Crossing Borders through Technology in Teaching and Learning

by JY Zhou and Shin Ji Kang
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As an important approach to developing students' global perspectives, Global Virtual Exchange (GVE) has gradually gained more attention, especially when traveling became restricted in the past years. More and more faculty members have found that GVE provides them with an excellent opportunity to engage every student in their classrooms across disciplines.

What is GVE? According to the Stevens Initiative, GVE connects students from diverse places using everyday technology for collaborative learning and interaction through sustained and facilitated engagement. It further emphasizes that GVE provides "the cross-cultural experience that builds marketable global competencies – including communication, collaboration, empathy, language, and problem-solving skills – and deepens understanding of, and ability to engage with, people from other backgrounds." In this Teaching Toolbox, we (JY Zhou, Executive Director of CGE, and Shin Ji Kang, Faculty Associate in the CFI) will introduce definitions, benefits, and models of GVE, along with our experiences in conducting GVE. If you would like to have a quick review on GVE, see this introductory video developed by the Stevens Initiative. Shin Ji showed it to her students when she first introduced the GVE activities in her elementary education class.

Since GVE does not involve traveling, it is "cost-effective, scalable, and uniquely capable of reaching every student that might otherwise be left out by in-person exchange programs" (Stevens Initiative). There are a variety of approaches to develop GVE that may fit the needs of your classes. We want to introduce two widely used approaches: the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) Model and what we call the "Plug-In" Model.

COIL is an effective approach to develop students' intercultural competence and global perspectives through virtually connecting classrooms across institutions. It provides a unique and easily accessible opportunity for students to communicate face-to-face with students in other countries and to work collaboratively on course projects. Usually, one faculty member at JMU and one faculty member at an overseas institution who teach similar courses will pair their students to work together (see Shin Ji's story below), via synchronous and/or asynchronous technology, on group projects related to their course content. If you know an international partner already, co-designing COIL is much easier to begin with. You can also request support for finding potential COIL partners through CGE or the World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence. The formats, schedules, and length of COIL projects are flexible to meet individual faculty/course needs and requirements. Some COIL courses ask students to meet just for a couple of sessions (synchronous or asynchronous, in class or after class) and some courses may ask students to collaborate throughout the semester and work on the course projects together.

The following is Shin Ji's COIL experience:
Last fall and spring semesters, I incorporated class-to-class GVE in my undergraduate course, ELED 310: Diversity, Equity, & Justice in ELED, for 25 students. I collaborated with Dr. Eunyoung Jang, from Seoul National University of Education (SNUE), who was at JMU as a visiting scholar for Spring 2022. Dr. Jang's graduate course had 5-10 students, who were all experienced in-service teachers. First, all of the students were asked to introduce themselves, and then they were assigned into five small groups to go deeper in sharing their cultural autobiography assignment to learn about each other's identities and cultures. The class sizes and student ages were not the same between the classes, which created some

challenges in facilitating equitable load in exchanges. For example, 1-2 SNUE students had to exchange with 5 JMU students in a small group and there were some JMU students who were not active. Students in both classes watched the short video "Oppressed Majority" (by Eleonore Pourriat), reflected on gender inequality in their own classes guided by each instructor, and exchanged perspectives and experiences on gender inequality online.

I like the progression of the GVE: 1. informal introduction, 2. a little more formal and deeper understandings of each other's cultures, and 3. focused exploration on a common social issue. The key thing that made my GVE successful and meaningful was the frequent check-ins and facilitated reflections in class about my students' exchange experiences. Students might have a lot of questions about their partners' cultures, perspectives, and experiences and may not feel confident enough to ask (although I talked about how to ask open-ended questions), so it was important for them to have a safe space to process these questions together. One thing I would reconsider for next time would be assessment. The Beliefs, Events, and Values Inventory (BEVI) was administered before and after GVE implementation and I am not sure if 6-7 weeks apart between pre- and post-GVE was appropriate to measure any changes.

As indicated by the name, in the "Plug-In" Model, faculty members at JMU can use existing GVE projects as assignments or course projects (see JY's story below). Several leading institutions and organizations on GVE (such as the Stevens Initiative, Institute of International Education, Amideast, IREX Global Solutions, etc.) have developed GVE programs and JMU faculty members can just "plug in" these GVE projects into their current courses and monitor students' performances in the projects. If you're interested in these GVE projects, please contact the CGE.

The following is JY's experience in the "Plug-In" Model:
In the past several years, I have adopted the Soliya Connect Program (US-MENA) in my undergraduate course. Soliya Connect is one of the flagship GVE initiatives hosted by the Stevens Initiative under the U.S. Department of State. In the project, students from more than 200 universities across 35 countries have two-hour online live conversations in small groups for eight weeks with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of the perspectives of others on important global issues as well as the crucial 21st Century Skills, including critical thinking, communication, and digital media literacy. I asked students to complete this project after class at the time their group determined and this project counted towards 15% of their final grade. My students were assigned to small groups based on their available times to meet. In these eight weeks, students read and discussed articles on intercultural competence, conducted interviews with community members related to the topics the group chose, and completed the final projects with a reflection paper. In the final project, students shared an analytical summary of the interviews of their group members and reflected on the process of engaging with different perspectives, their role in enabling cross-cultural exchange, and their overall GVE experience. I received weekly reports on students' attendance and discussion summaries. I dedicated 5-10 minutes each week for students to share their project topics and interviews as well as their feelings and experiences in the process. After successfully completing the eight-week live discussion, group project, and reflection paper, students received a Certificate of Completion, a chance to become a paid facilitator for Soliya projects, and opportunities to network as State Department alumni. The class evaluation showed that students really enjoyed this project and several of them reported that this was one of the most rewarding school assignments they had experienced. I highly recommend this plug-in project if you're interested in integrating it into your courses.

JY and Shin Ji are excited to co-facilitate the [Fall 2023 CFI Madison Fellowship](#), a faculty learning community focused on designing and evaluating GVE experiences. CFI and CGE have co-developed a Canvas site to introduce key literature and resources on GVE and invitations are open for all interested faculty and staff. Please feel free to reach out to JY and Shin Ji if you have any interest or questions.

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