The Tricks of the Trade: How to Organize and Manage a Linked Course between 4 Colleges

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Abstract: This poster presentation shows the dynamics and interactions of a model designed to engage students from different cultures in an ongoing dialog to improve their level of proficiency in English and their understanding of another community they would not otherwise have the possibility to meet. The model allows for diverse communities to study issues of importance to all the communities and includes tips and pointers on how to organize and manage such courses. In the model, one subject is well known and studied by one group of participants and another is basic to the other group. The study was carried out between four classes of deaf students attending three universities in the US and one class of hearing student-teachers in Tel Aviv, Israel. The common themes treated in the course were the Holocaust and the Deaf community.

Background

Freire defines literacy as learning to read the world, and to read the word (Freire & Macedo 1987). Intercultural learning projects do just that--by communicating the students learn more about the world and their fluency in writing and reading improves. Students feel more motivated to write in a foreign language or even in their mother tongue when they are interacting with their audience. They are also more motivated in a situation where they learn from each other. Learning can best occur when it occurs on the three "planes" -personal, social, and cultural- (Rogoroff 1995, Monkman et al 2003). While students expand their horizon, student-teachers can gain confidence and conviction in the use of intercultural connections in their future classrooms through experiential learning as well as getting to know people from different backgrounds and cultures. (Hoter 2001). However, intercultural projects are often marred by bureaucratic barriers; differences in scheduling, holidays, requirements, standards, expectations among the participating colleges, technical support and availability of equipment for videoconferencing. There are also differences in the background, expertise, personalities, teaching styles of the instructor from each college, as well as in what themes and sub topics are considered to be important and stressed.

Model description

This current year, five classes are involved in the intercultural project, four classes of deaf and hard of hearing students from three different academic institutions in the United States: two first year writing courses at Gallaudet University,
third and fourth year students studying a course about Deaf People and World War II at the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a class of first year students from LaGuardia Community College, whose focus is on the preparation for the standardized reading test given to all students in the CUNY system, and a class of student teachers from Talpiot Teachers College, Israel, training to become English or special education teachers. The themes chosen for the course are the Holocaust and the Deaf Community.

The course includes videoconferencing between the colleges, guest speakers broadcasted live to the four centers, ongoing small mixed group forums discussing the books, articles, and films assigned for the course and collaborative research.

The poster will present how the course was set up: management, organization, interactions and dynamics between the colleges and instructors of the course, the division of labor as well as polls and feedback on the course and the beginnings of research on the long term effectiveness of this type of intercultural learning experience on attitudes to computers, learning about another culture and improving written English.

References


