

EMPOWERING TEACHERS FOR A GLOBALIZED WORLD

Approaches for **COLLABORATIVE
ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING (COIL)**
Experiences



BranchED



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Author Contact Information:

Dr. Tara Mathien

Clinical Assistant Professor and Program Area Leader for Early Childhood Studies
University of Florida's College of Education

✉ tmathien@coe.ufl.edu



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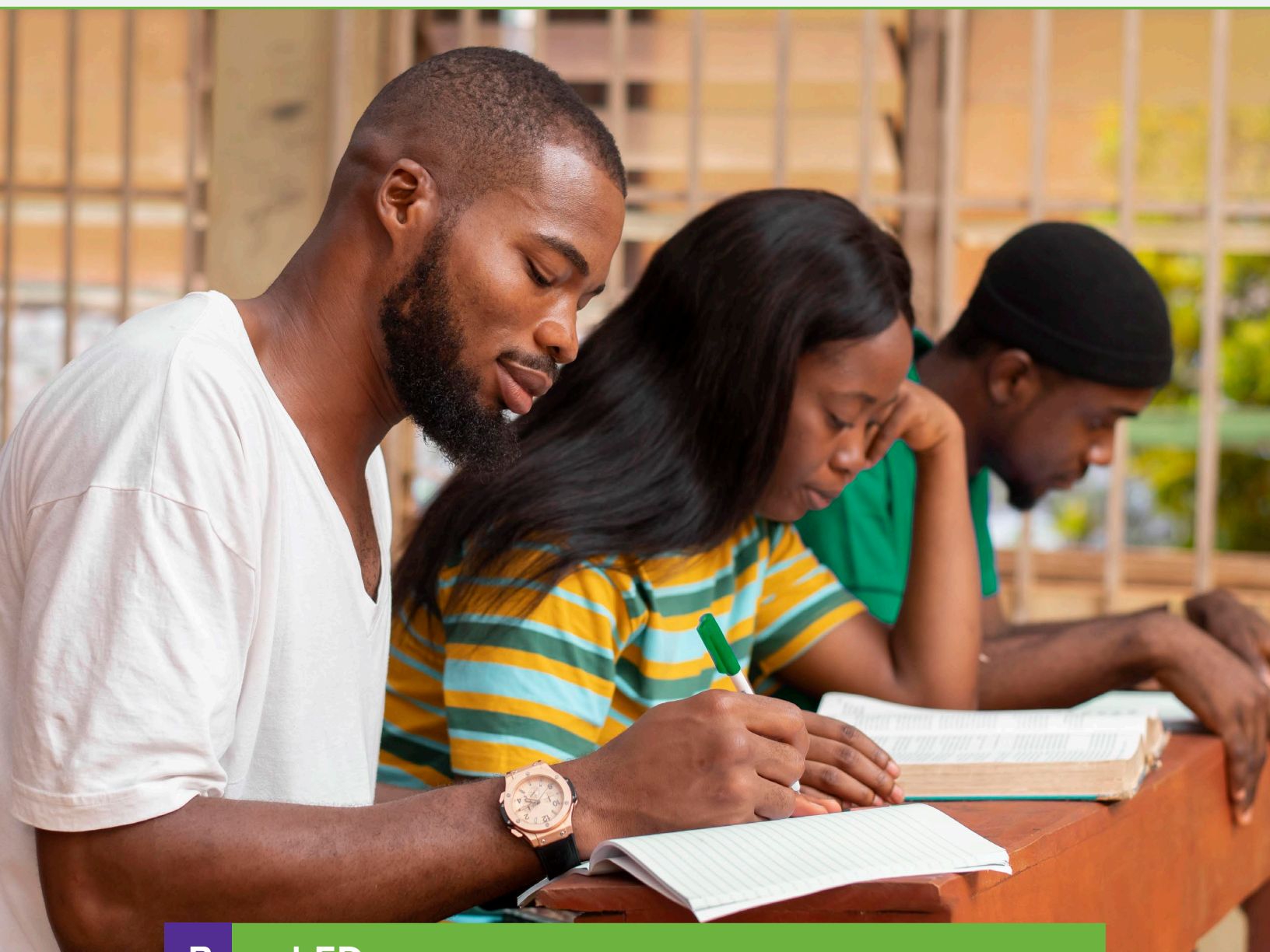
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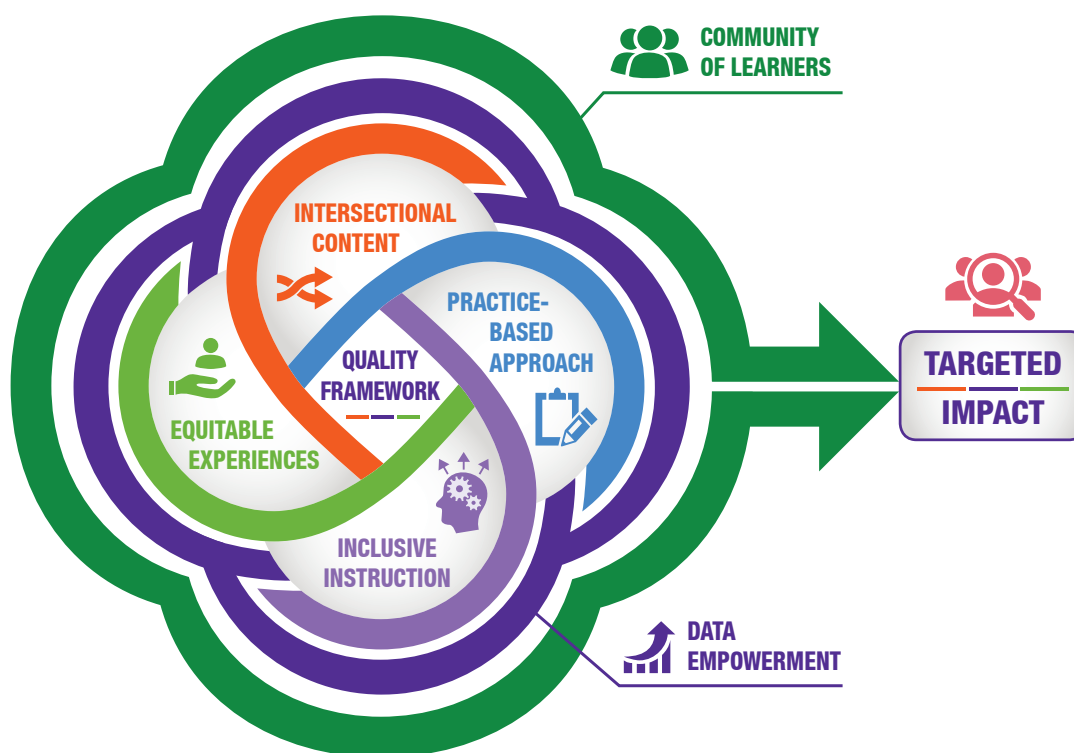
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BranchED

BranchED is a professional services organization and a collective of university faculty and leaders advancing educational equity and excellence by expanding individual capacity, enabling supportive relationships, boosting institutional effectiveness, and collaborating with communities. We believe every student deserves access to caring, adaptive, and well-prepared teachers; every teacher deserves preparation that fuses quality with diversity, and every person benefits when we create a higher standard of education together. We are committed to achieving programmatic transformation leading to improved outcomes for diverse educators who, by extension, benefit all students by preparing them to thrive in our heterogeneous society. The BranchED Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators informs programmatic transformation, which guides the development and enhancement of equity-oriented educator preparation programs that prepare educators to reflect, respect, and reify the value of the diversity in our schools.¹



The Framework

BranchED's Framework is the lens through which the organization looks at, provides feedback to, supports continuous improvement efforts of, and innovates with Educator Preparation Providers (EPPs). It is the bedrock of all the organization's activities.

BranchED's Framework is unique, in that it does not focus on candidate competencies nor philosophical orientation. Rather, it focuses on six design principles that high-quality EPPs implement to ensure graduates are competent and confident educators able to leverage, not fear or ignore, the differences among their students. Two of these design principles (**Community of Learners** and **Data Empowerment**) provide the foundation for the remaining design principles: **Practice-Based Approach**, **Inclusive Instruction**, **Equitable Experiences**, and **Intersectional Content**).

This toolkit is situated within two of the Framework's six design principles: **Community of Learners** and **Practice-Based Approach**. As conceptualized by BranchED, quality educator preparation is catalyzed by a **Community of Learners** comprised of a variety of stakeholders from within and beyond colleges and schools of education and the institution, PK-12, and community. It incorporates a **practice-based approach** that provides opportunities for authentic experiences that also engage candidates in critical reflection to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop the capacity to contribute to diverse communities. These principles also empower teacher educators to integrate global perspectives into curricula, strengthening faculty development, and expanding global mobility.



THE NEED

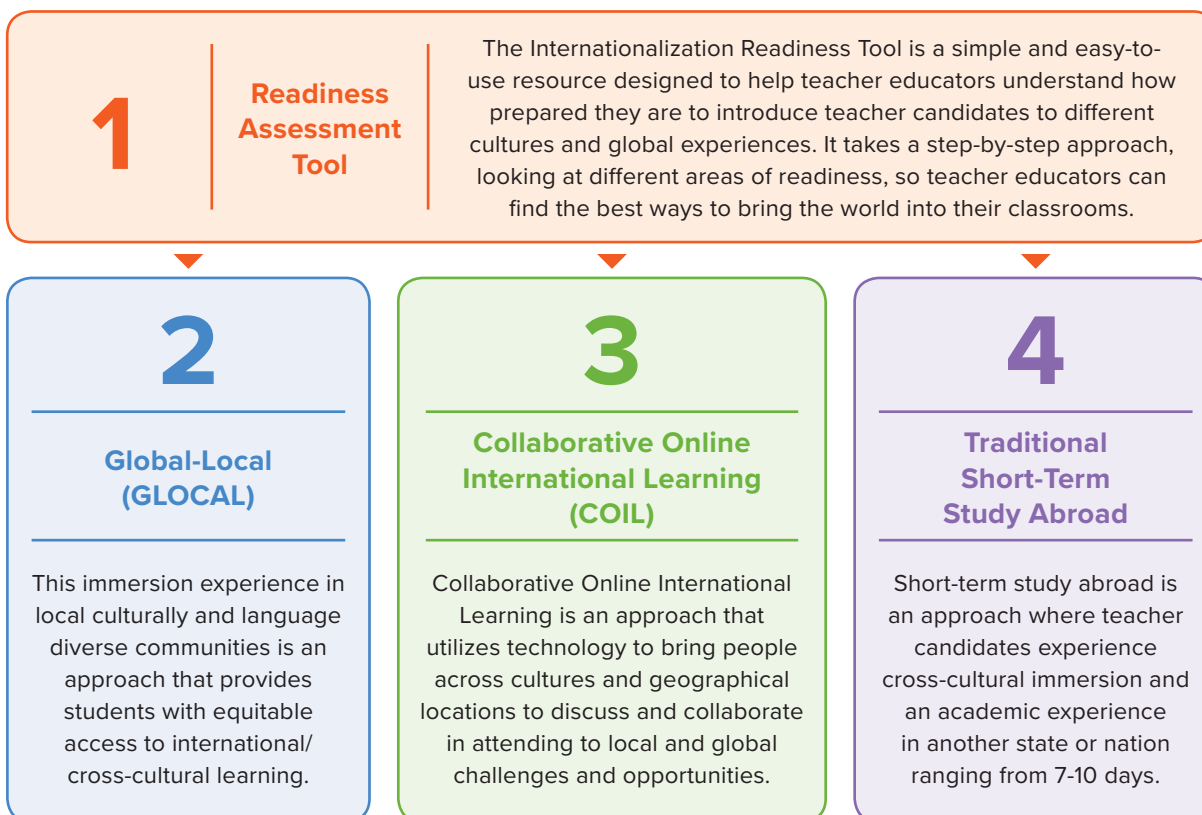
Today's classrooms are more diverse and globally connected than ever. Teachers teach and work with students from various cultural and linguistic backgrounds in a variety of settings, making it essential to understand and support all learners effectively. To thrive in an interconnected world, students need skills that foster critical thinking, cultural awareness, and global citizenship—something teachers who teach from a global perspective can provide. Preparing students for a global society and economy requires educators to integrate international content, encourage multilingualism, and promote cross-cultural and intercultural understanding. Global challenges like accelerating volatility, climate change, migration, technological innovations and advancements, and global connectivity impact everyone, and teachers with a global outlook can help students engage with and respond to these issues.² Therefore, there has never been a stronger need for the internationalization of teacher education programs. This will provide teacher educators with the tools needed to develop curriculum and create global partnerships so that teacher candidates can teach, lead, and counsel from a global perspective once they enter the classroom.^{3, 4, 5}

An important aspect of this work is to consider intersectionality as a way of understanding how various aspects of a person's identity may serve as potential facilitators or barriers for teacher candidates seeking to participate in international experiences. Integrating global perspectives into teacher preparation requires an understanding that both teachers and students bring unique, intersecting identities into our classrooms. Cochran-Smith highlights that a pedagogy of social justice in teacher education must go beyond skills and knowledge by emphasizing the need to consider the impact of educators' and students' identities on the learning process.⁶ Identity is defined here as a "socially and culturally constructed self, formed through life experiences and communication about these experiences (p. 27)."⁷ It encompasses multiple dimensions—such as race, social class, gender, sexual orientation, and culture—that teacher educators must understand to avoid creating barriers

for underrepresented groups seeking to access international education programs. These aspects of identity should shape program design; if overlooked, they can expose individuals to multiple forms of discrimination and exclusion simultaneously and result in an experience comparable to being impacted by traffic approaching from multiple directions.⁸

When internationalization efforts fail to account for the complex interplay of intersecting identities, participants may face compounding forms of discrimination. Adopting a pedagogy of intersectionality addresses this by prompting educators to recognize how identities and experiences are layered and to intentionally integrate this awareness into the internationalization of curricula and teacher preparation.⁹ This approach not only mitigates exclusion but also fosters global competence in both educators and students, enabling them to engage more meaningfully with diverse cultures and perspectives. While study abroad opportunities have often been the exclusive focus of such efforts, a range of alternative strategies (e.g., differing in time, cost, and institutional readiness) can also provide inclusive, globally focused learning experiences that reflect the realities of an interconnected world.

In order to support educators in designing and implementing experiences along the International Readiness Continuum, BranchED, in collaboration with our subject matter experts, has developed an **Internationalization of Teacher Education Series comprised of four toolkits** beginning with an **Internationalization Readiness Assessment Tool** that allows users to evaluate their preparedness to incorporate global perspectives into their courses and programs. Subsequent toolkits address **Global-Local (GLOCAL)** experiences, **Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL)** experiences, and are supported by **short-term study abroad** experiences. The goal of the series is to inspire educators and students to connect more deeply with each other and engage with the world beyond the classroom.



COIL OVERVIEW

This toolkit, the third in the series, addresses Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL). It describes what COIL initiatives consist of and how to implement COIL experience in coursework or at a program level. It concludes with case studies highlighting how COIL can be implemented in different contexts and for different purposes.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

This toolkit is intended for educators who are interested in engaging a variety of stakeholders in COIL experiences. This includes both novices who have never created a COIL experience and those seeking new ideas for customizing existing experiences.

DESCRIPTION OF COIL

COIL is situated in the middle of the readiness continuum. A score between 20 and 40 indicates that an institution is beyond the early stages of internationalization readiness. COIL is a great next step in internationalization efforts. While you may have heard of a similar approach, Virtual Exchange (VE), a COIL experience focuses on collaboration between at least two groups, ideally in different countries, in which they work together via virtual platforms to complete projects, have discussions, and share ideas, all of which is facilitated by faculty. Oftentimes, the COIL experience is situated within coursework and includes faculty co-designing coursework and learning experiences that includes technology and intercultural learning which allows individuals with common interests to engage and collaborate in cross-cultural experiences around the world. COIL is oftentimes seen as a scalable and accessible option within VE to internationalize education due to its flexibility, including by way of virtual and hybrid programs.

Based on your score on the continuum, you may have already implemented collaborations and projects with local community groups that supported students in understanding their community context and issues faced by their geographic area. Your readiness score indicates that you may be encouraged to move beyond the GLOCAL experience and extend your reach across borders. If so, you may be ready to plan a COIL experience.

IMPLEMENTING A COIL EXPERIENCE

In preparation for designing your COIL experience, you first need to identify an international partner. If you have not already identified an international partner, consider reaching out to faculty or colleagues who have done this work or may have international colleagues with whom you might connect. If you have an international programs office, they would be another great resource to support you in making international connections. Additionally, professional listservs and organizations are extremely beneficial networking opportunities. A few to help you get started include UniCollaboration and World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence.

Once you have identified a partner, you will begin the work to design the co-curricular experience for both groups of students. Logistics considerations are a major component of this work. The broad pre-planning pieces involve the alignment of learning outcomes, scheduling considerations, and preparing students for the diversity of the partner country.

First, you and your partner will want to discuss technology as it is a major component of a successful COIL experience. Ensure that you, your partner, and all participants have access to a strong Wi-Fi connection in order to download and access all required technology to successfully participate in the experience. You will then want to determine where you will meet. Below is a list of widely used technological platforms that can be accessed in most countries and are available at little to no cost. Each includes suggested ways the technology can be used.



Zoom or Microsoft Teams: These platforms can be used for synchronous sessions. They have a breakout room function to allow opportunities for small group discussion. Both platforms also allow participants to share screens for collaboration purposes.



Google Workspace: Several applications under the Google umbrella can be helpful for collaborating including Google Sites, Google Slides, Google Forms, Google Docs.



Padlet: This can be used for icebreaker activities; however, limited use is available with free account creation.



WhatsApp: This messaging platform works similarly to text messaging. It allows students to communicate with each other on their own time.



Spotify: This music platform can be used for icebreaker activities to create a shared global playlist.

Once you have agreed on the virtual platform to be used, you will also want to discuss language delivery expectations. Depending on each partner country's language preference, you may need to discuss proficiency expectations, language delivery, and technology-assisted translation services. Planning for any anticipated language barriers is vital for all students' success.

Once you have determined virtual platforms and language needs, you can begin the planning phase by ensuring alignment with the goals of the COIL experience. The overall topic of your project should be mutually agreed upon between you and your partner. Through conversation with your faculty partner and course requirements, determine a topic for students to study. Next, determine your shared learning outcomes by discussing what you both value and prioritize for this COIL experience. In addition, discuss how the COIL experience will connect directly to the content and concepts students are learning in their course or program. Finally, consider the requirements students will need for successful COIL completion.

When planning the project requirements, we recommend that the experience be integrated into the course requirements and that it be outlined in the course syllabus as an assignment. This way, students can receive credit for their efforts, feel compelled to participate, and make it feel like an integral part of their coursework experience.

Contingency plans are an important part of the planning process as a student may miss the COIL experience due to reasons outside of their control, such as illness or personal emergencies. In the contingency plans, provide alternative ways for the students to engage with the content. Consider recording the sessions, offering times to meet outside of COIL sessions to catch up, and/or encouraging participants to connect with one another outside of the scheduled project times. Having these planned ahead of time will make it easier for unexpected events and allow students to successfully complete the COIL experience.

After planning course requirements, you will want to start building a schedule that will be conducive to geographic locations, class needs, and participant accessibility. Building a schedule that accommodates your faculty partner and students' needs is vital. It might take as long as a whole semester to plan the experience prior to the actual launch date. Adequate time for planning allows both the faculty member and partner to address time zone conflicts and accommodate schedules. We highly recommend specifying dates and times for pre-COIL preparation, the COIL experience itself, and post-COIL debriefs. This will allow everyone to plan accordingly.

Another item to consider during the schedule-building process is how to engage with the fullness and rich diversity of the partner's countries. This can include selecting a range of resources, texts, and media. Consider differing perspectives, reflection opportunities, and language when selecting these resources.

Once you complete these logistical considerations, the next step is to plan the content details of the project. Here you will consider pre-COIL project information, content planning, session details, and final outcomes.



Project Planning

The first step in the content planning and delivery for a COIL is to prepare your students for the experience. You can do this by sharing resources about COIL experiences with your students. This can include creating activities to help students “get to know” the partner country, through selected readings and other media. Perhaps you have a short, pre-recorded video or Zoom session with your partner or in-country partner or expert. Additionally, facilitating a discussion and developing in-class activities that focus on conducting introspective cultural interactions will give students a common foundation to start. Finally, providing an overview of the technologies that are required will ensure that students are ready and confident to use them.

Once technology is decided, you can then plan for your delivery of synchronous and asynchronous topics and sessions. Typically, COIL experiences include a combination of

synchronous sessions (e.g., Zoom sessions), asynchronous sessions, and on their own student-student connections. Consider the balance between these components and what content will be covered in each of them.

- **Synchronous Sessions:** These types of sessions allow students to meet at the same time on an agreed technology platform such as Zoom. Here students can spend time community building, listening to presentations, discussing the topic at hand, asking questions, working in small groups via breakout rooms, completing exit tickets and/or surveys, and ensuring everyone is able to access and use the technology at hand.
- **Asynchronous Sessions / Asynchronous Facilitated Sessions:** These types of online sessions allow students to access and participate at their own pace. These types of online sessions are not live but allow interaction with faculty members or other students. During these types of sessions, students can reflect on discussion boards/forums, respond to prompts, or interact with other students' comments. During these types of sessions, students can read articles and watch assigned videos that can be posted on a shared platform (e.g., Google Classroom or Google Sites).
- **Student-Student Connections:** These types of connections are those encouraged to be between students only. They are initiated by participants in ways that feel most comfortable and accessible to them. The students can choose to share email addresses with one another or phone numbers for WhatsApp exchanges. These types of interactions can be quite powerful to allow for more personal and deeper connection between participants that extend and enhance the goals of the project.

Reflection and Debrief

Once the COIL experience is complete it is important to include time to reflect with your students, on your own, and with your partner. Plan a debrief meeting to review together your conclusions. What worked well? What should be changed? What challenges did you or your students face?

The ways in which you might have students reflect can include self and group opportunities. Incorporating reflection-based assignments that require students to connect their COIL experience to the theoretical and practical knowledge they gained through readings, videos, and class discussions can foster deeper learning. These reflection-based assignments could include prompts for journals that can be either anonymous or self-disclosed.

Additionally, opportunities for feedback gathered throughout your COIL experience can be extremely useful data to inform you about the overall project strengths, revisions needed, etc. Items like simple Google Forms that act as “exit tickets” are a helpful way to capture student perceptions in real-time. Another type of feedback to consider collecting is group reflection data that are both guided and open-ended which allow for conversations that deepen understanding through hearing differing perspectives. We recommend using data collected from feedback gathered throughout the experience to guide your facilitated group reflection discussions. A variety of data collection is essential for making informed decisions, identifying trends, and driving improvements for COIL experiences.



CASE STUDIES

Below are two case studies of COIL being implemented. The first is how to embed a COIL experience in a course for teacher candidates at the undergraduate level. The next shares how to use COIL with graduate students, faculty, and staff at the university level. While these case studies show the different ways COIL can be implemented; both highlight how COIL provides a transformational experience for participants to confront their ideas and perceptions about partnering with and interacting with others in a global landscape.

CASE STUDY 1 **A COIL Experience for Teacher Candidates**

In this case study teacher education faculty at the University of Florida (UF) and Universidad San Francisco de Quito (USFQ Ecuador) deepened a partnership and created a course for students to complete. Faculty met several times via Zoom to share commonalities and identify the objectives of the COIL experience. We concluded that students would investigate literacy practices and family partnerships that were utilized in early elementary classrooms in the US and Ecuador. The purpose was to address similarities and differences within and across instructional approaches related to cultural and language-specific needs in each country related to the following:

- Literacy activities and materials in students' field experience placements
- Compare findings with Ecuador and Florida examples
- Investigate family engagement in the literacy development process
- Determine how reading and writing are taught in each country
- Consider how classroom teachers respond to cultural-linguistic learning needs in each country.



This COIL experience was required for students and built into each of our syllabi as a requirement of our courses. It was comprised of a preparation period, three synchronous Zoom sessions, asynchronous facilitated reflections, and a final project presentation.

Preparation Period

Prior to the COIL launching, each faculty member prepared their students for the project by sharing resources about COIL projects as an overview and highlighting technologies that would be required. Additionally, faculty facilitated classroom discussions and in-class activities which focused on conducting introspective cultural assessments and reflections. Each group of participants also engaged in activities to help one another to “get to know” the partner country, Ecuador and the United States, through selected readings and other media.

Synchronous Zoom Sessions

Three synchronous Zoom sessions were scheduled over the course of the project that required meetings during mutually agreed upon dates/times, adhering to student schedules, accommodating time zone changes, and confronting daylight savings time that occurred right in the middle of the project. Sessions included the following components: an icebreaker/get-to-know-you activity, an overview of the technology being leveraged, presentation/content delivery, conversation starters/discussion prompts for whole group or breakout room time, and student feedback/survey dissemination.

Asynchronous Facilitated Reflections

During the “off-weeks” in which synchronous sessions did not occur, students were provided opportunities to reflect and debrief about their experiences in asynchronous formats. Additionally, confidential reflections were required to provide additional means in which students could share thoughts and feedback. These opportunities gleaned powerful conversations that resulted in further discussions and knowledge gained about English Language Learners, cross-cultural communication, work ethic and styles, collaboration, and more. It was in these moments that transformation began to occur within students as they confronted their own ideas and perceptions about partnering with and interacting with peers in a global landscape.

Student Reflections

To culminate the COIL experience, students reflected on the following questions and presented their findings to the group in our final synchronous session:

- What family engagement practices exist in the literacy development process for each setting?
- How is reading and writing taught in each country?
- What similarities and differences in instructional approaches related to cultural and language-specific needs have you identified?
- How do the classroom teachers respond to cultural-linguistic learning needs?
- Describe classroom student responses to activities and learning experiences related to literacy in each country.
- How is literacy development assessed in each country?
- What pedagogical practices are used in classroom environments?

CASE STUDY 2**COIL Experiences for Graduate Students, Faculty, and Advisors**

The College of Education at Texas A&M International University (TAMU) is deeply committed to enriching its programs with meaningful global perspectives and preparing future teachers to excel in an interconnected world. To advance these goals, the College of Education conducted a self-assessment of its readiness for internationalization, identifying areas of strength and opportunities for growth.

Based on the self-assessment, TAMU identified strong leadership, clear structures, and robust partnerships as foundational assets. These strengths enabled them to pursue three COIL initiatives without requiring substantial new resources. By leveraging connections with international organizations, TAMU sponsored three distinct COIL initiatives. These included global citizenship coursework for graduate students, international early childhood education training for faculty, and collaborative changemaker programs for staff. Each of these initiatives created unique pathways for global engagement across the institution.

INITIATIVE 1***Global Citizenship Extra Curricula Coursework for Graduate Students***

The college sponsored a small cohort of five graduate students to join an existing executive COIL activity hosted by the University for Peace (UPEACE) in Costa Rica. This opportunity was part of an ongoing partnership with UPEACE, allowing students to engage in an established international learning environment offered by UPEACE. The selection process did not involve pre-acceptance screening; candidates were accepted in the order of their expression of interest and joined an existing international cohort of students from UPEACE.

Over the course of five weeks, graduate students engaged in an extra curriculum experience, meeting weekly for two hours in a mandatory live virtual session. The course was facilitated by a faculty member from UPEACE. Course topics included:



- | | |
|------------------|---|
| SESSION 1 | Introduction to Global Citizenship Education Pedagogy |
| SESSION 2 | Introduction to Design Thinking |
| SESSION 3 | Empathy & Cultural Humility |
| SESSION 4 | Critical Skills for Global Citizenship Education |
| SESSION 5 | Global Citizenship Education Applied: Latest Approaches to Solving Humanity's Greatest Challenges. |

Each session encouraged collaborative dialogue, critical reflection, and practical strategies for fostering peace, human rights, and sustainable development. This unique opportunity allowed students to engage with, respond to, and reflect on social, environmental, and educational challenges at local, national, and global levels. The chance to collaborate with peers from around the world enriched their academic experience and prepared them to incorporate global perspectives into their future classrooms.

INITIATIVE 2

International Early Childhood Education Certification for Faculty

The college sponsored four faculty members to participate in an ongoing Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) activity led by Fun Academy, an education company based at the Helsinki Education Hub on Aalto University Campus in Helsinki, Finland. Fun Academy provides pedagogical solutions grounded in the unique Fun Learning approach, designed for international application and adaptable to any curriculum, with a mission to empower educators to unlock children's full potential, inspiring them to pursue their dreams. Participants were intentionally selected from the local community college, Texas A&M International University (TAMIU) Early Childhood Faculty, and Early Childhood leaders from the local school districts, aiming to strengthen local recruitment, preparation, and retention efforts for early childhood educators.

The online course took place over the summer and introduced educators to Finland's globally renowned early childhood education system, covering core components such as:

- Finnish Education Influence
- Fun Learning Educator
- Learning Environments
- Innovative Resources, Collaborative Learning
- Life Skills
- Assessment and Feedback
- Parent and Community Engagement.

Throughout the program, participants were provided with a holistic and engaging educational experience that nurtured a love for learning and empowered them to reach their full potential. Each session exposed them to elements such as play, individual learning, collaborative activities, and innovative resources, encouraging the creation of classroom environments where learning becomes enjoyable, meaningful, and impactful. By fostering a deeper understanding of these principles, the program inspired participants to implement practices that will cultivate a new generation of lifelong learners.

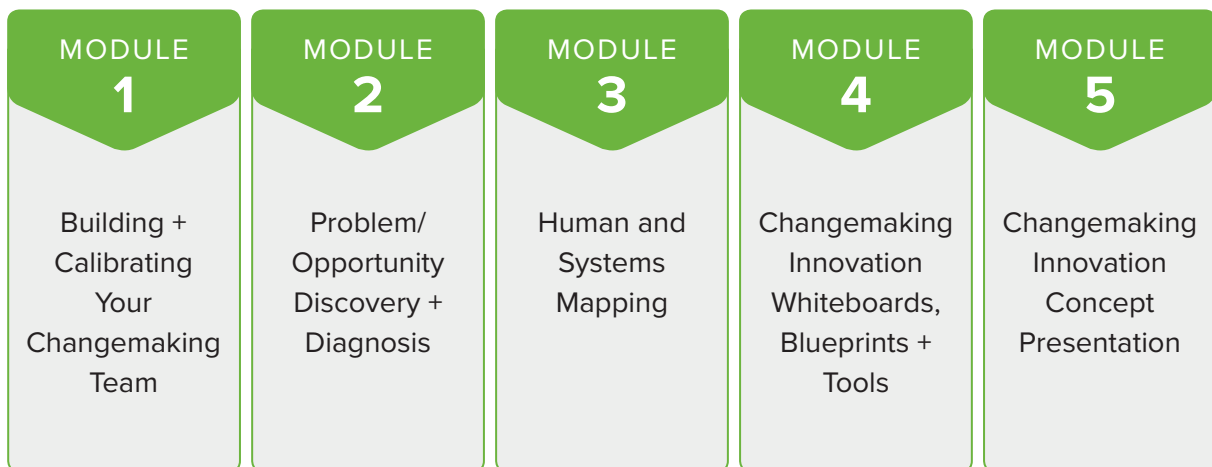


INITIATIVE 3

***Collaborative Changemaker Capacity
Building for Advisors***

This emerging collaboration was built upon an existing publishing partnership with an academic colleague who had a long-standing relationship with the founder of Collaborative Changemaking Labs (CCL). The academic advisors were carefully selected to align with the college's strategic goal of preparing critical thinkers for leadership roles in developing strong academic and student support systems.

Over 10 weeks, participants completed the program in five synchronous sessions, totaling 15 hours. The program was structured around five core modules:

**FIVE CORE MODULES OF THE PROGRAM**

Throughout the program, participants worked with tools from the CCL field guide, which emphasized empathy, equity, and empowerment. As they applied these tools to enhance existing student support systems for graduate students, they engaged with the changemaker mindset—fostering empathy, collaboration, teamwork, leadership, and creative problem-solving—qualities vital for navigating our increasingly VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world. This deeper understanding of these principles inspired the participants to implement strategies that will transform student support, particularly in advising.

The capstone project required the advising team to develop and present a formal proposal to the Dean of the College of Education, addressing a student success challenge they identified as insufficiently addressed. This hands-on experience provided the advisors with an opportunity to directly apply their learning to real-world challenges, making meaningful contributions to the ongoing enhancement of the college's student support systems.



LESSONS LEARNED

Each COIL experience is unique. The outcomes will be different every time due to the nature of the participants, the topic, the political climate, and so forth. Offering this type of opportunity to students allows for the world to feel closer, people to feel connected, and perspectives to feel shared. Based on our experiences implementing several iterations of COIL experiences, we offer the following suggestions:

- **Start Small:** Consider beginning a project with a smaller class size or just one partner. COIL can be done across multiple institutions and groups, and you can work your way up to many participants and/or several partners.
- **Build Momentum Through Focused Initiatives:** If possible, partnering with external organizations that offer established international programs reduces the burden of creating new programs from scratch and ensures quality. Early successes in focused initiatives build institutional momentum and establish a solid foundation for expanding global engagement efforts.
- **Do not Plan ALL the Things:** Especially if you are venturing into this for the first time, keep it simple! There are many different ideas and tools that have been shared in this toolkit. Select one or two and start from there.
- **Be Flexible:** Even with the best-laid intentions, plans will need to shift. Expect technology to fail, participants to need more support, and for sessions to not go exactly as intended. Approach the experience with an open mind and talk with participants about doing the same.
- **Managing Cultural and Logistical Complexities:** Be prepared to navigate time zones, cultural differences, and diverse institutional practices. Additionally, considerations such as language barriers and varying levels of technological access may need to be addressed. Effective planning and proactive communication are essential to address these complexities.

- **Design Inclusive, Scalable Programs:** Design programs that are scalable and accessible. Virtual and hybrid programs are particularly effective for engaging a wide audience, reducing barriers to participation, and providing valuable professional recognition, such as certificates or credentials.
- **Asynchronous and Synchronous Opportunities:** Depending on time zones and scheduling conflicts, synchronous sessions can be complex to plan. While beneficial and engaging, they can be hard to make work as partners usually do not have class meeting times on the same days and times of the week. Asynchronous work and reflections are a powerful component of learning. Intentionally building experiences that allow participants to meet your learning objectives will look very different than a traditional course assignment or assessment!
- **Connect to an Incentive:** When the COIL experience is connected to a class assignment, certificate, and or credential there is often more engagement and participation due to the requirements to earn the incentive. When not tied to an experience, participation is not always dependable.
- **Prioritize Commitment When Selecting Participants:** If selecting participants, choose individuals who demonstrate sustained commitment to completing the program and integrating their learning into their practice. Selecting participants who are not only eligible but also fully committed to international education is critical for program success. Develop criteria for participant selection, such as requiring a clear articulation of goals for participation and a commitment to completing the program. Identifying highly motivated individuals ensures resources are allocated effectively, avoiding wasted opportunities and
- **Collect Data:** To inform improvement efforts data is crucial! Data collection should be ongoing, formal and informal, summative and formative. This can be done easily through Google Forms, reflection assignments, surveys, etc.

CONCLUSION

Understanding where students are in their learning journey helps educators plan international experiences that match students' abilities, making it easier to introduce them to new cultures and global opportunities. Internationalization strategies like COIL have shown how powerful global connections can be by weaving international ideas into the work of students, faculty, and staff. These efforts have inspired teacher candidates and graduate students to explore global experiences. In addition, they have helped faculty bring the best teaching practices from around the world into their classrooms and encouraged staff to build a creative and collaborative environment when leading change efforts. With careful planning and a clear commitment to global engagement, the rewards of internationalization can go beyond the reach of the classroom.

ENDNOTES

¹ See [BranchED Signature Framework: Principle Briefs](#) for more information.

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Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity
100 World Drive, Suite 101
Peachtree City, GA 30269



Toll-Free: (800) 519-0249
Fax: (512) 686-3747



info@educatordiversity.org



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