**Simulating Working Conditions: Virtual Teams and Student COIL Projects Across Cultures**

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Abstract:

In our Business English minor at Amsterdam University (Netherlands), we strive to give our adult learners the opportunity to construct a self-image through Collaborative Online International Learning projects (COIL). During these projects, our Dutch students simulate actual problems in the international business world and work towards a viable solution all the while practicing English with their fellow classmates as well as with American students from Miami University of Ohio. Mackey argues that the students “need to have a clear roadmap of tasks and strategies to follow in order to do this, and Dörnyei makes the analogy between teaching a language and creating a training plan for an Olympic athlete. Like sports coaches, he explains, ‘instructors should take the perspective of trainers and cheerleaders, helping learners to imagine themselves in their ideal L2 personae and thus leverage their motivation to better their learning outcomes.’” The Amsterdam/Miami project was set up with a clear roadmap for students to follow and implement with a program description accompanied by a kick off class, student introduction videos, assignments/deliverables including a proposal, team charter, rough draft video, final video and a finally a peer review. The students had the task of improving their second language, in this case English, and apply it in a simulated international business situation. According to the end of project reflection reports, the majority claimed that they met these goals. The reflections showed that the learning was online and intercultural and interdisciplinary. The learning was global and applied, honing 21st Century skills, intercultural awareness, interdisciplinary application, diversity and inclusion. Crawford argues that COIL projects are Global Network Learning (GNL) ventures that involve experiential learning and heterogeneous groups and problem solving. We can add to that that “Intercultural communication occurs when the people creating shared meanings have different cultural perspectives and values. Typically, it is the differing world views of members of different cultures that make intercultural communication challenging” (Sadri 10). So participating in the COIL project asks each student as well as the two faculty leaders to arrive with an open mind and sensitivity to difference. On top of that, there is the navigation of the online situation, which includes mastering the technology, recognizing the netiquette, and, of course, finally executing a plan of action to produce a deliverable with real world value.