

Language and Leadership: Best Practices and Lessons Learned in U.S. / India COIL Partnership

Candace D. Bloomquist, PhD

Assistant Professor, Interdisciplinary Leadership Program, Creighton University, Omaha, NE
Email: CandaceBloomquist@creighton.edu

Mike Mencuccini, EdD

Owner/Partner, The Conforta Group, Leadership Development for Nonprofit Organizations. Phoenix, AZ
Email: conforta1@gmail.com

C.J. Hobson, MA

Sr. Director, Global Titans Center, California State University Fullerton, Fullerton, CA
Email: jhobson@fullerton.edu

Tags

Internationalization and Global Learning; Citizen Diplomacy/Education Diplomacy; Cross-Cultural Issues; Experiential Education; Language Education; Partnerships; Professional Training; Student Learning and Development; Technology; University/Higher Education; Virtual Exchange

Setting

A partnership between an accredited U.S. university and a teacher training institute in the province of Nagaland, India is central to this case study of a COIL conversation model course. In comparison to India's overall enrollment of secondary and higher education students at 26.3 percent, Nagaland's enrollment is at 18.7 percent (The Morning Express, July 2021). One reason for this lower enrollment rate in Nagaland is the lack of qualified teachers.

The teacher training institute in Nagaland offers a two-year pre-service course of study preparing individuals for the provincial state board of teacher education examination. Those who successfully complete the course and examination have a very high likelihood of finding placement in public or private elementary or secondary educational institutions in Nagaland or other parts of India.

Despite strong traditions of English language learning throughout India, the numerous individual tribes in Nagaland each speak different local languages. Even though the pre-service course is completely residential and is conducted in English, the teacher training institute finds that not all trainees come to the institute with the same level of English language development. Therefore, the institute provides various activities which help the trainees acquire the necessary language, communication, and leadership skills, to be teachers of quality.

A partnership between a U.S. university and the Indian teacher training institute was created to find a low-cost way to address the English language learning proficiency gaps. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and challenges presented to global mobility, the U.S. university and the Indian teacher training institute developed a collaborative online international learning (COIL) course. The course was designed to provide the opportunity for expanded global citizenship and language exchange via the online platform Zoom.

Case

A COIL course was developed to provide the Nagaland teachers-in-training with opportunities to practice conversational English with volunteers recruited by the U.S. university. The intended goals for the COIL conversational model course were two-fold. First, for Nagaland teachers-in-training, the goal was to improve their English speaking and listening skills. Second, for the U.S. university, the goal was to engage volunteer students, faculty, staff, and community members in an intercultural exchange experience that promotes lifelong learning. The COIL course included conversation sessions between volunteers and teachers-in-training that lasted for approximately 60-minutes each week for four weeks. Cultural, educational, leadership, and social justice issues were discussed during each session which were in line with the institutional missions of both the U.S. and Indian institutions.

The first time the course was offered 31 volunteers and 90 teachers-in-training agreed to participate in the course. However, due to life challenges experienced by volunteers only approximately 17-20 volunteers regularly participated in each session. In contrast all 90 of the Nagaland teachers-in-training were present each week. All participants joined the same Zoom session on the same day at 8:00 am (Central Time U.S.)/6:30 pm (India) resulting in a Zoom session with over 100 participants each week. A faculty member from the U.S. university facilitated the Zoom technology by creating and managing the breakout rooms for all the sessions.

Challenges with the first iteration of the course included (1) the ratio of English speaking volunteers to teachers-in-training was off balance (i.e., on average each breakout room had one volunteer and around 6 teachers-in-training), (2) many of the teachers-in-training were hesitant / resistant to turning on their cameras citing issues of comfort and/or bandwidth, and (3) because the teachers-in-training are living in residence during their pre-service training, many of them were gathered in the same common space using the microphone and speaker on their mobile devices leading to audio issues because of feedback and echoing. These challenges made it difficult to provide a virtual classroom setting conducive to language and cultural exchange.

The second time the course was offered 42 volunteers agreed to participate with the same 90 teachers-in-training. To enhance the experience and improve the ratio of volunteers to teachers-in-training, two separate Zoom sessions were offered on different days. By offering the course on two different days the Zoom session only had approximately 60 participants therefore the volunteer to trainee ratio was on average one to three. In addition, the faculty facilitator began each session with icebreakers using the Zoom chat box and reaction icon functions to encourage teachers-in-training to communicate with their volunteer conversation partner even if they were hesitant to unmute or turn on their video.

For both sessions, a Google Classroom was used to coordinate conversation worksheets, Zoom links, and exit tickets for both the volunteers and teachers-in-training. The exit tickets were designed and managed by the faculty member. Broadly, the exit tickets, along with the informal polls and debriefing sessions with volunteers, demonstrated growth in English language proficiency as felt by the teachers-in-training and as assessed by the volunteers. In addition, both volunteers and teachers-in-training shared that they valued the cross-cultural conversations and appreciated the greater international and global perspectives these technology-enabled conversations provided.

The current structure of facilitating the COIL course is informal and situated primarily with the faculty member within the U.S. university. While the international education administrative offices of the U.S. university have been supportive and consultative, their role in the project is currently peripheral. The foreseeable implications of this case study are: (1) the sharing of informed research and promising practices around the field of international education and lifelong leadership development using COIL and (2) the consideration of how more students and lifelong learners can experience sustainable global leadership through collaborative, global, online modalities. As the number and type of COIL course models continue to increase, international education and leadership educators will seek out these types of evidence-based practices that give people unique opportunities to engage globally so they can relate to leadership everywhere.

Discussion Questions

As you consider this case, discuss:

- What concerns might there be regarding the sustainability of this COIL course program? What are some tactics that the U.S. or Indian partner institutions might implement to bolster the sustainability of this program?
- Volunteer attrition on the U.S. side of the partnership appears to have been a challenge resulting in less-than-ideal English speaker to trainee ratios. What are some tools and/or approaches that might reduce this attrition?
- What non-monetary incentives might be appropriate for volunteers to encourage them to commit their time and energy more consistently over a four-week timeframe?

- The lack of camera use on the part of the Nagaland teachers-in-training creates challenges for the volunteers to determine how engaged some teachers-in-training are. Is this something that can / should be addressed? What strategies and approaches might minimize the technological or sociocultural challenges associated with turning on the cameras?
- There are pros and cons to technology enabled learning like COIL. What other technology enabled learning models might be effective at fostering the English language skills of teachers-in-training?

References

- Day, D. V., Riggio, R. E., Tan, S. J., & Conger, J. A. (2021). Advancing the science of 21st-century leadership development: Theory, research, and practice. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 32, 1-9. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2021.101557>
- Linder, K. E., Elek, E. D., & Calderon, L. (2014). SoTL and the Institutional Review Board: Considerations before navigating the application process for classroom research in higher education, *Journal of the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 14(2), 1-14. <http://www.doi.org/10.14434/josotl.v14i2.4217>
- Nagaland Post (July 2021). *National Education Policy 2020: Nagaland Context*. <https://www.nagalandpost.com/national-education-policy-2020-nagaland-context/231454.html>
- Sumi, T.K. (July 2021). How the New Education Policy 2020 will influence the edu system in Nagaland. The Morning Express. <https://morungexpress.com>