

UMSAEP-UWC Academic Exchange Program Report

2022-2023 Project

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Title: “Building Students’ Cross-Cultural Competencies Through an Innovative COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) Program Through Action Research in the US and South African Higher –Education Programs”

1. OUR COLLABORATION:

The collaborative international partnership of Dr. Karen Collett from the Department of Educational Studies at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and Prof. Alina Slapac from the Department of Educator Preparation and Leadership, University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL) aimed to address the knowledge gap related to the value and sustainability of COIL programs in teacher development, as well as to inform improved practices related to the internationalisation of the curriculum at faculty level and student development. The collaboration was endorsed and supported through The University of Missouri South African Education Program (UMSAEP) grant received by Dr. Collett in 2022.

Dr. Collett participated in the University of Missouri and South African Educational Partnership exchange visit from the 12th of August to the 7th of September 2023. She was fortunate to be generously hosted by Prof. Slapac for the duration of her stay in St Louis. This home-stay arrangement facilitated a very productive use of time and resources and strengthened their collaborative relationship. Dr. Collett visited the UMSL campus and attended the State of the University Address (including faculty and staff Award Ceremony) at the start of her stay. At this ceremony, Dr. Slapac received the Governor’s Excellence in Teaching award for her work in

innovative teaching and action research. Drs. Collett and Slapac focused their work on finalising and submitting an UMSAEP grant for 2023; expanding and deepening their research into COIL in supporting internationalisation of the curriculum; working on two publications; presenting their findings to UMSL Faculty at the College of Education (COE) Research Symposium; meeting with UMSL Faculty interested in furthering collaboration; developing two presentations for an international virtual exchange conference they attended in Brazil in October-November 2023; and working on a presentation (Webinar) for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) that took place at the end of September. Prof. Slapac took Dr. Collett on a tour of the UMSL campus. They also visited two public schools (Henry Elementary in Parkway School district and Busch Middle School in St. Louis Public Schools district). As COIL partners they used this time to do preliminary planning towards the third iteration of their COIL course in 2024 and related research on COIL. These activities were complimented by fitting in time to visit an ex-UWC faculty member, Prof. Owen van Den Berg (who was one of the founding members of UMSAEP) and his wife Prof. Jane Zeni, as well as some inspirational networking with UMSL Faculty in a party hosted for Dr Collett by Prof. Slapac and her family Dr Collett was fortunate to have a generous and hospitable partner in Prof. Slapac who ensured that she was taken on a number of breath-taking sightseeing trips on weekends. Each of these aspects is reported on below.

1.1 UMSL campus visit

On Friday the 25th of August and on the 30th of August Dr. Collett visited the UMSL campus with Prof. Slapac. She was shown the North and South campus buildings and grounds, as well as the impressive Millennium Student Center. She was given a tour of the College of Education Building and facilities and met with several of Prof. Slapac's colleagues, Department Chair (Dr. April Regester) and Dean Ann Taylor. The Education Building at UMSL will be replaced in a few years and faculty/staff will move to a new facility in the North Campus. Dr. Collett's visit to the campus was able coincide with her being able to collect the UMSAEP check from the Finance office for the stipend granted for her stay.

1.2 Attended the State of the University Address (by the UMSL Chancellor) and the Award Ceremony

On Friday the 25th of August Dr. Collett attended a Faculty ceremony at UMSL where the Chancellor Kristin Sobolik and the university community, recognized faculty and staff members who earned teaching, research and/or service awards: This included her research partner Prof. Alina Slapac who was acknowledged for winning the 2022 Governor's Award for Excellence in Teaching, that was related to her work on action research and internationalisation of teaching and learning lined to COIL. Dr. Collett was able to meet a number of Faculty members as well as the UMSL Global Director Liane Constantine.

1.3 Submitting an UMSAEP grant for 2023

At the start of Dr. Collett's exchange visit she and Prof. Slapac worked on finalising and submitting their grant application to UMSAEP to extend their COIL research collaboration into

2023. Although they submitted their application for the 2023-2024 grant they were informed at the end of Dr. Collett's stay that their grant application for the following year was not funded. Although this was disheartening, their partnership and research has grown in strength and future grant application will be considered in 2024.

1.4 Deepening research into COIL.

The key research goal for the research partnership between Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac was to have a better understanding of the influence of Collaborative International Online Learning (COIL) or virtual exchange courses, on student and faculty intercultural and global citizenship competence in order to improve and expand current practices. Furthermore, it aimed to research factors at a partnership, faculty and institutional level that support the sustainability of COIL collaborative partnerships.

The intended main objectives of the research and partnership were threefold: a) curriculum development, b) scholarship of teaching and learning, and c) the building of critical citizenship.

Specifically, our objectives were to:

- To advance internationalization and global learning in teacher and leadership development through engaging in innovative Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) courses;
- To strengthen our student and staff intercultural competencies and research skills;
- To document and publish our collaboration and the outcomes of the COIL courses engaged in;
- To develop global online teaching and critical citizenship and awareness through collaboration;
- To enhance cultural and linguistic diversity through collaborative learning.

Key Research Questions:

1. In what way do Collaborative International Online Learning (COIL) courses focused on teacher and leadership development influence student, faculty and staff intercultural and global citizenship competence, and how can they be strengthened?
2. What factors at a partnership, faculty and institutional level support the sustainability of COIL collaborations?

Subsidiary Questions

1. How did students experience their intercultural and global citizenship competencies being developed as a result of the COIL course?

2. What aspects of the COIL curriculum and assessment design strengthened student intercultural and global citizenship competencies?
 3. How did the participants researchers/lecturers involved in the COIL collaboration experience the development of their intercultural and global citizenship competencies?
 4. What did the participant researchers/lecturers' experience of being involved in COIL influence their course curriculum and assessment design?
 5. What factors (processes and principles) at a partnership, faculty and institutional level helped to sustain the COIL collaboration?
- During the exchange visit a fair amount of time was focused on deepening research related to COIL and the internationalisation of the curriculum as identified under the second key research question above. Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac worked on refining the interview questions related to factors at an institutional and partnership level that support or constrain the sustainability of COIL courses. They also planned and organised interviews for data collection with respondents from UMSL and UWC. During the stay four online interviews were conducted by Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac with key respondents at UMSL and the UMSAEP programme. Further interviews will be conducted with UWC Faculty in November –December 2023. Time was spent on developing the data analysis framework and an initial identification and review of the related literature on sustaining COIL programmes was done. The project partners worked on an outline for a publication related to their current research into factors at an institutional level that sustain COIL courses and support the internationalisation of the curriculum.

1.5 Publications

In 2023, Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac published from the COIL research they were involved in during 2022. This includes the following publication.

- **Slapac, A., Collett, K.,** Wessels, F., Gamiet, G., & Knudsmoen, H. (2023). Social justice pedagogy and Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL): Across three partner higher education institutions. In P. Escudeiro, N. Escudeiro & O. Bernardes (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on Implementing Inclusive Educational Models and Technologies for Equity and Diversity*. (pp. 252-272). IGI Global.

Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac worked on finalising a chapter they have co-authored with Dr Coppersmith and Dr. Cheng related to COIL and “response-able pedagogy”. This chapter was accepted for publication in a book co-edited by Prof Slapac and Prof. Huertas to be published in early 2024.

- **Collett, K., Slapac, A.,** Coppersmith, S.A. & Cheng, J. *(accepted, 2023). *Towards a Response-able Pedagogy: Lessons Learnt from a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Partnership* in **Slapac, A. &** Huertas Abril, C.A. (to be published in 2023). (Eds.). *Encouraging Transnational Learning through Telecollaboration in Global Teacher Education*. IGI Global.
- **Slapac, A. &** Huertas Abril, C.A. (to be published in 2023). (Eds.). *Encouraging Transnational Learning through Telecollaboration in Global Teacher Education*. IGI Global

Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac used the time spent together to co-plan and discuss the framework for an article related to their current research into factors supporting and constraining the internationalisation of the curriculum through COIL courses. A structure for this article as well as an article related to their presentation at the IVEC conference was developed and two possible international journals were identified for this article to be submitted to.

1.6 Presenting their findings to Faculty and the Dean

Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac prepared and delivered a presentation to the Faculty of Education colleagues and Dean at UMSL on Friday the 30th of August, as part of the annual College of Education (COE) Research Symposium. Dr. Collett was introduced to the Dean Ann Taylor who welcomed their input on COIL. They were invited to a lunch meeting with the Dean and faculty and were able to engage in more depth with UMSL colleagues about their research.

- **Slapac, A., & Collet, K. (August 30, 2023). *Internationalization of the Curriculum through COIL***. Presentation at the COE Research Symposium, University of Missouri-St. Louis.

1.7 Developing two presentations for an international conference

The project partners worked productively on preparing two presentations at the International Virtual Exchange Conference (IVEC) they attended at the end of October in São Paulo, Brazil. The first presentation they did was a workshop and the second presentation was a paper presentation with a slot for questions.

- **Collett, K., & Slapac, A.** (October 30-1 November, 2023). *Exploring the Social Justice Dimension of Innovative Collaborative International Learning (COIL) Courses Between Global Partner Institutions Through a World Café Methodology*. IVEC (International Virtual Exchange Conference). São Paulo, Brazil. **(Workshop)**
- **Slapac, A.,** Collett, K., Coppersmith, S.A, & Cheng, J.* (upcoming, October 30-1 November, 2023). *“Response-able Pedagogy” : Connecting Global North to Global South through a Collaborative International Learning (COIL) Course*. IVEC (International Virtual Exchange Conference). São Paulo, Brazil. **(PP)**

1.8 Presentation developed for the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE)

The project partners worked together in developing a presentation for the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) on their COIL experience. The Webinar aimed to encourage other teachers in higher education institutions to engage in COIL courses and to model COIL as a pedagogical practice in teacher development and internationalisation programmes. This presentation was practiced by the presenters and submitted to AACTE on the 13th of September. The presentation was held online on the 20th of September and was well received with over 80 attendees.

- **Slapac, A., & Collett, K.** (September 20, 2023, Webinar, invited). *International Partners in Teacher Educator Preparation Programs*. American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE).

Dr. Collett felt she helped to profile UWC at the University of St Louis and that the work that she and Prof. Slapac were doing helped to motivate other colleagues and teacher development institutions to consider engaging in COIL courses.

1.9 School visits

Two public schools were visited in the St Louis area to give Dr Collett an idea of the schooling and classroom context of public schools and to explore the possibility of these schools engaging with one or two schools in South Africa in a professional learning network related to teacher and school development and the sharing of the potential of COIL or virtual exchange programmes at school level.

- Monday August the 28th: Visit to Henry Elementary (Parkway School District), Manchester area. Prof. Slapac and Dr. Collett met with the Assistant principal Dr. Kneer and the Principal, Dr. Oliver to get an overview of the programmes and activities in the school and their willingness to engage in teacher development links with an elementary school in South African to form a professional learning community. The school leaders took us on a tour of the school and classrooms from grades R to 7. The school has approximately 535 learners (Students) and 35 full time staff with a number of support and auxiliary staff members. The teacher pupil ratio in the school in the Foundation Phase was 1:16 with at maximum of 21 (learners/Students) permitted by the state. The ratios in most grades were between 20 and 23 with about 23 learners in grades 2 to 3 and 25 in grades 4 to 5. All classrooms had smart boards and were spacious and well resources with desks arranged in small group with user-friendly desks.

The principal noted that the staff was very involved and committed and that they only had 3 staff development days per year. The schools had decided to discontinue their focus on a leadership and values programme they were involved in as they did not feel that they received a great deal of benefit from the programme for the annual costs involved.

However the school was committed to fostering their own set of deep core values of caring and respect. All novice teachers were mandated to follow a three year mentorship programme supported at district level and they had mentors in the school as well as attended monthly training sessions by the district. The school engaged in a focus on school development and their current focus was on a Scientific approach to teaching reading that included a focus on phonics. English was the medium of instruction in the school and where learners had any language barriers to learning they were supported additionally by learning support teachers that met with learners individually or in small group. Our impression was that the school was an interesting site for a possible learning network, however staff seem over extended in their current commitments and did not seem open to taking on further engagements.

- September 5th: Visit to Bush Middle School of Character in the St Louis inner city area that was established in the 1952. The focus of the visit was to get insight into the functioning of a professional learning community within the school that was facilitated by one of the staff members appointed as an Instructional Coach, Dr. Svetlana Nikic. This school was also identified as a possible partner school as the challenges faced by teachers in this school are similar to those faced by many South African schools. These challenges include: improvement in supporting learner academic achievement and behaviour management as well as psycho-social issues such as learner motivation and classroom management. We had the opportunity to attend two school team meetings focused on “High Impact Teams” informed by the work of John Hattie and part of a district school improvement initiative. We participated in two team meetings for Mathematics and English Language and Arts teachers in the school. Key learnings of interest were the ensuring of uniform processes in lesson planning linked to the research and work of Hattie what focuses on formative assessment and the teacher taking on a greater mediating role in guiding learner to achieve overt outcomes and to finding information to solve assessment tasks set. Processes included teachers doing a FOSIL walk that stands for Focused Instructional Learning walk that helps teachers and the teacher developer to identify if all teachers in their classrooms are making the learning objectives clear and well as the assessment criteria and supporting learner and peer self-directed learning. The Teacher Facilitator mediated this engagement process for both groups of teachers and also provided concrete examples of assessment task to scaffold teachers in developing their lesson plans and their pedagogical practices. Interesting questions posed by the instructional coach included teachers being asked to identify what key factors they needed to find in an instructional environment or experience learners had, and secondly, what key classroom expectations they would have. These strategies and experiences were aligned with the core values of the school of self-control, honesty, determination, respect and responsibility. A focus on values in education was similar in South African schools as well as the focus on supporting learner academic achievement.

- The teacher facilitator at this school as well as Prof Slapac and Dr Collett felt that it would be of benefit to try to link some teachers within this school up with a group of South African school teachers in a professional learning network. Staff communities in this school have a regular planning and meeting slot on a Tuesday between 8 and 10am. The partners felt it would be possible with time-zones to link up a small group of teachers from one or two primary schools in Delft area of Cape Town that shared common concerns with interested teachers from this school. A time slot between 3 and 5 pm on a Tuesday afternoon via an online platform such as Google meet for the South African teachers could address some of the time-zone and connectivity challenges across two continents. Dr. Collett shared these findings with a principal and deputy principal from two schools in South African in October when she returned to South Africa. These two school leaders show interest in a collaboration between their school and this school. Prof Slapac will keep in contact with Dr. Collett and Dr. Nikic to coordinate an initial meeting between interested participants in November or December 2023.

1.10 Planning COIL course design and research for 2024

As part of their research collaboration Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac worked on planning for the third iteration of their COIL course between the end of January and May 2024. They planned for weekly online meetings in 2024 to support co-curricular planning and data collection. In 2024 Dr. Collett hopes to include all 380 (pre-service students) in her Introduction to Research fourth year course students in (EDC 411) in a COIL collaboration with Prof. Slapac's anticipated 40 graduate students (in-service teachers) from the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL). Based on the learning from two previous COIL courses in 2022 and 2023, a collaborative assessment task will be set for students and they will be encouraged to meet both synchronistically and asynchronistically using the electronic platforms of FLIP and Zoom as well as WhatsApp. In 2024 data will be collected over ten weeks, consisting of one online pre-post survey, one questionnaire, students' individual reflections and assignments and collaborative online activities. Data from Faculty at UWC and UMSL members will be collected through ongoing collaborative reflective sessions. The COIL courses they plan aim to provide opportunities to the development of student and faculty intercultural and global citizenship competence and the internationalization of teacher development.

In November 2023 Dr. Collett aims to facilitate links with Faculty on the UWC campus and with Ms. Divinia Jithoo from the Durban University of Technology (DuT) who she met at the IVEC conference in Brazil, to share learnings on the value of COIL and virtual exchange courses in enhancing the internationalisation of the curriculum. Attendance by the partners at the IVEC conference and the two presentations done by the partners generated positive engagement with partners from COIL internationally who were interested in linking with UWC and UMSL faculty in future COIL courses. Internationalisation of the curriculum through COIL is an aspect that both partners in this project aim to expand in the future in their respective institutions.

1.11 Visit to Prof Owen van Den Berg

- On the 29th of August, Dr. Collett and Prof. Slapac were pleased to meet with Prof. Owen van Den Berg (who was one of the founding members of UMSAEP) and his wife Prof. Jane Zeni. Professor Owen van Den Berg used to head up the UMSAEP partnership in the early 1980's and 90's. It was informative to hear about the early years of the UMSAEP partnership exchange and the strong focus and commitment by both UWC and UMSL in a political commitment to building democracy through the exchange. An unexpected surprise was being able to celebrate Prof. van Den Berg's birthday with him.

1.12 Meetings and Networking.

- September 3rd: Prof. Slapac and her family kindly hosted an evening party for Dr. Collett with a number of UMSL colleagues and Department Chair, Prof April Register. This event provided a number of fruitful exchanges between UMSL partners and Dr Collett linked to current research initiatives. Of particular interest was the meeting with Dr. Mindy Bier and two of her post-doctoral students who are involved in citizenship education with school leaders. The potential of linking with colleagues at UMSL doing work related to school leadership may be able to be facilitated through this link in the future.
- Dr. Slapac and Dr. Collett plan to submit an online blog entry for UMSL and UWC on their collaboration and value of COIL by the end of December.

2. INSPIRATIONAL SIGHTSEEING.

Prof. Alina Slapac and her family were exceptional hosts to Dr. Collett and took her out to see a number of cultural and historical sites in and around St Louis over the weekends. These included: a trip to the St. Louis Art Museum that exhibit a number of world renown art works, as well as contemporary exhibits by indigenous and modern artists; a visit to the Missouri Botanical Gardens with exhibits of glass plants by the famous American artist Dale Chihuly were captivating; a visit to the beautiful Forrest Park where we attended an excellent performance of "Sister Act at the iconic Muny outdoor theatre (a national theatre that holds over 11 thousand people at a time in public art performances); a trip to the St. Louis Zoo was appreciated and eventful with Dr Collett's first actual sighting of a polar and grizzly bear. She also have the opportunity to see a hippopotamus close up and under the water through a glass viewing panel.

One of the highlights of Dr. Collett's was her exposure to American presidents through a visit to the Lincoln Museum and memorial in Springfield, Illinois as well as the visit to Grant's Farm an estate that belonged the wife of president Grant that is now a park area and home to a number of animals. Here she experienced a Drone show topped with a Budweiser beer. A tour of the Dana-Thomas home designed by Frank Lloyd Wright was another highlight for Dr. Collett and the

cherry on the top of her first every visit to Springfield. As a first time visitor to America the size and variety of retail stores such as Costco and Marshalls were a new experience of Mega Stores for Dr Collett.

3. WORD OF APPRECIATION

The project partners Dr. Karen Collett and Prof. Alina Slapac would like to express their thanks for the support offered by the UMSAEP UMSL-UWC Academic Exchange Program that made this exchange visit possible. They would also like to thank the UWC International Office and Prof Umesh Bawa for an additional grant of R5000 rand to support the covering of expenses for Dr Collett on this trip. Both of partners found it highly productive and valuable to meet in person and to work on their research and publication. Furthermore, this in-person visit helped them to prepare for presentations to a range of stakeholders at local and international level. They plan to continue their partnership by strengthening research and practice related to COIL and teacher development, as well as by encouraging faculty staff involved in teacher development to engage in online transnational learning and the internationalisation of the curriculum. They hope to expand the COIL partners they currently collaborate with and to mentor their colleagues in the practices of COIL and publication related to the scholarship of teaching and learning. Through their current and future activities they aim to strengthen the building of global competencies in their faculty and for student and in-service teachers. This exchange has helped them to consider factors that support the sustainability of virtual exchange and research partnerships at faculty, institutional and international level.

The mobility afforded by this grant has strengthened the partnership collaboration and has helped to build potential future collaborations with faculty and schools. The grant facilitated partners visiting schools and meeting potential collaborative partners and developing a number of local, national and international presentations. It afforded them the opportunity to plan for COIL in research and courses in 2024. Activities included planning for the IVEC conference and paper presentation, as well as the AACTE webinar and a presentation at the COE Research Symposium. As a first time visitor to the Midwest America, Dr. Collett has come to know a little more of American culture and the schooling system and plans to look at expanding COIL programmes at UWC and internationally in the future. The UMSEP grant and assistance from the UWC International office helped to facilitate this productive partnership research collaboration related to COIL and the internationalisation of the curriculum and higher education in South African and the United States.

Dr. Karen Collett

UMSEP grant recipient

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