

# **Internationalization and Global Exchange: The California State University, Stanislaus and PUC Minas' Partnership**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is part of a larger research work that analyzes two projects including university students to exchange information about their academic experience. The projects are read as promotional of equity-minded education and part of the process of internationalization at California State University, Stanislaus. Initially motivated by the challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the first project targeted Portuguese language students from two different US institutions to practice Portuguese due to the cost of mobility for study abroad programs and a recent culture of being an exchange student. The transition from face to face to online instruction amid the COVID-19 outbreak scenario posed various difficulties to Portuguese World Language teaching and learning. Syllabi were discontinued as everyone's knowledge, information, and communication technology literacy skills were challenged. One of the most affected class components was the interpersonal mode of communication. Shouldering the goal of promoting authentic oral practice, we piloted, examined, and analyzed meaning negotiation during conversational interactions. To investigate this uncharted area, we were led by the overarching question: what events, attitudes, beliefs, and policies shape remote interpersonal communication in internationalization and global exchange? The supporting question was: how do participants perceive meaning negotiation during conversations in the target language? Results pointed to a positive impact on students achieved by optimized talk time, higher volume of meaning negotiation, and increased time of information exchange due to the target language span time-module learning objectives ratio.

**Keywords:** internationalization; equity-minded education; global exchange; meaning negotiation.

## **Internacionalização e Intercâmbio Global: Parceria entre Universidade Estadual da Califórnia, Stanislaus e PUC Minas**

## **RESUMO**

Este estudo faz parte de um trabalho de pesquisa mais amplo que analisa dois projetos envolvendo estudantes universitários para troca de informações sobre sua experiência acadêmica. Os projetos são interpretados como promoção da educação voltada para a equidade e do processo de internacionalização na California State University, Stanislaus. Motivado inicialmente pelos desafios impostos pela pandemia da COVID-19, o primeiro projeto focou em estudantes de língua portuguesa de duas instituições diferentes dos EUA devido ao custo da mobilidade em programas de estudo no estrangeiro e a uma cultura recente de ser estudante de intercâmbio. A transição do ensino presencial para o ensino online em meio ao cenário da COVID-19 impôs diversas dificuldades ao ensino e aprendizagem da Língua Portuguesa Mundial. Os programas de estudos foram descontinuados uma vez que letramento prévio sobre conhecimento, informação e tecnologia de comunicação foram desafiados. Um dos componentes da aula mais afetados foi o modo de comunicação interpessoal. Assumindo o objetivo de promover a prática oral autêntica, pilotamos, examinamos e analisamos a negociação de sentido durante interações conversacionais. Para investigar esta área inexplorada, fomos levados pela questão abrangente: que eventos, atitudes, crenças e políticas moldam a comunicação interpessoal remota na internacionalização e no intercâmbio global? A questão de apoio foi: como os participantes percebem a negociação de sentido durante conversas na língua-alvo? Os resultados apontaram para um impacto positivo nos alunos alcançado pela otimização do tempo

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de conversação, maior volume de negociação de sentido e aumento do tempo de troca de informações devido à relação entre o tempo de extensão da língua alvo e os objetivos de aprendizagem do módulo.

**Palavras-chave:** internacionalização; educação para a equidade; intercâmbio global; negociação de sentido

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Collaboration overall is a pillar of the mission of California State University, Stanislaus (from hereon, CSU Stanislaus) which fosters partnerships with its surrounding communities. As we are expanding the range of the surroundings by reaching partnerships abroad – with Pontificia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais, in Brazil – we are also broadening the scope of the university vision. CSU Stanislaus strives for cultural engagement beyond its location in the Californian Central Valley. The projects described in the next segments and the COIL initiatives support the academic body of both institutions to actively participate in various collaborative enterprises. The present work will detail some of the processes adopted by CSU Stanislaus towards its objectives, which include a successful partnership with PUC Minas and other international higher education institutions through Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL).

In both cases, the initial objective was to create opportunities for students to engage in exchanging cultural information (and to practice a second language, respectively Portuguese for the United States students and English/Spanish for the Brazilian counterpart). The CSU Stanislaus and PUC Minas project entailed Portuguese language and culture endeavors: the Language Partner Exchange Project (LPEP) and the Cultural Partner Exchange Project (CPEP). Their corresponding scopes and learning objectives are detailed in the following sections. Data are divided into primary source (subjects and participants) and secondary sources (written production and annotated responses created by the primary source). Each data source has its specific contribution to informing this body of the research. In short, the first project (LPEP) paired Portuguese Foreign Language (PFL) students from two US universities for virtual interactions focused on language use. The second project (CPEP), on the other hand, paired some of the same PFL students from the US universities and others (US subjects) with native speakers of Portuguese from a southern university in Brazil (BR subjects).

We have created and kept running two projects to minimize such negative impacts of the pandemic since Fall-2020 semester on Portuguese students at California State University (from hereinafter referred to as CSU Stanislaus):

1. Language Partner Exchange Project between CSU Stanislaus and Indiana University-Bloomington (intermediate level Portuguese learners). Participants had to set Zoom<sup>®</sup> meetings, interview each other, and record their interactions, generating written reports of the process and providing oral assessment to the project.

2. Cultural Partner Exchange Project among students from CSU Stanislaus and Pontificia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais. During this follow-up project, CSU Stanislaus' students taking Advanced Portuguese were partnered with native speakers of Portuguese in Brazil to perform a series of interactions/interviews engaging in conversations about various topics. They were able to use their previous experience on setting Zoom<sup>®</sup> meetings and going to the process described for the previous project. Their native speaker partners were majoring in Law, Philosophy, English, Second Language Acquisition, and Theology. The topics for the interactions included academic and non-academic daily routines, health and wellness, the impact of COVID-19 on their respective communities, vacations and travel, environmental issues, technology, human rights, and ethics.

Unlike LPEP, CPEP enables participants to draw from a wider array of topics and open-ended questions as opportunities to expand their interactions. Given that their counter partners (BR subjects) are native speakers of Portuguese, it is noticeable the US subjects are gradually exposed to unknown vocabulary, unfamiliar language structures, and idiomatic expressions that may be more closely aligned to outside classroom experience. Results show that US subjects that had a chance to participate in both LPEP and CPEP have acquired a higher level of proficiency when compared to those who participated only in the LPEP. The demand and the use of both broader lexicon and more complex conversation leads that work as scaffolds are also observed. Our motivation was triggered by the changes due to the switch to entirely virtual sessions, the curriculum reframing, and the redesign of authentic communication to accommodate learners' oral outcome.

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involved. In setting the parameters and boundaries of this research clipping, findings of LPEP are not reported herein, as they do not involve the study subjects directly.

## **2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Efforts to guarantee Education as a global public welfare to which everyone must have equal rights and access have been intensified after World War II. In December 1948, the United Nations Organization hit a milestone regarding international outreach for global experience indiscriminately. The General Assembly of the United Nations Organization proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as

a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Focusing on effectiveness rather than protocols, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has become the spokesperson of internationalization throughout the history of globalization. In fact, the common ground tenet among scholars, including Veronez and Sembianti (2024), is that globalization is not novelty highlights the importance of subsidies for new academic programs in search of reputation, visibility in a sustainable reality. Universities across the world, for example, have established partnerships as they understood collaborative measures are extremely important for nations to consolidate bases of solidarity and respect for different cultures and peoples. Internationalization can comprehend a network of connections that are set by agreements with the purpose of bringing benefits, sharing life-changing experiences, exchanging new teaching standards, improving methodologies, and transcending barriers. In a study about start-ups, Scherer et al. (2018) see internationalization as a form of apprenticeship.

At a macro level, the US Department of Education designed the Framework for Developing Global and Cultural Competencies to Advance Equity, Excellence and Economic Competitiveness[1], a comprehensive continuum for discipline-specific knowledge that begins in early childhood and goes through postsecondary education. Aligned with the US Department of Education framework, the American Council of Education, a non-profitable higher education association, promoted the ACE Model for Comprehensive Internationalization. At a micro level nationwide, universities launched initiatives, hosted a platform, nominated committees for

Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) to bolster international network across countries.

Historically, the State University of New York COIL foundations and elements have served as exemplary opportunities for global engagement (Matielo and Toledo, 2020). From virtual interactions to scholarships, internationalization as educational cooperation is not new. Instead, transnational partnering come from the demand for global citizenship. Foreign policies are viable through government projects that attract contributions for investments, trade, academic knowledge, technology (Carvalho and Araújo, 2020). Consequently, there is greater visibility and focus for post-secondary educational intuitions.

At CSU Stanislaus COIL, the four goals of the Global Competencies Faculty Learning Community include 1) global learning competencies (virtual and physical mobility skills); 2) comprehensive internationalization assessment measures (cohesive rubric); 3) plans to interface with related campus groups and activities (diversity and inclusion action plans), and 4) advocate for global learning in the curriculum (community integration).

As global societies are getting more integrated, the challenges we face are becoming more deeply interconnected. In addressing division, injustice, and inequality through *know-how skills*, we seek to bridge the gap between linguistic tools and meaningful positioning. Byram, Kribkova and Starkey (2002) focus on attitudes and mediation as the conceptual framework of intercultural communicative competence. Therefore, contemplating inclusive teaching and learning moments is imperative for an engaging environment. Along with the lines of categorizing knowledge into proficiency competencies is the intercultural competence (Thome-Williams, 2016). Whereas intercultural competence can be claimed to be acquirable upon abstraction, study and practices, cultural humility involves a lifelong process of mitigating unfairness, recognizing power relations, advocating for diversity inclusion institutionally (Tervalon and Murray-Garcia, 1998).

Foundational to diversity inclusion is equity-minded curriculum design. Glynn et al. (2014) advocate for social justice-oriented foreign language education, in which teachers bring in marginal voices to cultivate a sense of intellectual responsibility in every phase of the teaching-learning process. Starting with purposefully designing for equity to critically rethinking privilege position, equity-minded pedagogy legitimates minority representation within the group. Artze-Vega et al. (2023) debate about the study of Dewsbury (2023<sup>4</sup>) with a biology population sample to postulate the Norton Guide to Equity-Minded Teaching as a

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<sup>4</sup> <https://nerd.wwnorton.com/ebooks/epub/equityguide/EPUB/content/2.4.2-chapter07.xhtml>

stepwise realignment plan that reflects the course needs along the way. Artze-Vega et al. (2023) support the view that equity-minded approach is based on daily fine-tuning of relevance, rigor, structure, and engagement. Indeed, humility is essential for all parts involved to accomplish the mindset of intercultural inclusivity. Equally relevant, Lundquist, and Henning (2020) show how students' demographic variables influence their assessment to foster a culturally responsive evaluation, namely, Continuum of Equity-Minded Assessment (Lundquist and Henning, 2020).

According to the dictionary Merriam-Webster (2024), the term *humility* means “freedom from pride or arrogance: the quality or state of being humble.” Inherent to being culturally humble is our acceptance of being limited, in the sense of being ignorant, more constantly uninformed. Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) allude to this continuing openness when they refer to cultural humility as a lifelong learning process of addressing underrepresentation, fighting power imbalances, and modeling institutional principles of equity.

Notably, LPEP and CPEP are designed to establish an informative paradigm on equity-minded curriculum alignment for Portuguese World Language within transfer samples. This discussion will redound to the benefit of scholars who consider corpora-based research and mixed-method data a determining role in global exchange for international communication today.

LPEP (ultimately, CPEP) pilot started from the need of learners-talk-time in pluricentric Portuguese World Language online settings. Intercontinental universities partnered in a project with their learners using a video conference platform to chat about everyday life, interests, culture, and community. The instructors' motivation is the learners' lack of opportunity to interact in unpredictable situations. While learners receive performance-based instruction during class, LPEP & CPEP projects provide proficiency interaction, just like small talks in real life.

Since communication takes place in any form of engagement with context and purpose, one acknowledges there can be one-way and two-way communication modes. In light of that, LPEP & CPEP aim at converging the three modes of communication into a gradual scale of linguistic independence, and cultural humility through the evolution of the topics, described ahead. This investigation on LPEP & CPEP is of major significance to the school of literature, since both projects count on planned episodes to develop different levels of 1) awareness: from self, peripheral to holistic; 2) engagement: from staged to more natural scenarios. The closest (re)enactment of realistic information exchange is likely to be found in interpersonal interactions. Language users are able to relate interculturally by questioning conformity in

conscious processes of evaluating difference (Byram, Kribkova and Starkey, 2002; Melo-Pfeifer, 2015).

When conformity rules one's duties as well as their dreams, what else can we lean on? A straightforward problem which rises from the interdisciplinary fields of Foreign Language Education, or Cultural Studies, is when the learners' perception of institutionalized concepts (namely, *already-said ideas*), cultural implicitness, and evidence sustaining value framework in the target language undermine a holistic culturally empathetic discourse. For that, the need of genuine sources of the Lusophone culture has been largely searched as they prepare students for their social lives in the foreign language by narrowing the language gap between classroom knowledge and real-life authenticity (Guariento, 2023). Schlatter (2009) says that authentic materials can situate language use to context, and to different communication conditions. The rationale herein is to define authenticity as one mean geared to communicative function, source of information, linguistic instrumentation. This type of curriculum, when in language classrooms, does not only have a pedagogical goal; it promotes a sociocultural function of approaching learners to the target language realities, presenting them to context of use.

Contextualizing experiences under the lens of cultural humility allows students a) to build awareness through self-reflection about their current moment, b) to help them to start drafting future, c) to establish strategies in order to achieve goals in life. Authentic context also helps learners identify, and strategize priorities, transferable skills that transpose language instruction. As a result of a constant process of awareness from experiencing a variety of learning situations (and here, we refer to formal education as the venue to promote such situations), different degrees of maturity can be achieved as students advance in their academic life. Thus, thinking about their career is reinforced by a higher education opportunity, as much as it sets link to their current studies. Nonetheless, informal online education settings game-like applications, and chatrooms face challenges with overly the practical conundrum of not capturing engagement, as seen during the COVID-19 lockdown with the unprecedented full transition to remote interactions at such short notice.

There is overwhelming evidence corroborating the notion that connecting learners for intercultural communication through virtual exchange and telecollaborative interactions is at the very least empowering and the closest reproduction of realistic settings (Akiyama and Cunningham, 2018; Barron and Black, 2015; O'Dowd and O'Rourke, 2019). Social interactions held remotely should inform one more thoroughly to live in a globalized world. However, COVID-19 might as well have had the opposite effect on foreign language teaching

and learning. One instance is how the pressure of the social distancing scenario demanded complex skills that hindered remote communication instead of fostering it. As an overnight market response to the lockdown scenario, teachers were flooded with blended tools that promised effectiveness (Banditvilai, 2016; Crawford et. al, 2020). Many new resources claimed to have proven ways into discussion-based features, empowering strategies, and retention power (Basilaia and Kvavadze, 2020). In fact, the COVID-19 lockdown scenario created an overflow of technological assets, which led to issues of ownership and control, content propriety, class time-content ratio management, just to list a few myriads.

Research shows the COVID-19 aftermath is in constant reshaping, and irreversible change to a certain extent to date. For instance, Chen et al. (2020) point out that personal factors do not influence users' satisfaction as much as a platform availability does. Likewise, Finardi and Guimarães (2020, p. 11) conclude there is an ongoing need to “disentangle the complexities of alternative practices”, including approaches to technology. Specifically, we highlight various studies that examine the impact of COVID-19 in learning validation during interpersonal interactions (Milman, 2020; Chen, 2021). Interestingly, the attempt to academically address punctual issues related to confinement as seamlessly as possible is what Chen (2021), and Milman (2020) refer to as *Pandemic Pedagogy*. Those issues include accommodating needs, internet failure, and others. Furthermore, Gruber et al. (2023) deliberate about the importance of maintaining positive rapport while teaching online as a tool of social projection, and learner's autonomy. When it comes to the challenges posed by COVID-19 to the abrupt turn of Pluricentric Portuguese World Language and culturally responsive approach in synchronous interactions, scholars such as Alvim and Ramos-Sollai (2022), Fernandes (2021), and Pires and Duarte (2021) propose transformative practices that differentiate learning at individual levels by promoting equity, encompassing solidary voices, and disrupting stereotypes.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

The regular in-class oral practice for foreign language learners was jeopardized by the sudden virtual teaching mode imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. With the daily classroom exposure and face-to-face practice being suspended, the opportunities of interactions were drastically reduced. For language learning, the speaking component has been the most negatively impacted due to its need of at least two interlocutors to engage in a live conversation.



The scenario urged for answers on how to address such an emerging demand to provide more opportunities for oral interactions and skills mastery in the target language.

This study gathered original data from students' interactions in Portuguese language to present the corpora in four phases: raw data management (verbatim transcription); data coding (memoing); data interpretation (triangulation); and data representation (analysis). Coding is a non-arbitrary application of names to text passages. Codes emerge inherently and vertically from the questions as umbrellas. The answers pull out the axial codes vertically to establish patterns between them. Memoing is the act of recording reflective notes from the data as data coder and analyst to control researcher's biases. Memos support research biases control as they contribute substantially to the qualitative research process and its credibility, synonymous with validity in quantitative research. Data triangulation is a set of strategies that include the review of the detailed literature, the assumptions of this mixed-method study, and the procedures for the data collection (Creswell, 2013; Johnson and Christensen, 2020).

### **3.1 The Agreement between the Two Universities – Our Memorandum of Understanding**

Becoming partners allowed our institutions to collaborate with each other for wealthier academic endeavors. Our dream started to shape a new reality and it all began with setting up our intentions and goals in a document we will refer as a formal agreement to promote a project denominated Cultural Partner Exchange Project (CPEP).

It is common that such partnerships are established as what is known as MOU – a Memorandum of Understanding. CSU Stanislaus describes a MOU as an agreement for partnership set by defined roles and responsibilities of all the participating institutions. Also, the purpose of the document is to clarify types of cooperation that will be conducted prior to any actions are taken. Differently from a contract, a MOU “is not a binding, legal document and does not contain a fiscal commitment or an exchange of goods or services between the parties” (MOU CSU Stanislaus). As it usually involves consultation with faculty and administrative governance groups, a MOU requires approval signatures by many instances of the university. For instance, a MOU would require signatures from the following CSU Stanislaus participants: the faculty member involved in the partnership, the respective Department Chair, the Dean, the Associate Vice-President (AVP) for Academic Planning and Analysis, the Provost (normally delegated to the AVPAPA), and either the President (normally delegated to the Provost) or the Provost themselves.

What really differs the structure of our agreement from the definition of a MOU by CSU Stanislaus is the fact that our partnership was not generated by multiple units within academic affairs, even though we receive its full academic support. Our MOU included the Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Modern Languages, the Director of the Modern Languages Programs, and the faculty leading the project from CSU Stanislaus. From our counterpart, the Chair and the Faculty of the Department of Philosophy, and the Coordinator of the Law School from PUC Minas.

Established in the Spring semester of 2021, the Cultural Partner Exchange Project (CPEP) involved students of Philosophy and Law from PUC Minas, Brazil, and students graduating with various majors at CSU Stanislaus, USA, which will be described in detail in the following segments. Our document of agreement states that the interactions among the participating students would occur under academic supervision from faculty from both institutions. They would also advise participants to better guide such an academic experience and to optimize their sociocultural education. It also clarifies the virtual nature of the meetings, selecting Zoom<sup>®</sup> video platform (officially adopted by the California State University System) as the virtual tool component of its Learning Management System (LMS).

Finally, the objective and nature of the partnership is also stated as educational ones to develop abilities for both educators and students in several areas, including but not limited to second language, ethics, diversity, and citizenship; besides, academic productions such as educational journals and seminars to broadcast and advertise the benefits of the project are envisioned as other collaborative evidence between the institutions.

In the sections below, two projects and the Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) will be described to exemplify initiatives by CSU Stanislaus towards internationalization and global exchange. They represent concrete actions taken by part of the academic body to involve its community and beyond.

### **3.2 COIL – Collaborative Online International Learning**

CSU Stanislaus is a member of the SUNY COIL Global Network. Diverse learning experiences can be achieved as this virtual collaboration allows a myriad of partnerships among institutions around the world. COIL activities are planned by professors from different areas of study to promote international experiences for all those involved.

The structure is framed having a COIL coordinator in each institution. The coordinator's role is to serve as a source of information and a merging point to which participating professors refer to. Several faculties participate in the Partnering Fairs promoted by the SUNY COIL Center. That is an opportunity to virtually meet professionals from around the world who are also interested in virtual collaborations. Here is the dynamics of a COIL fair:

Preparation.

1. Professors complete a form (COIL Partnering Information Form) to indicate their area of expertise and course(s) they would be interested in collaborating with other professionals.
2. COIL coordinators gather the information from the forms and publish them in the Partnering Bulletin, which is shared with participants prior to the virtual fair.
3. During the virtual fair, COIL director will distribute participants into breakout rooms according to their interests (based on the information from the bulletin).
4. Participants converse and share ideas of projects – which could be, for example, sharing a virtual class to each other students, propose group assignments mixing students from the different participating institutions, assign final presentations to each other, and so on.

Projects such as CPEP, described in the previous section, are feasible to COIL. CPEP has actually been used for partnerships among CSU Stanislaus and different universities (in different states) in Brazil. SUNY COIL Center Partnering Guide suggests considering logistical, academic, and compatibility aspects. The logistical includes the percentage of synchronous vs. asynchronous work, time zone differences, academic calendars, availability of technology tools, and timeline for developing the collaboration. Academic aspects ponder about the existence of any natural project of common interest to both classes, shared learning objectives, language for collaboration, expectations for student participation, and flexibility of design for the collaboration. Finally, the compatibility aspects include approaches to teaching and learning, preferred communication medium and style, comfort level with each other's culture, and expectations of each partner for the COIL collaboration. As explained earlier in the historical background, feasibility for cultural humility and equity-minded design through global exchange and internationalization involves a) critical thinking and self-reflection, b) future goals planning, c) actions strategizing. In sum, COIL promotes customized collaborative interactions by implementing culturally responsive relevance in teaching and learning.

## **4 ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Project 1 - Language Partner Exchange Project**

As the pilot for the future projects, students who were taking a second semester of Portuguese in the US from two universities were randomly paired by instructors to complete a series of 5 interactions through the Fall-2020 semester. The objective was to practice Vocabulary practice, grammar review, and intercultural engagement related to daily routine in the Lusophone and US communities were the overarching objectives listed in the course syllabus.

This project was named “Language” because our first goal was to practice oral skills more than anything. Later on, the name was modified to “Cultural Partner Exchange Project” as we noticed that all four skills (speaking, writing, listening, and reading) of the language were practiced and the fact that the cultural aspect inevitably takes part of the interactions. Thus, the name of the project had herein changed. Simply stated, the justification for having left LPEP samples out is design delimitation. In order to be concise, we focus only on the key arguments that conducted this research clipping.

Language courses bring opportunities to unveil entire cultures to a classroom, and with them a full set of values accompany the language and many other aspects of a society. It is crucial that we support, embrace, and celebrate a variety of points of view without generating resistance or prejudice.

By creating a space between judgments and reactions, we can listen to the other, and to ourselves, more fully, and thus our perspectives, decisions, and actions are more informed. Our assumptions are usually invisible to us, yet they undergird our worldview and thus our decisions and our actions (Artze-Vega et al., 2023, p. 195).

As we value equity-minded teaching practices, we believe that allowing students to share their experiences and perceptions contributes immensely to learning perspectives that go beyond learning objectives listed in syllabi. LPEP promotes such values through language practice.

### **4.2 Project 2 - Cultural Partner Exchange Project**

US students participating in this second project were taking a third semester of Portuguese course while interacting with native speakers from a university in Brazil, located

in the Southeast part of the country. Again, they were randomly paired by instructors and were to complete a series of four interactions through the Spring-2021 semester. This Cultural Partner Exchange Project (CPEP) contemplated all the course objectives, such as list (sentences and structures) distinctive cultural aspects of the pluricentric Portuguese-speaking community, communicate in writing and orally at an advanced-low level in Portuguese, and articulate knowledge of cultural works from the Lusophone world and compare them to other cultures (US and other Latin American countries); and General Education learning outcomes expected for the Advanced Portuguese course (Port 3000): Demonstrate effective advanced-low level written communication and express written knowledge of cultural, intellectual, and artistic ideas and works from Lusophone cultures compared to the US and Latin America.

#### **4.2.1 The Interactions**

CPEP is a broader way for students to question when compared to the previous project (LPEP) because participants are challenged to explore each suggested item further, which was thought provoking and motivated their oral performance. Thus, the information collected throughout the project were diverse and sometimes unexpected. Students informed their area of study/major and some of them a minor as the warmup in their first interaction. Daily routine and preferred activities were the highlight of their conversation.

The diversity of students' backgrounds from Brazil and the US and their cultural differences emerge on their points of view, area of expertise, and also language skills. Since the communication was held in Portuguese, US students were challenged to express ideas in a second language. As many of them have a Hispanic background and speak Spanish fluently, Portuguese is their third language. It was not uncommon some interference from Spanish during the conversations, with less occurrences as they progressed throughout the interactions. Vocabulary, verb tenses, and gender of some words were the most frequent.

Below, we will present a sample for each of the most common interferences as they represent a strong mark of their background: their native (Spanish) language.

Examples

\* (...) “**mi** marido” / “**septiembre**” /

\* (...) “**voy a** mostrar”

The concept of a “major” when referring to the academic diploma does not correspond in the Lusophone academic system to what is called “*curso/formação*” as it is in the US higher

educational institutions. This cultural academic lingo led students to translate such a concept from the word *major* to “maior” – which in Portuguese does not really make sense. Higher ed academic institutions in Brazil, for example, use the course name as the graduation title. For example, a student going to Law School will be referred as a law student; thus, there is no reference to the major, but to the course name itself.

#### Examples

\* (...) “Eu sim quero ter um “minor” em português./Eu estava pensando em fazer um “double major.”

The impact of COVID-19 became a significant part of the students’ perspective on their daily lives<sup>5</sup>. As participants compared vaccination tiers and cases of contamination around themselves, it is noticeable the importance of the moment to share frustrations, fears, and apprehensiveness towards the future of the pandemic.

As an educational practice, we believe in the importance of this project as a venue to promote humanistic relations. In such difficult times of the pandemic, the opportunity participants had to share about their difficulties at school, work, and even mourning processes of losses of relatives, friends, and/or coworkers helped to promote mental health and broaden their social skills.

Participants discussed elaborate concepts such as Ethics, Human Rights, and Citizenship, which are related to their perception of the society where they belong (Ramos-Sollai et al., 2018). Basic rights and obligations are mentioned as the concept of citizenship. It is remarkable how they associate hunger and homelessness as a consequence of disrespect to one’s rights as a citizen and economic disparities in both countries. Such a perception denotes their political views and the social implications of participating in a society of inequalities. These findings exemplify the academic debate on disrupting stereotypes (Pinheiro-Mariz and Eulálio, 2016; Tavares, 2020).

Following the same rationale of intercultural appreciation in world language education, inclusivity is seen by addressing strangeness, and/or validating one’s silence. As Glynn et al. (2014) explain, the students must be able to see themselves in the curriculum.

In all conversations, the participants mention corruption, police brutality, explain the different political parties and their respective ideologies, and the consequences of the presidential decisions on the COVID-19 vaccination. By validating the students’ interpretations of their surroundings, CPEP is endorsing equity-minded practices and cultural humility

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<sup>5</sup> At the time of the second interaction, April 2021, Brazil had reached over 13.83 million confirmed cases.

approach. Since cultural humility aims at addressing disparities in both power relations and minority voices representation, optimized efforts are to be coordinated institutionally, as claimed by Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998).

A group of students has mentioned this project as an opportunity to know a country in case they would not have a chance to travel abroad. Indeed, our analysis shows that this virtual mobility endorses a positive cost-benefit ratio. Despite implementing both qualitative and quantitative data, we determine the relationship between the expectations and the gains of LPEP and CPEP is strong for their transformative skills, empowering topics. Another group analyzes and compares plagiarism and their consequences at their institutions.

One of the challenges some of the Portuguese learners faced during this interaction was the advanced level of the required lexicon to discuss ethics and to refer to laws of both countries. As none of them US participants are taking classes related to law, and some of the Brazilian counterparts are majoring in Law, while discussing such topics one notices a natural negotiation of meaning and even retrieval to translation into English or Spanish to feed the communicative process.

The final meeting including participants from Brazil and the instructors to assess the project. Some of the participants mentioned the time zone difference was something that, at first, generated some difficulties to adapt to, but, overtime, it became a learning experience.

Among the positive aspects of the Project, students mentioned the opportunity to learn about each other's cultures – and also as being a culture shock when they have started, their availability to help each other (the similarities between Spanish and Portuguese are mentioned as a positive factor to help understanding each other), how the project allowed students to communicate during the difficulties of the pandemic, to learn about how the pandemic is impacting other cultures, and even as a support while some were under a lockdown.

It was remarkable that by the end of the Project participants had developed a friendly relationship among themselves, sharing pictures of family members, pets, trips they had made, and we had one of them playing a musical instrument to their partner. By sharing such personal facets students reveal their trust and connection with the Project and with their counterpart.

Examples:

\* (...) “Eu senti que era **otro** amigo.”

\* (...) “Antes da primeira entrevista eu estava nervoso porque eu pensei não entender muitas coisas que íamos **a** falar, mas estou feliz que não foi muito difícil. / As opiniões, apesar de algumas divergirem, foi um bom acréscimo um pro outro (...) / Essa troca de cultura de pessoas

que estão em lugares muito diferentes, muito distantes, é sempre enriquecedora porque você vai conversar com uma pessoa e ela tem um ponto de vista diferente do seu, ela tem uma visão de mundo diferente, ela tem experiências diferentes. Uma vai sempre somando com a outra, elas vão se complementando e isso termina sendo enriquecedor para qualquer pessoa, não importa o curso que ela faça (...)'’.

If we consider global exchange to be heuristic in the sense it promotes critical thinking while discovering from one's own experience, we can look at the samples above as signs of both meaning negotiation and cultural confrontation. While practicing self-reflection, the participant is questioning their idealistic view of interaction. Elements of interpretive comprehension, as the ability to go beyond literal meaning, are found here as well (Adair-Hauck et al., 2013).

Participants delivered information about facts of their daily lives, shared their points of view based on their own experiences – such as political parties, COVID-19-related decisions and impacts on their emotions, and the contribution of the project to their own learning experiences. We believe that such opportunities contribute to equity-mindedness learning by giving a chance to students from various cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds to collaborate to each other's education. All participants assessed the conversations as a positive impact to their learning and adding value to their academic life. The fact that the cost to participate demanded only Internet access enhances the importance of such initiatives in times of an educational system looking to cut costs and erasing some language programs, generating a negative impact on courses in the humanities and areas already hardly affected in a post-pandemic era.

## **5 DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS**

This study presented primary and secondary data sources in a balance of a chronological and informational sequence to analyze in what ways replicable interactions can be supportive of internationalization, cultural humility, and global exchange in Pluricentric Portuguese for World Communication curriculum. The extensive, thorough, and unabridged raw data are available upon request from eligible parties to the researchers.

When we set up this journey five years ago to answer the research question – What events, attitudes, beliefs, and policies shape remote interpersonal communication? – we explored which conjunct actions or the lack of them could enable one to read the world beyond



the words, or in other words, to interact critically, diverge and converge, think creatively, and to act responsibly in a multilingual, multicultural environment, where Portuguese is the instrument of communication. We also investigated how to mitigate the abrupt loss of face-to-face interaction while promoting global exchange remotely as a secondary question. Even though this is a genuinely longitudinal case study, which is not meant to be generalized, the results are inspirational to review transcontinental communication through institutional internationalization, and to provide alternate digital instruction (Crawford et al., 2020).

In perception of the coexistence of teaching approaches that value equity-minded practices, significant learning requires continuous self-reflection and transparency. We found out the goals must be revisited and detailed in a stepwise fashion, regardless of their explicit documentation in the curriculum. Goals are shared in an inductive paradigm, with a bottom-up interpretation.

Our findings are aligned with the foundation that evidence can be detected at various levels of perception, action, discourse, and beliefs grounded from the past into the present (Kramsch, 2014). Making meaning from the difference as a starting point in foreign languages and cultures works as a transcultural intersection validated in the learner's text, the instructor's practices, content material, and local engagement (Paesani, 2017).

The reasons universities must foster internationalization vary from local to collective dimensions. For instance, there were participants that were thinking of their Portuguese-speaking family bonds, and there were participants who were thinking of a cross-cultural and empathy understanding boost, instrumentalization, where education is an investment in human capital (Amorim, 2016). All in all, culturally responsive approach plays a big factor in heritage honor. Our sample represents a learner whose skills in one language can aid in the development of another language or even another subject all together – these are transferable skills that can support the home language and the minority culture maintenance.

Some of the constraints related to internationalization we see as pressing problems are:

1. Whatever postsecondary systems are paired or gathered (private or public, colleges or universities), there may be potential conflicts of interest between institutional missions and high-stake testing, that is, at city, state, federal level accountability system for determining certification, penalties (sanctions), accolades (awards, fellowship), advancement (promotion, student graduation), or professional development, career compensation (salary increase or bonuses).

2. Even though the US higher education system is both largely independent and highly decentralized from federal government regulation, language boundaries may bring undesired segregation during intra and interdepartmental phases. Priorities and multifaceted cultural humility must be planned protocols.
3. Bureaucracy related to content, curriculum alignment, and certification can be restrictions to such a desirable form of multicultural education. Internationalizing tertiary education must move from a marginal differential offered by a few to a massive strategic agenda at a large scale.

Broader consequences from our findings imply a connection between assessment and test anxiety, home language and minority culture framework, educational policy and accountability, to list a few. Rewarding students for demonstrating what they understand continuously is an important implication of this study. Despite the fact this case study does not aim at testing hypothesis to raise a systematic structure, in-depth explorations led us to developing a replicable model in which teachers and learners thrive.

In our interpretation of the results, this study has two significant contributions. First, it is one of the few studies in the field Portuguese World Language that uses observational data, as well as artifacts to raise awareness about global exchange. Second, LPEP and CPEP promote sustainable internationalization through real-goals interactions. Besides, we believe that cultural humility and equity-minded practices pave secure venues towards intercultural inclusivity.

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