COIL BEVI Project[1]:
Consultancy Model and Collaborative Approach

COIL BEVI Project Vision Statement

The COIL BEVI Project seeks to create and sustain a vibrant global community of educators, scholars, students, practitioners, and leaders to develop and disseminate theoretically grounded and empirically supported best practices for VE / COIL instruction, learning, and evaluation.

Towards such means and ends, the following perspective on the COIL BEVI Project (CBP) is offered to help educators, scholars, students, practitioners, and leaders – as well as current and prospective CBP consultants – engage in more effective and enjoyable virtual education and exchange. From the standpoint of this "Consultancy Model and Collaborative Approach," there are four fundamental and interrelated components:

1. understanding and gaining competence in "Virtual Exchange" (VE) and/or Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL);

2. agreeing on and using a common "virtual platform" to deliver the VE / COIL experience or project;

3. developing and delivering "high impact" VE / COIL courses and programs that have the potential to be experienced as "transformative"; and

4. integrating comprehensive, depth-based, and mixed methods assessment to evaluate, facilitate, and improve the virtual experience.

Successful VE / COIL experiences and projects attend to other matters as well, such as the characteristics of the consultant and the role of instructors and students. Although each of these issues is addressed below – with specific resources and examples to be provided during an actual consultancy – it should be emphasized that there is no "one right way" to engage in VE / COIL or become a successful CBP consultant. As such, the following points are not intended to be definitive or comprehensive, but simply to offer a philosophy and approach for this work.

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[1] This document was development by members of the COIL BEVI Project Steering Committee. For more information about the COIL BEVI Project, including relevant resources and materials, please see: 1) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8AoGG82uefg (IIGE project video); 2) http://www.kansai-u.ac.jp/Kokusai/IIGE/resources/BEVI-COIL.php (IIGE project description); 3) https://www.acenet.edu/Documents/Connecting-Classrooms-Using-Online-Technology-to-Deliver-Global-Learning.pdf (ACE VE / COIL materials); 4) https://www.class2class.com/ (Class2Class virtual platform); 5) http://ibavi.org/content/featured-projects.php (IBAVI project description); 6) http://thebevi.com/about/projects/ (BEVI project description); 7) https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transformative_learning#:~:text=Transformative%20learning%20is%20the%20expansion,contents%20of%20the%20unconscious%20and (overview of transformative learning).

1. Consultant Characteristics

For the successful planning, implementation, evaluation, and improvement of a VE / COIL experience or project, the person of the consultant is as, if not more, important than the consultancy. As such, relevant background and interests (e.g., experience working with VE / COIL, knowledge of relevant models and methods) are necessary but not sufficient. That is because the central role of the CBP consultant is to foster a collaborative spirit of honest, deep, and ongoing inquiry and practice with two or more instructors from different institutions and countries who are interested in teaching and learning together.

As such, CBP consultants must have the capacity and inclination both to understand the challenges faculty and instructors face and be okay "knowing what they don't know," while drawing upon the expertise and resources of others as needed. A good consultant is comfortable with ambiguity and uncertainty, emphasizes process as much as content, and eschews "one size fits all" approaches. The consultant is there to facilitate and support rather than to impose or direct, serving as a "guide on the side" rather than a "sage on the stage." In short, along with strong social and emotional intelligence, an attitude of curiosity and respect is paramount for anyone assuming this role.

Finally, it may well be that instructors don't want any consultancy at all. That's okay. A good consultant doesn't insist upon this or that step or procedure occurring, or even the necessity of serving in the "consultancy role," but rather takes their lead from what the instructors want. As long as the VE / COIL process is occurring according to agreed upon parameters, consultants can simply be "on call," understanding that instructors may have all they need – in terms of knowledge, resources, skills, dispositions, and commitments – to design and deliver an effective experience or project, and to appraise and enhance such effectiveness through the type of meaningful assessment described below.

2. Virtual Engagement[2]

Although such competencies should not be assumed universally for many reasons (e.g., different cultural, educational, and economic backgrounds), students today generally are more technologically sophisticated than their parents or the educational institutions that are trying to adapt to and occupy this new virtual frontier. What that means is, students tend to be drawn toward virtual technologies that may be irritating, confusing, or overwhelming to faculty who grew up and were educated in a different era. As such, students can be allies and advocates of technology in a way that can help instructors facilitate the pursuit and achievement of learning goals, a dynamic that opens up processes for constructive cross-generational collaboration. That said, faculty / instructors are, and must be, at the very heart of VE and COIL. If they are motivated to collaborate with colleagues in different countries and contexts, the results can be

[2] Although the particulars of such a discussion exceed the scope and nature of this document, it may be necessary to explain differences between "virtual learning" and "virtual exchange," of which COIL is a part. For present purposes – and to understand the deliberate selection of the heading "virtual engagement" – a major goal of the COIL BEVI Project is to continue examining the interacting mediators and moderators of learning, growth, and development, including (but not limited to) empirical evidence for the differential impact of virtual learning, which does not necessarily integrate international or cultural components into the educational experience, and virtual exchange, which does (e.g., see Wandschneider et al., 2015, https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1071299).

powerfully transformative for them and their students in ways that traditional pedagogies (e.g., face-to-face classroom instruction) neither imagine nor pursue.

So, if this potential is right at hand, what are the barriers to virtual engagement? They are both real and perceived. For example, the garden variety derogation of "online learning" often is due to 1) lamentable instances or stereotypes of what virtual education involves (e.g., boring, endless, and top-down lectures that try to replicate the classroom experience via computer) and/or 2) a lack of creativity and sophistication by instructors who do not take advantage of the many ways to engage students in virtual learning (e.g., creation of shared videos, joint project development, depth-based experiential learning through group-based assessment, synchronous and asynchronous dialogues, etc.). Compounding matters, we don't really have robust and comprehensive data regarding "who learns what and why and under what circumstances" in a virtual learning environment, which is one impetus for the COIL BEVI Project (e.g., to understand better these complex and interacting processes and outcomes of virtual education and exchange). The point is, VE / COIL already was an expanding field of inquiry and practice long before the coronavirus. The pandemic simply magnified – dramatically – the need for theoretically grounded and empirically supported models and methods of virtual teaching and learning as well as more engaging and accessible educational opportunities, both locally and globally.

Although instructional faculty may not immediately be drawn toward virtual education and exchange – due to experiences or perceptions as noted above – the art and craft of VE / COIL is not qualitatively different from what they do in their daily lives: designing and delivering curricula and programs that they intend to be effective and meaningful. In fact, initially skeptical faculty can become the best virtual consultants, both by being empowered to devote the same energy and creativity to virtual education that they devote to their traditional instruction, and seeing up close the many synergies that emerge for teaching, scholarship, practice, and leadership with collaborators around the world. The job of the consultant is to appreciate that instructional faculty may already possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to teach effectively regardless of the medium, including VE / COIL. If they do, the consultant simply needs to explain pedagogical basics (which are not "rocket science"), make available the systems and approaches necessary to design, teach, and evaluate them, offer relevant resources and support, and then get out of the way.

More specifically, presuming instructor partners are interested in doing so, the CBP consultant should initiate the first of several possible "real time" discussions among lead instructors in two or more institutions. Although there is no "right way" to conduct such discussions, goals and processes should be clear. Mainly, instructors should be encouraged first to talk deeply about their own interests and activities, as educators, scholars, practitioners, and leaders. The overarching objective of such a process is to identify the meanings and motives for each individual in terms of "why they do what they do" as well as what is essential – from their perspective – to produce deep and engaged learning, growth, and development with their students or participants, recognizing fully that such experiences may be epistemologically complex and emotionally evocative. Whether or not a consultant is involved, this discussion process is crucial because it helps instructors understand better where each other is coming from while also clarifying values and commitments that are similar or different as well as any

preferred theoretical or pedagogical approaches. One or more discussions may result in shared readings or other materials in order to explicate or amplify points that emerged during the initial discussion. There is no set number of such discussions, but a collective sense that "we're getting somewhere" should emerge from this process.

Depending upon the nature of the desired collaboration, and based upon the above discussion(s), instructors should brainstorm about possible areas of virtual engagement between themselves and their students or participants. To help, recommendations and variations regarding VE / COIL practice should be reviewed (e.g., the need for an icebreaker, developing an experience that lasts at least three weeks, the merits of asynchronous / synchronous engagement) and information shared (e.g., abundant materials are "out there" in the field, including guidelines, examples, lessons learned, etc., which should be shared during the consultancy). The goal here is to examine the nature of VE / COIL including what it typically looks like and how it's done, with the consultant playing a key role in the dissemination and review of relevant resources.

In addition to pedagogical aspects, practical matters also should be emphasized, including the recommended use of a common “virtual platform,” the web-based system that holds and advances various components of the VE / COIL experience including, but not limited to, syllabi, student / faculty communication processes, videos, papers, electronic portfolios, and other artifacts of virtual education or exchange. In selecting a virtual platform, it is strongly recommended that one common system be adopted that 1) allows all components of the VE / COIL experience or project to be contained in one place, 2) meets security and functionality requirements for managing and storing sensitive educational information and data, 3) facilitates smooth interactions and learning processes between instructors and students, and 4) enables VE / COIL evaluation and enhancement before, during, and after the educational experience.

Once a virtual platform is selected, access to training materials and support as well as “hands on” experience should be provided. Usage of any virtual platform may be difficult at first and especially for technologically adverse colleagues. The system will take time, patience, and experience to master. As such, it is important for consultants to anticipate and communicate the likelihood of such challenges with project team members while also setting a collegial tone of constructive resolution of issues that inevitably will arise. Virtual platforms are complex technologies that emerge from the world of computer programming. Functionality may need to be modified on the basis of participant feedback, which should be constructive in nature and requested frequently by platform developers and addressed accordingly. Throughout this process, the consultant should model and cultivate a “team-based” mindset (i.e., we’re all in this together) so that everyone can work together in a shared spirit of mutual commitment and regard.

Despite the need for consensus on shared elements (e.g., an agreed upon virtual learning platform), the technological cart should not be placed before the pedagogical horse. In other words, technology should be in the service of the VE / COIL experience and not dictate or delimit what the experience should be. Likewise, it should be emphasized that there is no one VE / COIL program or experience, so instructors should be encouraged to be creative and flexible in what they select. As voluminous and accessible examples illustrate via multiple materials and websites, VE / COIL experiences can be anything from participation in some or all lectures and discussions, completing readings together, having sustained synchronous or

asynchronous online dialogues, interviewing other people and compiling results, developing one or more shared videos, jointly writing a research or policy paper, bridging the humanities and sciences through shared activities, conducting a community-based project, and so forth. Developed and delivered across the spectrum of disciplinary fields and professions, VE / COIL projects and experiences are limited only by the imagination and creativity of collaborators.

Overall, the consultant's role is to offer guidance, suggestions, and resources, while also serving as a model for professional collegiality, problem solving, and team building. The instructor's role is to let the consultant know if and when they need further assistance. In short, the consultant should take the lead from instructors in terms of when they need additional materials, training, or support in order to feel ready to implement the VE / COIL experience or project.

3. Transformative Learning

A central hypothesis of the COIL BEVI Project, to be operationalized and evaluated over time, is that VE / COIL can and should be transformative. What does that mean? As a movement and paradigm over the past four decades, transformative learning contends that human beings have an ineluctable capacity and inclination to engage deeply in their own growth and development; thoughtfully designed and delivered educational experiences can be key to that process.[1] More specifically, transformative learning offers students "high impact" opportunities to engage in deep self-reflection regarding their inculcated beliefs and values, which influence how and why self, others, and the larger world are experienced as they are.

Through carefully integrated didactic and experiential dimensions, participants who engage in transformative learning may imagine a reworked sense of self, including what their life might be and become if their core needs and innate potential were known and pursued; such reflective processes may have profound implications for identity, emotions, and consciousness as well as relationships, careers, and lives. Because our internalized beliefs and values – and concomitant structures and processes of self – influence real world actions, policies, and practices, transformative learning also should address *why* we educate in the first place, to include an emphasis on the "wicked problems" that affect us all, exemplified by big picture ideas and initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals.

Not surprisingly then, from the standpoint of the COIL BEVI Project, instructors who aspire toward transformed learning are naturally excited and passionate about what they are doing. That is because the subjective and experiential dimensions of teaching and learning spring from a heartfelt quest to merge quality and excellence with meaning and purpose. In short, transformative VE / COIL processes – from duration and design to delivery and debrief – should be optimally equilibrating and deeply engaging. Although VE / COIL instruction – like teaching in general – will include complications, glitches, and less-than-stellar moments, all involved should look forward to planning sessions, learning experiences, classroom discussions, group dynamics, and collaborative projects.

By way of contrast, instructors who are bored, overwhelmed, or confused about the VE / COIL experience are destined to be non-transformational, presiding over educational experiences where their students are indifferent or even suffer. If educational experiences are not engaging

and stimulating, something is going wrong. It is important to acknowledge such realities when they arise, figure out and address problems, and go forward from there. Time is too precious a commodity to waste on teaching and learning processes that are mediocre or failing. In short, if VE / COIL is experienced negatively by educators or learners, more meaningful assessments, honest dialogues, course corrections – or even different instructional partners – are probably needed.

In the final analysis, a good teacher – like a good CBP consultant – is honest and open about such matters as well as clear and constructive, adopting a good faith and high road approach to the entire enterprise. With such values and commitments, VE / COIL is that much more likely to be transformative for students and instructors, leading them to want more, rather than fewer, such experiences in the future.

4. Meaningful Assessment

To ensure that the VE / COIL experience is unfolding as intended, and to identify how future experiences or projects may be improved, it is essential to evaluate student / participant learning, growth, and development as well as the overall effectiveness or impact of the course or program itself. Certainly, it is important to evaluate whether change is occurring, which typically requires some sort of longitudinal (e.g., Time 1 / Time 2) assessment. However, ecologically valid assessment (e.g., assessment that emerges from and maps onto the complex and interacting processes of learning, growth, and development) requires sufficient breadth and depth to measure more than one or two relevant constructs, which should be linked to learning outcomes. As such, instrument training will be necessary, not only for pedagogical and interpretive reasons, but also to ensure that measures are understood and used in an appropriate manner.

For example, many people who work in the world of international education assume that measuring constructs like "intercultural competence" or "global citizenship" are the only or most important variables to assess. In fact, the measurement of "intercultural competence" may well be quite relevant, but is unlikely to illuminate or predict many – or sometimes any – of the reasons a VE / COIL experience is successful or not. For example, considerable evidence indicates that emotional capacity, attributional tendencies, critical thinking, basic openness, demographical variables, or life history may be much more predictive of student learning, growth, and development than measures of "intercultural competence" even with courses that are explicitly designed to promote intercultural competence.[2]

As such, good assessment requires attention to multiple levels of analysis (e.g., affective, attributional, contextual, cultural, demographic, developmental), uses a "mixed methods" (quantitative and qualitative) approach, and evaluates within and between group differences. Good assessment also is good intervention, by offering an opportunity for those who are completing assessment measures to 1) understand why they are being assessed as they are, 2) see and experience the relevance of such assessment for their personal and professional learning, growth, and development, and 3) illuminate "who they are" in relation to the larger group of which they are a part as well as why such awareness matters. In short, good assessment evaluates *and* facilitates interacting processes and outcomes of change with depth, breadth, sophistication, and nuance.

Finally, because we learn as much, if not more, from what "doesn't work" as we do from what does, it is important for VE / COIL leaders (e.g., consultants, faculty) to gather and review all forms of assessment data before, during, and after a learning experience (e.g., from formal assessment to satisfaction surveys to anonymous "check ins"). Oftentimes, learning processes "go wrong" because people in positions of leadership, including but not limited to instructors, aren't asking those who are on the receiving end of educational or training interventions what the experience is like. As such, good consultants – like good instructors – actively and consistently solicit information that is necessary to "course correct" and attend to dynamics that may be deeply felt but are not articulated for any number of reasons (e.g., providing feedback doesn't feel safe or like it will even matter). The receipt of constructive feedback, when collected and delivered in an appropriate manner, can be instrumental not only to improving future VE / COIL interventions – that is, the level of engagement students and participants feel – but to modifications that may be necessary to an intended course or program before, during, and after it is delivered.