanced foci in the ongoing scholarship of exchange programs, including Virtual Exchange (VE), do not equally represent the whole participating parties of collaboration and furthermore overlook the learning needs and achievements from NESs. Noticing such a gap in the scholarship, the author intended to explore what NESs and native speakers of more than English have taken away from a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project between a university in China and a Hispanic-Serving Institution in the U.S. Twenty-one U.S. students in a writing-as-processes course were asynchronously collaborated with 20 students in a reading-writing course in China over ten weeks. The COIL data of this case study was from U.S. students' reflections on the peer review giving and given and their COIL reflections. The qualitative findings revealed that Peer Feedback (PF) via COIL broadened participants' insight about contrastive rhetoric, English as pluralistic, and cross-cultural communication. The COIL project also offered multi-dimensional enrichment and promoted 21st century skills in general. The participants expected some form of continuous VE projects, similar to the current COIL project, in the subsequent semesters. Those findings implied practical considerations of how to further develop COIL – synchronous or/and asynchronous modes, multi-layered collaborations, individual and collective communication, and a balance among students' autonomy, technology support, and instructors' affordability of additional arrangements

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for details. The significance of the study lies in the fact that the findings would help mitigate and balance scholarly attention to students' takeaways from both participating parties.

1.   Introduction

Globalization involves the multi-directional movement of people and their ideas across borders (Rizvi, 2019); however, only one-way communication from NESs to English learners has been chronically and widely represented in the existing literature of English language education, international education, and exchange education (i.e. partnering degree-seeking programs, study abroad programs, or Fulbright scholarships). Moreover, the connotation of NESs needs to reflect speakers of multiple languages with English as one of them, despite the collaborative terms reflecting the trend of globalization in higher education, such as COIL, the mindset of linguistic imperialism still dominates the ongoing conversation (Phillipson, 2009, 2016). Such unbalanced foci in exchange programs or exchange projects do not represent the whole participating parties and furthermore overlook the learning needs and achievements from native English-speaking students in multiple perspectives and layers, which are highlighted as part of the 21st century skills by scholars such as Geisinger (2016) in higher education.

Noticing the gap in literature about broader NESs participating exchange programs, the author in this article intended to explore what the NESs or native speakers of more than English have taken away from an online exchange project. The COIL project was nested in the field of writing between a university in China and a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the U.S. The COIL data of this case study was from 21 U.S. students' reflective essays on the peer review giving and given, and their COIL reflections. This study and its findings would have an impact on helping mitigate and balance scholarly attention to students' takeaways from both participating parties.

2.   Literature review

2.1.   Why VE?

With the advancement of technology, VE has evolved in many forms. One of the recent forms is COIL, in which exchange refers to "connecting two or more classes of similar course content in

different countries" (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 14). The course modules are connected in a sense that the two respective student groups will communicate and collaborate together. As O'Dowd (2018) states, such collaboration may occur "synchronously or asynchronously […] via email, voice, video, or in some combination" (p. 14).

Hauck and Kurek (2017) highlight COIL's authenticity in terms of linguistic and intercultural contexts. Hauck and Kurek (2017) advocate the use of COIL to connect digital and academic literacy, in the current context where being literate means "being able to navigate between a multiplicity of voices, perspectives, cultures, and textualities in mostly technology-mediated contexts" (p. 275). Furthermore, COIL help students engage in such multi-faceted literacy and develop self-reflection on the constant interplay of themselves and "social, economic, historical, and political contexts that determine the various discourses resulting from it" (Fuchs, Hauck, & Müller-Hartmann, 2012, p. 83).

Moreover, COIL empowers participating students who cannot travel or study abroad to partially experience authentic cultures of 'others' abroad (Fondo & Jacobetty, 2020; O'Dowd, 2016). In addition to the contextual and logistical factors aforementioned, several researchers (e.g. Fuchs et al., 2012; Guth & Helm, 2010; Hauck & Kurek, 2017) found multi-faceted development from students in their COIL programs or other types of VE – digital literacy, intercultural awareness, and communicative competence (Chen & Yang, 2016; Fuchs et al., 2012, p. 83). Such skills developed from COIL and the like were also referred to by other scholars, such as Jager, Kurek, and O'Rourke (2016), as 21st century skills.

2.2.   The 21st century skills

The American Association of College and Universities (AACU) developed a framework of 21st century skills as guiding outcomes for graduates of higher education to attain. Among those skills, intellectual and practical skills are inclusive of "inquiry and analysis, critical and creative thinking, written and oral communication […], teamwork and problem solving" (AACU, 2007, p. 3). Another subset, personal and social responsibility, has "intercultural knowledge and competence" (AACU, 2007, p. 3). Geisinger (2016) further conceptualizes the four categories of the 21st century skills into three dimensions: "information communication – written, spoken, virtual, art, collaboration, and using information communication technology, and ethics and social impact – social responsibility, critical thinking, decisions/judgment, and social awareness" (p. 247).

Connected with multiple categories or dimensions of the 21st century skills mentioned above (i.e. communication, information, critical thinking, inquiry, and analysis), students' skill development

would be embodied along the process of writing. In the current study, the writing process refers to pre-writing (reading for writing), drafting, giving and receiving PF, revising and reflecting, and final submissions.

2.3.   Why choose writing and cross-cultural PF?

In this neo-colonial era, "English-speaking nation-states play a significant role in global capitalism, the world's economy" (Perkins & Jiang, 2021, p. 212), politics, and "military, social, communication, and cultural activities" (Phillipson, 2009, p. 2, 2016). Such an advantageous status of English and its dominantly represented ideology of English imperialism and English patriotism have helped lead to, for instance, the "general failure of foreign language education in the U.S." (Macedo, 2017, p. 82). The failure also refers to deficient attention to bilingual education and cultural diversity for and of immigrant students. Immigrant students' Englishes should be acknowledged as "valid and valuable" (Jain, 2014, p. 490), and the monolingualism in education is more "consistent with 20th century ideologies" and has not "kept pace with these 21st century realities" (Jain, 2014, p. 491). Accordingly, students in those English-speaking countries, including the U.S., have the need to develop cultural responsiveness and intercultural competence, that is "an awareness of multiple cultures and knowledge of the cultures of 'me' and 'the other'" (Senokossoff & Jiang, 2015, pp. 295-296). Moreover, to acknowledge language experiences of immigrant students and in foreign language education in English-speaking countries, the term of NESs needs to embrace native speakers of multiple languages with English as one of them in practice and scholarship. Furthermore, English reading and writing processes are regarded as "the cornerstones of academic success" (Lems, Miller, & Soro, 2017, p. 230), because both are involved with various genres, connected between phonemes and graphemes, reduced in context, embedded in component processes, loaded in information processing, and more sophisticatedly structured than oral English (Lems et al., 2017; Perkins & Jiang, 2019).

COIL or other types of VE, could bring more opportunities to mitigate and attenuate linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2009, 2016) and English hegemony (Sun, Zhang, & Cheung, 2021, p. 33). The hegemony of English is associated with "the transfer of a dominant language to other people as the result of colonization or globalization in terms of economic power or military conquest" (Perkins & Jiang, 2021, p. 211). English hegemony needs to be re-examined in light of the introduction of diverse identities, pluralistic literacy practices, and exchange programs, such as COIL. In addition, the number of global Englishes continues to grow. Galloway and Rose (2018, p. 8) provide a long list of over a dozen versions of global Englishes, including Japanese English, Scottish English, Egyptian English, Kenyan English, Malaysian English, Nigerian English,

Patois (Jamaican English Creole), and so on; they acknowledge a movement away from the native English benchmark (Galloway & Rose, 2018, p. 3). Aligning with Galloway and Rose (2018), Canagarajah (2011, pp. 413-414, 2013) states that successful communication can be achieved without adhering to native English-speaking norms and the English norms are equated with diversity.

One channel of the aforementioned communication across cultures through COIL is students' PF (Ware & O'Dowd, 2008), which is named differently as 'peer review', 'peer editing', 'peer evaluation', or 'peer response', in various literature. PF refers to the practice of students assuming responsibilities in commenting on each other's drafts in written and oral formats during the process of writing (Liu & Hansen, 2002; Yu & Lee, 2016). Informed by various theoretical sources, such as process theory of writing, collaborative learning theory, communicative language teaching, and sociocultural theories (e.g. Vygotsky's zone of proximal development), PF is reported to have cognitive, social, linguistic, and affectual benefits in both in-person interactions and VE (for details, see Hyland & Hyland, 2006; Liu & Hansen, 2002; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). Connected with the current study, the PF can be considered as an approach to help counter English-speaking domination and help discover those linguistic and cultural diversities from overseas counterparts for English speakers.

What adds to the extra feature of PF is that it occurred across languages and cultures in the current study. Contrastive rhetoric is an area of research in second language acquisition that "examines differences and similarities in writing across cultures" (Connor, 2002, p. 493). It originates from Kaplan's (1966) cultural thought patterns. Kaplan's (1966) cultural thought patterns are closely relevant to the current study, because at least the three types out of the five paragraph organizations would be represented in the drafts and possibly in PF – English, Romance, and Oriental. The Oriental style is circular, rotating or wheeling; English academic writing is straightforward, linear, and explicit (Jiang, 2011; Mu, 2007); the Romance type has "[m]uch greater freedom to digress or to introduce extraneous material" (Kaplan, 1966, p. 12).

Contrastive rhetoric was further developed by JoAnne Liebman (1992, p. 141) into an expanded contrastive rhetoric. The new contrastive rhetoric is not only embodied in finished written products, but also in the contexts in which writing occurs as a process. Liebman (1992) describes contrastive rhetoric as the differences in writers' "approach to audiences, their perception of the purpose of writing, the type of writing tasks with which they feel comfortable, the composing processes they have been encouraged to develop, and the role writing plays in their education" (p. 142). These aspects are resembled in individuals' writing processes and their PF giving and given.

3.   Methodology

3.1.   Research questions

Inspired by the existing literature about PF and VE or the lack thereof, the author aimed to explore answers to the following questions.

- What did the U.S. students notice in writing across languages from PF via COIL?
- What sociocultural factors did the U.S. students discover in writing beyond languages from PF via COIL?
- What other takeaways did the U.S. students get from COIL?
- What were the expectations from the U.S. students about future COIL projects?

3.2.   The current study

3.2.1.   Context

The current case study was conducted at a U.S. research university and a university in a coastal metropolis in China. The university in China has approximately 40,000 students, with a few thousand international students. The domestic students are all native Chinese speakers, as are the approximately 3,000 faculty members.

The U.S. university is one of the largest HSIs in the Southeast. The U.S. university primarily serves working-class and minority students and thus has brought high impact on social mobility to local communities. Many of its students come from immigrant families and cannot afford to go abroad for study. Even when they have opportunities to travel or study abroad, they might prefer countries in Central and South America because of the geographic closeness and cultural/linguistic connections/belonging to Hispanic countries to those in Asia.

When it comes to students' demographics in the U.S. university, over 60% of its around 49,000 undergraduate students are Latino/Hispanic (National Center for Education Statistics). It employs over 2,300 faculty and almost half of those are foreign-born from 135 countries. Such racial and ethnic demographics in faculty, however, still do not reflect its student population (Carter, 2018, pp. 252-253). The university's COIL initiative started in 2016, providing COIL consultations and curricular workshops. Applying the university COIL resources and adding COIL in the curriculum for students would be eye-opening and beneficial to students who speak English only or English and other languages (mostly Spanish).

3.2.2.   Participants

Twenty-one U.S. students who were mostly juniors or seniors participated in the current research study. Those participants were mostly bilingual – English and a Romance language (i.e. Spanish or Portuguese), with English or other humanities fields as their majors. The researcher of the current study was the instructor of their writing course.

Twenty students from a reading-writing class in the Chinese university participated and they all majored in nursing for practicing abroad. Those participants had Mandarin as their first language and English as their foreign language. The instructor of their writing course was the co-researcher of a bigger study which the COIL section was a part of.

3.2.3.   COIL procedure

The rationale of adopting COIL in the current study was the match of the research objectives mentioned in the introduction and a collective review of the existing COIL literature (e.g. Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). The COIL literature supported the aims of this project as: (1) helping students become familiar with rhetoric, voices, and thinking styles in writing, which stem from various cultures and primary languages, and (2) helping students practice written PF with people unlike them.

In the current study, one reading-writing course in China was connected with one writing-as-processes course in the U.S. The two groups collaborated asynchronously through emails, with the consideration of challenge in time differences. In the ten weeks of the COIL project, the two groups of participants read the same article, wrote one exploratory essay with identical prompts, exchanged their corrective feedback with assigned partner(s) in the other university, revised their essays accordingly, and wrote their reflection about the exchange; they submitted their final draft for grading. The two groups were introduced with the same guidelines of giving written corrective feedback and followed the same writing rubric, as the tutoring training from their respective instructors (Ware & O'Dowd, 2008, p. 46). The e-tutoring format (Ware & O'Dowd, 2008), essays, and real-life text exchanges, in the current study, helped students contextualize the text socio-culturally, read between the text, and write for diverse groups of audience.

In detail, the students from both sides read and discussed a paper published in the New Yorker, that is "Live and Learn: Why We Have College". This paper offers a theoretical framework to understand the nature of higher education in the U.S. After reading this paper, students needed to write an exploratory essay on the topic of "Why I Attend College" for submission. During the second stage, both instructors assigned overseas students' essays to their own students and asked them to read

and comment with the aid of a set of questions for peer reviewers (see Appendix). Students from both sides used Microsoft Word to write and comment using *Track Changes*. In the third stage, students responded to comments provided by their overseas partners. They had to evaluate how they would deal with those comments and suggestions and how they would incorporate them into the revision process (see Figure 1 below as an example of PF). Then they submitted the final version to their instructors for grades.

Figure 1.   An example of PF using Microsoft Word Track Changes and comments
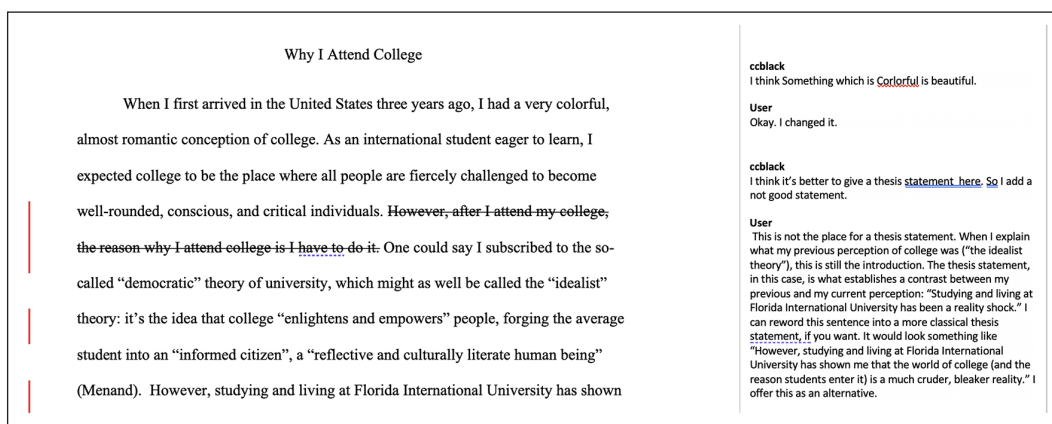
After the PF activities, students needed to write a reflective essay with given prompts. The reflective essay was expected to facilitate students to review and evaluate the whole process of conducting PF with an overseas partner(s). Students were also encouraged to write what they had learned from this collaborative project and how they would apply the new knowledge in the future.

3.3.   Data collection and data analysis

In the current case study, no intervention occurred in the process of data collection. All the data were from assignments in and after class. All the identifiable information in the data was removed and all the real names were changed into pseudonyms to the participants' preferences. The COIL part of the data came from U.S. students' reflective essays and excerpts in their final-term portfolios.

Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) was applied to the data. QCA is a type of qualitative interpretive research method, with the steps of "[c]oding, collecting codes under potential subthemes or themes, and comparing the emerged coding's clusters together and in relation to the entire data set" (Vaismoradi, Jones, Turunen, & Snelgrove, 2016, p. 101). The author coded the answers with

different colors to discover emerging subthemes first. Then subthemes were clustered into themes. For instance, coding related to participants' expectations to collaborate with overseas partners along writing in a *deeper, broader*, and *longer* sense were developed into the theme of *further collaboration in writing*. To write up, the author threaded the draft with themes.

4.   Findings

4.1.   Contrastive rhetoric across cultures

Born and raised in the U.S., most of the participants found writing of 'the other' salient. Danny, for instance, elaborated his finding:

> "I do not travel very much so I am ignorant when it comes to languages that are not Spanish or English. I do not see many differences between Spanish and English, but this experience introduced another language to me. Even though I never read anything in my partner's language, I was still able to read his accent through his writing in how he worded his essay" (Danny).

Samantha labeled the 'accent' as writing style, by saying "I was able to see firsthand how students from [X] University use the Oriental (Asian) writing style, which is circular, respectful, indirect, non-assertive, and authoritative". Specifically, Anna referred to the usage of a word by stating "I have learned that some people may not have the exact same definition for a word that I do". Echoing Anna's reflection, an example would be a comment from a Chinese counterpart on Alizarain's essay about the word 'track': Alizarain used it as a synonym for specification or major and the Chinese student seemed lost at its meaning.

Furthermore, Pikachu summarized that "writing is contextual"; a good example was from the first sentence in Genesis's essay – "being the daughter of Cuban immigrants and being one myself, I have learned […] their sacrifices of leaving their life behind" – and the comment from the Chinese counterpart "I'm sorry, I didn't quite get it. Do you mean that you appreciate what Cuban immigrants did to fight for the right to attend college"? Students from China, a non-immigrant country, might need more background knowledge about immigrants and their experiences before and after coming to the U.S.

In addition to the sociocultural aspect mentioned above, Sol analyzed the writing from non-NESs which may not sound 'correct' and concluded with the factor that "it is derived from their native

language"; Abdu-Jabal raised his consciousness of "idioms or jargon used in my paper" because "they may not be received by those second language speakers who are just becoming familiar with syntactic and semantic rules in English grammar and lexical knowledge"; Samantha also listed the differences in sentence structure. All of the discussions above compose many levels and aspects in and around linguistics – morphemic, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and sociolinguistic.

4.2.   Intercultural communication and mindfulness

Many participants seemed aware of the privilege associated with the English language, so they provide PF with growing consideration. For instance, Rachel, a multilingual student in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, tried not to "make the student feel inferior"; Jade, a monolingual English speaker, wrote the same comment about inferiority; Lulu, a bilingual student in English and Spanish, wrote that "it was difficult to ask questions that might not sound arrogant or too direct in order to help them improve their paper". Similarly, Samantha reflected on the concept 'standard English' and disclosed that "no writing style is 'correct'".

Mindfulness was an evident theme from the participants' communication across cultures. The participant, Sol, noticed that reviewers need "to be kind and courteous". Jade added to the topic that "when making comments, it's better to be specific instead of simply fixing the issue with no explanation". Macbeth showed his mindfulness by sharing that "I should be wary of injecting my thoughts and language in the words of another student, especially if they're a non-native English speaker". Lulu summarized her strategy as "to ask the right questions in an empathetic way" with her raised awareness of "putting ourselves in other people's shoes". Rachel used a metaphor – "to give a more balanced 'dose' of feedback".

In all, intercultural communication helped participants come up with the conclusion that "we are not so different at all" (Angel Cake's response). Angel Cake also elaborated on the transformation of her outlook as the following:

> "I've often thought about 'far away' cultures as something alien, scary, too far away for me to even comprehend. But as cheesy as this might sound, this project taught me that we are not so different after all. In approaching new research and interacting with different cultures in my writing, I will be more open to seeing the similarities rather than differences between other cultures and mine".

The thread of being unknown/different/common resembles participating students' growing mindfulness and intercultural awareness.

4.3. Multi-faceted eye-opening moments

4.3.1. Writing across culture via technology

Samantha attributed the COIL project to her growth in cross-cultural written communication in the sense that it "opened my eyes to how students in other parts of the world write". Participants also practiced *Track Changes* and *New Comment* in Microsoft Word, in the process of offering feedback. Danny said that he "learned about the comment feature in Microsoft Word" and he would use it for draft refinement in the future.

4.3.2. Writing in collaboration

Even though participants have had experiences in collaboration during their school years, such as group projects or group presentations, they seemed less experienced in collaborations along the processes of writing. Giving and receiving PF appeared to be inspirational. For example, Egypt, a monolingual English speaker, revealed that "doing this collaborative writing project has opened my eyes on how I can collaborative [sic] with writers and allowing [sic] someone to read my writing can improve".

Morgan would apply the COIL experience to future cross-cultural collaborations in her context:

> "I also gained more firsthand knowledge on how to cooperatively work with a student who has an entirely different style of formatting works and formulating arguments – specifically as a result of culture in this project. Because our campus has so many international students, this experience will help me to be more cooperative and empathetic when trying to understand these students' writing" (Morgan).

4.4. Thoughts about future COILs

As evidenced above, the COIL project won wide popularity among participants, who were very grateful to be engaged in the cross-cultural written communication experiences. They also provided a variety of constructive suggestions for future COILs.

4.4.1. Additional opportunities for communication

Because of the common motivation from two instructors and the research design of the whole project, the procedure was to examine PF. Thus, only email was used in this asynchronized

communication between two instructors. Students did not have chances for synchronous or asynchronous communication by themselves. Some participants would have liked to have their peer communication in the future and they expressed their expectations as follows.

> "Perhaps do a live chat with the other students. Sometimes it is difficult to type things you want to say. I feel that a live chat with no camera can be beneficial for the communication aspect of the project and lead to a more intense discussion" (Sol).

> "I guess I would have liked to talk with the student more. I don't know how a 'real time' session would be likely across the globe (keeping in mind time zones), and I suppose there is room for it not working out, because of technical issues or a student being absent that day, but I think the option would facilitate the collaboration process and allow for a better connection" (Macbeth).

> "I wish we did more one-on-one activities and talked to our partners about ourselves. I believe that in this way the experience would be better. I imagined that we would be seeing recorded videos of their classroom and the students" (Hazel).

Pikachu rationalized his suggestion of implementing synchronous meetings in that "I think that a video call would fix the potential misunderstandings of written communication and allow both parties to communicate better".

4.4.2. Further collaboration in writing

The word 'further' implies three layers of meanings – deeper, broader, and longer. Both Angel Cake and Sol, two bilingual participants (i.e. English and Spanish), hoped the PF occurring in two rounds as a two-way communication, in detail as follows.

> "I was disappointed that I didn't get to see the improvement on the Chinese student's paper after I gave feedback, and I also wanted them to see the improvement on my paper. I feel like this would've allowed us both to have been more active in the writing process of each other's paper, as well as having received additional feedback and seeing how our feedback was received" (Angel Cake).

> "I would have liked to have more than just one review of the essays. I would have liked to see the changes they made as well as see if the changes I made were what the reviewer pictured. This way I would be able to see more of the process from both ends" (Sol).

Abdu-Jabal indicated his expectations on the expanding breadth of the collaboration in the current study (i.e. multiple reviewers to one essay and one reviewer with multiple essays), by revealing that "it really can take some of the collaborative spirit out of the experience… because we are only getting a single perspective with the paper we're reviewing instead of a breadth of perspectives". Pikachu showed his willingness to participate in continuous COIL projects or alike in writing, by stating that a "more ambitious improvement would be collaborating with different schools across the world each semester to learn about how these countries approach academic writing and their views on a topic".

5.   Discussions

5.1.   Merits of COIL

The testimonials of participants echo with the existing literature about the merits of COIL. In the process of written communication and PF via COIL, many of them came to realize multiple factors beyond writing leading to 'accent' in their counterparts' writing and their composing process. Samantha, for example, connected her self-discovery and self-reflection on her partner's writing with Kaplan's (1966) contrastive rhetoric, in particular, the Oriental and English styles. They attributed their vivid awakening to their access to firsthand knowledge from the other party's writing through PF, similar to the benefits of e-tutoring in Ware and O'Dowd's (2008) study.

Moreover, Danny's sincere disclosure of his limited travel experience justified the role that VE or COIL can play (O'Dowd, 2016). Danny speaks to many students like him in the university in the light that they are from working-class and minority immigrant families. Even though other participants did not mention that they had or had not had their overseas experiences, the authenticity in linguistic and intercultural contexts, reflected in the current study, provided genuine enrichment (Hauck & Kurek, 2017). The multi-dimensional enrichment, shared by the participants in the COIL project, reiterate the advantages of VE and resemble the 21st century skills to different extents – "intercultural communicative competence and digital competence, intercultural awareness, critical thinking, and digital literacies" (O'Dowd, 2018, p. 6; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008).

5.2.   Growth in mindfulness about linguistic multiplicity from COIL and beyond

The U.S. students, many of whom are from immigrant families, have been immersed in more than one language for years. Nevertheless, they were more connected to Romance languages (i.e. Spanish or maybe Portuguese) than other languages (e.g. Chinese). Due to previous assimilation or

acculturation experiences of themselves and their families, they were more likely to be aware of the linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 2009) and English hegemony (Sun et al., 2021), as well as derived bias, oppression, discrimination, and other stigmas. Hence, there was no wonder when Rachel and Jade commented about linguistic inferiority, which should be a sensitive term to them.

With that being said above, those U.S. students in the current study, to different extents, seemed to have the mindset of linguistic multiplicity and the power dynamics involved. They adopted and further developed mindfulness via COIL to avoid making the speakers of other languages feel inferior. For instance, Lulu, a bilingual participant, monitored her choice of words in their questions that "might not sound arrogant or too direct".

Their mindfulness also included enhanced knowledge about the concept of 'standard English' versus other Englishes (Galloway & Rose, 2018), like 'Chinese English' in the current study, with respect to the center and the periphery of the English language. Carrying inclusive and diverse mindfulness, the participants appeared to develop their global perspectives about other versions of English and their legitimacy in writing. For instance, Samantha reflected that "no writing style is 'correct'" with respect to the English concept. Angel Cake also called for being "culturally sensitive to avoid alienating and disenfranchizing student writers". It is safe to conclude that the participants' global mindfulness was developed via COIL and itself resembled the meaning of COIL.

5.3.   Continuity of COIL

The participants also expected some form of continuous projects, similar to the current COIL project, in the incoming semesters. They provided numerous suggestions for improvements to COIL, some of which might not be applicable to other COIL projects due to the differences in course designs, foci, and contexts. Even though the situation does not allow for this COIL's continuity, the participants seemed confident and competent to apply their knowledge and skills stemming from the COIL to their local context (e.g. Morgan) and their future courses (e.g. Danny and Sol). In particular, the skills in giving and accepting corrective feedback, their mindfulness, and their cross-cultural communication and collaboration were perceived by participants as transferrable, on which COIL has brought a sensory impact (e.g. Fuchs et al., 2012; Guth & Helm, 2010; Hauck & Kurek, 2017). Such cognitive, affective, meta-cognitive, and interpersonal transference can be seen as the continuity of COIL spirit in the sense.

Although VE or its branch, COIL, is still in the arising stage, its positive impact has been revealed in previous studies (Fuchs et al., 2012; Guth & Helm, 2010; Hauck & Kurek, 2017; O'Dowd, 2016;

Ware & O'Dowd, 2008). The discussion on COIL's development should not be 'if', but 'how'. Again, the participants pooled their expectations as the first-time COIL tasters, and the instructors, also the first-time COIL adopters, would reflect on their future COIL blueprints and implementations. Some feedback in pairs might be considered for the future COIL designs: synchronous or/and asynchronous collaborations, multi-layered collaborations, multi-phased collaborations, and individual or/and collective collaborations. Such considerations and choices would help maximize learning outcomes and align with their course objectives. In addition, there would be a balance among students' autonomy, technology support, and instructors' affordability of additional arrangements for details in COIL projects. The additional arrangements, as expected, should include more contextual and background knowledge in order to help demystify "the illusion of commonality" (Ware & Kramsch, 2005, p. 200). For instance, it might be taken for granted about the reasons to go to college in the current study; what the study lacked would lie in an introduction of the student population in respective contexts. The U.S. students were mainly bilingual and from new immigrant families; the Chinese students were mostly the only child in their families because of the former one-child policy, thus they carry heavy family mission from their parents and possibly their grandparents to advance their degrees. When implementing additional arrangements, such as live chats and peer talks suggested by multiple participants in the current study (e.g. Sol, Macbeth, Hazel, and Pikachu), instructors may need to keep in mind that the arrangements may be a double-edged sword with respect to affective factors – building peer rapport to facilitate some socially comfortable students in learning and creating social apprehension to hinder some anxious communicators from learning (Fondo & Jacobetty, 2020).

6. Conclusion and future perspectives

The paper has shared the COIL section of a case study, with 14 U.S. participants' testimonials to show their growth in a wide range of the 21st century skills and in a deepened knowledge about their own composition and rhetoric field. The small sample size would be one of the limitations in this study. Meanwhile, it should be noted in this study that most of the U.S. participants are native speakers of more than English, unlike the monolingual majority of the U.S. population. Moreover, because of the common motivation from two instructors and the research design, the COIL was implemented via only email exchanges between the instructors. The monitored asynchronous communication would be the other limitation.

Accordingly, for future purposes of transcontinental communication and cultural immersion, it is suggested that with multiple venues of communications (i.e. WeChat or WhatsApp groups), students on both sides should be able to choose to interact synchronously and enter multiple discourses

beyond written and academic discourses. In other words, students can explore a comprehensive package from the 'others' as much as possible, to unveil the so-called token diversity or "the illusion of commonality" surfaced by the communicative approach and technology (Ware & Kramsch, 2005, p. 200). Such a step to expanding communications beyond textual connotations and the classroom vacuum would realize further authentic communications and reformative understandings across cultures. Furthermore, strategies and modeling of giving and responding to corrective feedback should be given more attention and time in the training (Ware & O'Dowd, 2008; Yu & Lee, 2016), to help successfully transit student roles from writers to peer reviewers to tutors. It is also suggested that the VE-like collaboration would happen in several sections or units of the same courses, thus, more participants would help quantify their growth in breadth and depth.

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Journal of Virtual Exchange 2022
Edited by Carolin Fuchs and Müge Satar

Publication date: 2022/04/01

Journal of Virtual Exchange (JVE) is an online, open-access, peer-reviewed journal aimed at practitioners and researchers in the field known variously as virtual exchange, telecollaboration, or online intercultural exchange. It is the official journal of UNICollaboration (https://www.UNICollaboration.org/), the international academic organisation dedicated to supporting and promoting telecollaboration and virtual exchange in higher-level education.

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Appendix

Questions for Peer Review

1. Read the introduction paragraph(s). Is there a thesis statement toward the end of the introduction? If yes, underline it and provide any suggestions on improvement.

2. Overall, is the introductory paragraph interesting and clearly written? Any suggestions on improvement?

Please go through the body paragraphs one by one by thinking of the following questions:

3. Is there a topic sentence in the body paragraph? If yes, please underline it; if there isn't a topic sentence, could you suggest one?

4. Does the topic sentence well echo the thesis of the essay? Any suggestions on improvement?

5. Of the reasons and proofs given to support the writer's opinion, are they relevant and logical to the topic? Any suggestions on improvement?

6. Are there any real-life examples or concrete illustrations to support the main idea of each paragraph? If not, what specific details or solid examples does the writer need to add?

7. Read the conclusion. Does it begin with a restatement of the thesis with different wording? If not, suggest one. Does the conclusion move to more general statement on the topic? Does the conclusion contain any irrelevant information to the thesis? If yes, make a suggestion.

8. Does the essay use appropriate word choices and correct word forms? Could you suggest improvements?

9. Are there any grammar errors that need correcting? Point them out and explain your reasons.

10. Overall, what other changes would you suggest to improve the essay?