Global learning through the lens of criminal justice

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Abstract

My research involves piloting a networked learning pedagogy, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), in an introductory criminal justice course at an urban U.S. community college. COIL involves the collaboration of professors from universities in different countries in creating assignments and projects, which their students collaboratively undertake. The networked learning values that are manifest in COIL are collaboration, group work, discussion, student ownership of learning, and navigating difference. I am partnering with a professor teaching an international criminal justice course at a university in The Hague. Through three assignments, we aim to develop student global learning competencies and increase student awareness of the existence of different criminal justice systems in the world. We are exploring certain aspects of global learning, including global self-awareness, perspective-taking and understanding cultural diversity. The students use "WhatsApp" and Skype technology to collaborate and the technology used to showcase the student work is Padlet, an online virtual bulletin board designed for students and teachers to collaborate and reflect and share videos, photographs, and written material. I will conduct assessment of my students' development of global knowledge and cognizance of diverse criminal justice systems using a qualitative methodology, administering pre and post-COIL reflective surveys. Data collected in the pre-COIL survey will be compared with the post-COIL survey and analysed using the American Association of Colleges and Universities' Value Rubric for Global Learning. The pre-COIL questions are designed to explore student expectations of the COIL assignments and collaboration with peers in a university class outside of the United States; and student awareness of differences in how criminal matters are handled and judges in other countries. Student responses will establish the foundation upon which to assess growth and transformation over the course of the semester for the students themselves and the professor. The post-COIL questions are designed to facilitate reflection of discoveries that students make about themselves and about the students abroad and the influence of cultural background on their interaction. Additional questions aim to explore differences and similarities in how students in the U.S. and abroad define justice and how it is applied in different jurisdictions.

Keywords

Introduction

I teach at an urban community college in the South Bronx. The students at the college, part of the City University of New York system, are largely members of the Latino and African American communities who live in some of the most economically deprived neighbourhoods in New York City. They possess a multitude of barriers to success in college and employment in mainstream professions. Facilitation of my students' global learning has become imperative as the internationalization of society accelerates and the communities where my students live remain insular (Allen & Turner, 2012; Mejia & Goshue, 2017).

Previous Related Studies

Previous studies that I conducted of students who participated in service learning in immigration and family law paralegal courses revealed that reflection of the service provided students with increased intercultural competencies. Students in those studies provided assistance at a naturalization assistance event where the clients served were mostly Latino. At the family courts, which serve clients who are unrepresented and in the lowest socioeconomic strata of New York City, students handled abuse/neglect and paternity petitions for mostly African Americans community members. Although the Latino and African American communities in the U.S.

share historical resentment generated by social and economic factors, through their respective service experience, students developed the ability to challenge prejudices and develop empathy for each other's community (Ramson, 2013; Ramson, 2014). I am currently researching another strategy, which exposes students to multicultural peers in another country in an effort to expand students' intercultural competencies to global competencies.

Aims and Objectives

This article discusses my current research, which involves piloting a networked learning method, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), in an introductory criminal justice course of 28 students. COIL is a recent, innovative pedagogy, which involves the collaboration of professors from universities in different countries in creating assignments and projects, which students from both universities collaboratively undertake (American Council on Education, 2016). The networked learning values that are manifest in COIL are collaboration, group work, discussion, student ownership of learning and navigating difference (Hodgson, McConnell, & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2012, p. 295). I am partnering with a professor (I.D.) who is teaching an international criminal justice course at a university in The Hague. Through three assignments, we aim to develop the student's global learning competencies and increase their awareness of the existence of different criminal justice systems in the world. Professor I.D. and I will link our courses and move from the pilot stage in the Fall 2020 semester.

Design

Professor I.D. and I began communicating in January 2019 in preparation for our COIL initiative. We emailed and Skyped numerous times in order to collaboratively formulate three preliminary assignments. Both faculty and students engage in collaboration throughout the initiative. Collaboration produces results, which are more profound than those of teamwork because of the intertwining of ideas, which occur as a consequence of exchanging viewpoints and compromising rather than merely the sharing of ideas (Ingram and Hathorn, 2004). We continued our communication regularly throughout the Fall 2019 semester in order to hone and adapt our assignments to our current students and unforeseen circumstances (Labi, 2011). This exercise forced us to reflect on and articulate our respective teaching styles and how we were going to "flip the classroom" where we were no longer the expert but rather the facilitator of student knowledge and skills (Hodgson, McConnell, & Dirckinck-Holmfeld, 2012, p. 296). We had to agree on ministerial matters such as deadlines and how to address problems as well as substantive ones such as student learning outcomes and course assessment. We had to prepare the students to work collaboratively and to engage in cross-cultural communication. Moreover, we had to infuse the students with the confidence to take the risk of doing something new and uncharted (Wiske, Franz, & Breit, 2005). In order for the online environment to be truly collaborative, we designed the assignments so that students had the ability to question, discuss and debate with other. Since the COIL collaboration for students was layered, the students developed collaboration skills with their class team members first, via text and e-mail, in creating unified answers to the assignment questions before collaborating with students in another country. I prepared the Hostos students for cross-cultural communication in this same fashion. In class group and Blackboard group discussion board fora, students discussed the definition of culture, their self-identified cultural identities and the negative impact of generalizations. I set up a cross-cultural simulation exercise in three parts involving the student members of the Latino and African-American community groups, who comprise the student population. Students learned about the norms, traditions, and language of the community that was not their own; observed a role play of a normal familial situation; and actively engaged in the role play of the other culture (Kratzke, C., & Bertolo, M. 2013). The next layer of collaboration between the Hostos and The Hague teams occurred using the "WhatsApp" messaging app because of its ubiquity, its familiarity to students, and its free cost. The technology used to showcase student work was "Padlet", an online virtual "bulletin board" designed for students and teachers to collaborate and reflect and share, videos, photographs, and written material. The professors divided the board into 6 spaces, each with a descriptive heading. In the first space entitled, "Welcome to this COIL course", the professors posted videos and photographs of our respective college and class, which serve as context for students to understand the academic environment of students in the partner college. In the second space entitled "Course Information", we posted a written blueprint of the initiative and the three assignments, including instructions and grading policy. Under "Assignment 1: Icebreaker", each student will post a video describing him/herself, why he/she chose to study criminal justice; and identifying a behaviour in his/her respective neighbourhood that should be a crime. Viewing and hearing each other on video, enables students to familiarize themselves not only with the students abroad, but also with their own classmates, which will start to build social connections. The behaviour that the student identifies as criminal can provide a window into the student's values and into the subtle characteristics of the student's living environment. It could

highlight cultural differences or similarities, for example if a behaviour is antisocial in one country and not in another or is unacceptable in both. For the second and third assignments, students will be placed in small groups of two or three students from each class to collaborate on more substantive assignments. This vehicle will deepen the connections between students since most college age students are comfortable establishing and maintaining intimacy through virtual relationships (Guizzardi, 2013). Focusing on a task at hand should obviate any potential awkwardness that the students may experience. The second assignment is a comparative analysis of the proceedings that students will view on trips to the courts, i.e., the Bronx Criminal court for students in the U.S. and the International Criminal Court for students in the Hague. The third assignment asks students to critique the roles that the prosecutor and defence attorneys play in case studies of trial proceedings in a New York State Court and the International Criminal Court and a discussion about justice in each criminal justice system. The students will record the discussion among the group members in assignment 3 and will discuss whether justice was achieved in either trial.

Methodology

The professors will assess their respective students. I will assess my students' level of global knowledge and cognizance of diverse criminal justice systems using a qualitative methodology, through pre-COIL and post-COIL reflective surveys (Cooper & Niu, 2010). Data collected in the pre-COIL survey will be compared with the post-COIL survey and analysed using the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) value rubric for global learning (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2014). The pre-COIL questions are designed to explore the students' expectations of the COIL assignments and collaboration with peers in a university class outside of the United States; cultural awareness of themselves at the commencement of the project; and awareness of differences in how criminal matters are handled and judged in other countries. Student responses will establish the foundation upon which to assess discovery and transformation over the course of the semester for the students themselves and the professor. The post-COIL questions are designed to facilitate reflection of discoveries about attitudes that students have about themselves and about the students abroad and the influence of cultural background on their interaction. Additional questions aim to explore differences and similarities in how students in the US and abroad define justice and how it is applied in other jurisdictions. According to Hatcher and Bringle (1997), reflection will assist students in relating what was learned through their discussions to the larger issues of justice in the world outside. The global learning categories examined will be global self-awareness, perspective taking, and cultural diversity, and understanding global systems which are measured by four levels, benchmark, two milestone levels and capstone (Johansen & Ornelas, 2012.).

Areas for improvement and future assessment

Even though we have not completed the pilot COIL initiative, I have noted areas in which I can make improvements. I will provide more background information to the Hostos students about the culture of the students in the Netherlands and spend more time explaining the assignments at the beginning of the semester. During the Fall 2020 semester, I will teach two sections of Introduction to Criminal Justice and I will participate in a COIL partnership in one of the sections. I will conduct quantitative assessment to determine if retention, a chronic problem for community colleges, can be increased if students engage in COIL activities (Oberhelman & Dunn, 2019).

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Biography

Amy Ramson is a Professor at Hostos Community College (CUNY) in the Bronx, New York where she has taught in the Public Policy and Law Unit since 1990. She is an attorney licensed to practice in New York State and Georgia since 1983 and 1987, respectively and practices part-time in the areas of immigration and international law. She has practiced at large and boutique law firms in New York City and at an international law firm in Geneva. Her areas of academic research are sexual harassment education, instructional technology, service learning and cybersecurity. Most recently, she is a founding member of the Hostos service-learning committee and has written an editor's choice article on sexual harassment. Her peer-reviewed manuscripts and numerous domestic and international conference presentations have focused on the benefits and assessment of service learning, e-portfolios, and online teaching. She serves as chair of her campus subcommittee on collaborative online international learning (COIL) and as the campus representative to the CUNY-wide COIL working group. She piloted COIL in Fall 2019.

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