Chapter 9
From Myopia to Global Vision via International Collaboration: Lessons from Research and Experience

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ABSTRACT
One effective strategy to prepare students to be successful participants in a globalized world is the use of online collaborative projects with students from other countries. New technologies and new opportunities for such collaboration may reshape teaching practices in unexpected ways. Three challenges need to be addressed for such projects to be successful: the specific circumstances of the classes, the structure and patterns of team interactions, and the technologies for collaboration. These challenges can be addressed through careful student preparation, well-designed assignments, monitoring of student progress, and a vision of the workplace of the future.

INTRODUCTION
Educating students for successful participation in a globalized world has become a priority for many university faculty members, in the United States as well as across the world. To address this new direction, many educators have taken advantage of evolving technologies. The new opportunities that are made possible by these technologies have also motivated faculty members to explore international connections themselves, since it is difficult to teach convincingly about globalization without having developed a global perspective.

Such global perspectives are urgently needed. As writers such as Thomas Friedman (2005), Lawrence Lessig (2008), and many others have pointed out, most 21st century problems (e.g., energy, climate, food distribution, clean water,
even copyright issues) can no longer be solved by individuals or even by nations, but must be confronted on a global level. Thus students need to develop problem-solving skills in a global context.

Furthermore, growing globalization has increasingly led to internationally distributed virtual work teams, as companies with multiple international locations seek to hire workers who are able to collaborate across country and cultural boundaries. A significant body of literature has already developed relating to this growing phenomenon, and some of the recent studies (e.g., Gupta, A., Mattarelli, E., Seshasai, S., and Broschak, J., 2009) suggest that there are no significant differences in the efficiency and the quality of outcomes of such globally distributed teams compared to traditional site-based teams. Preparing students for this type of workplace requires educators to develop new approaches.

Over the past seven years, the students we teach in the US and Poland have had first-hand experience with new opportunities and new challenges through the development of international working partnerships. As our students from Saginaw Valley State University (SVSU) in Michigan and Poznan University of Technology (PUT) in Poland have completed online projects each semester, we have experimented with a variety of project designs—and continue to do so. However, as Starke-Meyerring and Andrews (2006) have pointed out, even for experienced instructors, three challenges typically arise in the context of such international collaborations: the specific circumstances of the classes; the structure and patterns of interaction of the teams; and the technologies used for collaboration. Each of these three challenges is addressed below, demonstrating how targeted strategies, such as specific types of student preparation to surmount language and cultural barriers, and explicit assignment design with timetables, accompanied by a tactical monitoring of student work, can develop the problem-solving skills that students will need to succeed in the globalized workplace of the future.

These firsthand experiences have refined our methods and reshaped our teaching practices in unexpected ways, as this chapter will demonstrate. What has been learned from both research and experience will, we hope, provide guidance for those who wish to do the same. More importantly, it will encourage teachers to meet the challenges of such global collaboration and develop their own projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 2003, when the development of online international student collaborations in courses was new, the idea was fairly untested. Early in the history of these authors’ collaborative projects, we adapted the model of Chickering and Gamson’s “Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” to the work (Boehm & Aniola-Jedrzejek, L., 2006). The seven principles thereafter developed have continued to guide these authors’ online global student collaborations:

1. Develop cross-cultural awareness and mutual understanding of the culture of each group
2. Create a multi-faceted virtual environment
3. Coordinate calendars
4. Require intermediate level of English proficiency
5. Create relevant, engaging collaborative assignments with rubrics and shared understandings for evaluation of student work
6. Establish methods for successful group interactions, including information-sharing and relationship-building
7. Evaluate project outcomes. (pp. 1-2)

As other educators have also developed their own international collaborative projects, multiple models have evolved. Bell and Whatley (2004) have reflected on the complexities of developing collaborations between students who come from different cultures (e.g., British and Dutch),...
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