

Collaborative Online International Learning to Development Intercultural Competence among Swiss and Chinese University Students

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Abstract

There has been an increased interest in higher education institutions to develop students' inter-cultural skills. One such approach is the development and integration of collaborative international learning (COIL) courses into curriculum offers. COIL covers a range of teaching and learning approaches that focus on online intercultural interaction, communication and collaboration. Studies found that COIL has a positive impact on students' acquisition of content knowledge. In addition, COIL increases students' intercultural competence, consisting of three elements: sensitivity, awareness, and adroitness. Still, best practices to address all different dimensions of intercultural competence are limited.

This paper presents a COIL course design that ensures a development of intercultural competence. The course connects students from Switzerland and China, introducing concepts and practical approaches to cross-cultural aspects of business. A three-stage approach fosters, intercultural sensitivity (emotional dimension), intercultural awareness (cognitive dimension), and inter-cultural adroitness (behavioural dimension) with aim to increase students' intercultural competence. Thus, our approach acknowledges that the acquisition of intercultural competence is not a one-off activity.

The first stage focuses on the development of intercultural sensitivity, the openness to engage with different cultures, through self-assessment and a case study. The second stage promotes intercultural awareness, the understanding of cultural similarities and

differences, through group assignments requiring cross-country collaboration to analyse marketing communication. The final stage fosters intercultural adroitness, the effective behaviour in intercultural interactions, through a cross-cultural negotiation exercise. Our experience shows that this course design can increase students' intercultural competence.

Keywords: intercultural competence, collaborative online international learning, course design, cross-cultural business