



# “Build[ing] something which alone we could not have done”: International collaborative teaching and learning in language teacher education



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 16 February 2014

Received in revised form 9 January 2016

Accepted 10 January 2016

Available online 9 February 2016

### Keywords:

International collaboration

Telecollaboration

Teacher education

## ABSTRACT

Building on calls to internationalize teacher education and recognizing the under-explored value of international collaboration, we discuss an international collaborative project (ICP) developed and facilitated by two teacher-educators in South Korea and the United States. The study focuses on the teacher-educators' implementation of the ICP as well as four graduate students' experiences with the collaboration. Data from graduate students' written reflections, individual interviews, e-mail messages, course blogs, and teacher-educators' observation reflection journals inform the study. Positioning theory is utilized as an analytical framework to explore the graduate students' intergroup interactions in the project and how these cooperative experiences and positioning patterns facilitated co-construction of meanings. Results indicate the international collaboration enhanced graduate students' intercultural competences and stimulated perspective transformations. Based on findings which emerged from the collaboration, pedagogical considerations for teacher-educators interested in implementing international collaborations are provided.

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## 1. Introduction

We learned about our articles, about sharing and about patience. Not least, we were slightly forced out of our comfort zones, which is a sure sign that you're on the road to learning something new. The project allowed us to briefly dip into strangers' lives and have our faith affirmed when they helped us together to build something which alone we could not have done. (Fred, written reflection, 10/09/2010)[mm/dd/yyyy]

We (the teacher-educators/authors of this study) begin our co-authored piece with the above epigraph as an introduction to the journeys of four graduate students, two in South Korea and two in the U.S., collaborating together. These shared journeys led to unpacking one another's lived experiences as transnational human beings, opening spaces for students to move beyond the comfort zone of their linguistic and cultural spaces. The ICP, implemented between two graduate teacher

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education classes—one in South Korea and the other in the United States, was designed to encourage the graduate students to explore how theory and practices are connected in their own educational spaces as to share the multiple meanings (co) constructed via the course readings. Davies and Harré's (1990) positioning theory was utilized as an analytical framework to explore the graduate students' intergroup interactions in the project exploring how these cooperative experiences and positioning patterns facilitated co-construction of meanings.

South Korea and the United States are both experiencing increasingly diversified classroom demographics. For example, in South Korea, due to migration and international marriages, percentages of immigrant births have almost doubled in 5 years, from 2.9% in 2008, jumping to 4.9% in 2013 (Statistics Korea, 2014). In the United States, predictive charts from the National Center for Education Statistics (2014) indicated by the end of 2014, for the first time in U.S. history, people from diverse racial and ethnic populations will have comprised more than 50% of the student population at U.S. public schools. The percentage of English Language Learners also continues to rise, documented at 9.2% in 2012–2013 (NCES, 2014). With these “increasingly diversifying student population contrast[ing] with teaching professionals whose demographics haven't changed as rapidly” (Burkart & Thompson, 2014, p. 1), coupled with “superficial and partial” attempts at integrating multicultural perspectives in teacher education programs (Assaf, Garza, & Battle, 2010, p. 116), today's teachers are inadequately prepared to teach these diverse populations (Burkart & Thompson, 2014; Colon-Muñiz, SooHoo, & Brignoli, 2010).

Without adequate preparation, incoming teachers often teach as they were taught, but in drastically different settings (Burkart & Thompson, 2014; Clift & Brady, 2005; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). To meet current needs, teacher education programs are being called on to increase internationalization (Brown, 2015; DelliCarpini, 2009; Kissock & Richardson, 2010; Walters, Garii, & Walters, 2009) to “begin preparing educators for the globally interdependent world in which they will work and their students will live, by opening the world to students through international experience and integrating a global perspective throughout the curriculum” (Kissock & Richardson, 2010, p. 89).

While engaging in a “globally interdependent world” may be challenging for graduate students and their instructors around the globe due to a host of reasons including limited resources, teacher education programs can become creative in launching opportunities. We designed one of those creative opportunities. We focused on increasing internationalization within our own teacher education programs by introducing an international collaborative activity designed to foster intercultural communication through interactions with graduate student–teachers studying and/or teaching in a different continent. Though the value of international collaboration is increasingly being recognized, specific instructions on how to effectively engage learners in teacher education programs are sparse. To address this gap, we investigated how participation in this international collaboration project (ICP) affected the graduate students by specifically answering the following research questions:

- What were the experiences of four participants in the international collaborative project (ICP)?
- What meanings did these four participants co-construct as a result of involvement in this ICP?

In this article, we describe the process as we designed and implemented an international collaboration project (ICP) asking sets of partners to collaborate to describe their own contexts, read individual assigned texts, share and synthesize to generate theories applicable to language classrooms, and then independently create unique context-specific pedagogies. We hope that sharing information about this international collaboration and participants' experiences may be useful to other teacher-educators who wish to utilize international collaborations.

## 2. Review of the literature

### 2.1. Teacher collaboration

Friend and Cook (2007) identify collaboration as “a style of interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal” (p. 7). Collaboration stimulates students and teachers alike as it “models what it means to question, learn and understand in concert with others” (Smith & MacGregor, 1992, p. 9). Collaborating in teacher education programs and teaching in general offers many benefits for both teachers (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2010; Karaman & Tochon, 2007) and student achievement (Pardini, 2006; Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, & Grissom, 2015). However, in spite of noted benefits, current teacher education programs lack adequate opportunities to engage in collaboration (DelliCarpini, 2009) and collaboration is considered “under researched and under theorized” (Arkoudis & Creese, 2006, p. 411). This results in many unrealized possibilities, including missed chances for prospective teachers to develop cooperative social skills, global perspectives, and strengthened communication and intercultural competencies.

### 2.2. Internationalizing language teacher education

Teacher-educators today are challenged to equip teachers with global perspectives preparing them to teach in today's globally interdependent world. Teacher education programs have been called upon to integrate international experiences and global perspectives throughout the curriculum (Kissock & Richardson, 2010) and to “make room for real

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