Impariamo Insieme in Italia (Learning Together in Italy) via *Scambio di Instruzione –through instructional exchange.*

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Introduction

Preparing teacher candidates for their roles in 21st century schools, calls for direct experiences with inquisitive, linguistically diverse, and often technologically savvy students across global and economic contexts.

This article presents lessons learned from a unique practicum experience through a semester abroad in Italy, where faculty, teacher candidates, and students engaged in educational and cultural collaboration. Here's our story:

What the Research Tell Us:

The CC3R Framework (College and Career Readiness) seeks to prepare students to enter a "globally competitive workforce,"(NCSS, 2013), and Teachers (K-8) are responsible for "helping social studies students increase their understanding of the world," (NCSS 2014). But how do teachers, students and colleagues demonstrate competencies in teaching issues and problem-based solutions, if one is unable to communicate and collaborate with schools across the globe?

Teacher candidates need real time preparation in teaching the increasing numbers of linguistically diverse students present in 21st century schools and learning how kids critically engage in discussion on issues that effect them and their world. But, in what contexts does this occur?

The Global Studies Foundation reports: "Only 10% of undergraduates actually study or work abroad and 43% spend only one month or less outside of their home country. Higher educational institutions provide even less support for faculty study or work abroad (27%) or on faculty language training (16%)," (Harth, 2005).

According to a May 2015 report published by the National Center For Educational Statistics, "The percentage of public school students in the United States who were English language learners was higher in school year 2012–13 (9.2 percent, or an estimated 4.4 million students) than in 2011–12 (9.1 percent, or an estimated 4.4 million students).

And, while foreign language learning, both critically important and economically vital for students in an increasingly global economy, appears to be a neglected area within the United States' CC3R and NCSS

framework, Gregg Roberts, World Languages and Dual Language Specialist, Utah State Office of Education, warns, "Monolingualism is the illiteracy of the 21st century!" (Kluger, 2013).

Scholars from The Center for Applied Linguistics argue that U.S. economic competitiveness is not only tied to technological advances, but foreign language skills (Wiley, et al., 2011). Foreign languages are best learned at younger ages, yet only 15% of primary and 58% of middle schools, offer foreign language courses (Wiley, 2011; Alden, 2012, U.S. Commission on Linguistics, 2012).

The Association of International Education (2014) reports, "The number of U.S. students studying abroad for credit during the 2012-2013 academic year grew only 2 percent from 283,332 students to 289,408 students. When reviewing the state-by-state data, Arizona's total number of students, across all majors studying abroad, was only 0.54%. We were ready to change the statistics, noted above.

The Inaugural Education Track in Siena, Italy

During the Spring 2014 semester, the first education track was launched with school partners from The Siena School for the Liberal Arts, in Siena, Italy, a UNESCO heritage city ensconced amid the traditions of medieval history and culture. Nine teacher candidates accompanied me, an associate professor of Social Studies and Elementary Education to pilot, lead, and develop a prototype for the program. Teacher candidates lived with host families, were immersed in a new country for 17 weeks, and as native English speakers, supported existing English Language instruction, (often supplementing textbook/audio taped lessons) for PreK-8 grade students, in two public schools and one private school.

Our own limited Italian language proficiencies became a serious impediment, tempering our initial excitement and confidence when we arrived in a city of Italian native speakers. All of us felt an urgency to achieve personal language learning goals, as a matter of functional utility and shared purpose.

We also recognized that "global understanding" was not something learned from textbooks, Skyping, or streaming lessons. Rather, *it is* a process developed through (1) quality time immersed within another culture, (2) learning from people within communities, (3) meeting in person with people to build trust (4) observing cultural standards of etiquette and demonstrating patience.

Cecco Angiolieri Scuola Mediale: partnering with the public middle school

While we were living, teaching, and immersed in schools abroad, teacher candidates were co-enrolled in Social Studies Methods (taught in a face-to-face format), and Educational Technology (taught in a hybrid format), as well as three other courses. The elementary practicum course involved supporting English language learning for primary grade students bi-weekly. But the social studies' practicum experience required that candidates teach older students in a meaningful, relevant, and engaging format that included curriculum competencies at one Italian middle school.

Jonassen, Howland, Moore, & Marra (2003) note that 13-20 year-olds are increasingly more tech savvy than their teachers and readily look to technology to solve problems and locate information.

In early March, we entered a darkened classroom with no textbooks, only Ipads. We observed Dr. Tuliani's 8th graders, in teams of four, creating IBooks that answered one key question related to the

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causes and effects of World War I. Social Studies content was the nucleus from which rich discussion and concepts were presented, however, all research and final assessments were produced through Web 2.0-generated products.

Dr. Tuliani, a veteran educator, teaches history, geography, and Italian to middle school students at Cecco-Angioleri Scuola Mediale in Siena, Italy. He not only holds a Ph.D. in Medieval History from The University of Siena, but is one of only 25 Apple-certified technology teachers in the country.

He's the technology guru for his precocious adolescent students, but he developed *Teaching Methodology for a Pedagogical Unit using iPads in Arts and Letters/Liberal Studies Classes* that he uses to instruct teachers across his region.

Prior to visiting Dr. Tuliani's class at the public middle school, we did not observe much in the way of technology integration in schools over the seven weeks that we were located in his city.

Dr. Tuliani has "looped" with his level 1a 8th grade students for three consecutive years. He explains, "In Italy, and in most of Europe, public school students are placed into cohort classes, and all students in those cohorts, follow each other until graduation. Middle school students in a "1a" class take the same core classes with each other until they graduate from that middle school."

The class of twenty-one 8th graders, 10 male and 11 female, attended public school in Italy for 8 years (5 elementary and 3 middle) and Dr. Tuliani taught geography, history and Italian (three different subjects) to all of them over three consecutive years.

This aspect of Italian schooling contrasted with what my teacher candidates experienced during their own K-8 education in the U.S., and in previous U.S. based practicum assignments. Most report that they were taught by different teachers for *each* elementary grade, and then by several different core subject matter specialists across their 6-8th grades in their middle schools.

Getting Started:

After our initial visit we decided to arrange a meeting to collaborate on a project during our remaining seven weeks of the semester.

Admittedly, clear communication of ideas was not easy. Dr. Tuliani, a native Italian speaker, was fluent in French and Spanish. His English language skills surpassed my basic Italian, but we agreed to converse in Italian, to build my confidence and vocabulary when speaking to his class later in the semester.

We asked the questions that all teachers need to ask, but often don't when collaboration is planned:

Where could we collaborate?

How could we engage native Italian speaking students in discussion and meaningful exchange of ideas, with English speaking Italian-language learner teacher candidates?

How could technology assist us in reaching our lesson objectives?

What level of instruction, with time for assessment and evaluation of product could result from a 90 minute face-to-face classroom lesson in a middle school in Italy?

What other realities and expectations were we all dealing with?
(we would have only 14 weeks of Italian Language immersion study completed; The Italian school calendar limited prior interaction with this class because of their Spring break that coincided with the Easter holiday week and Liberation Day, April 25th)

We agreed on the date of April (29, 2014) and then worked on planning the specifics of how our education track teacher candidates would engage with his adolescent students via a lesson and assessment that aligned with our curriculum requirements.

We used Italian-English Google Translate and discussed time frame, 90-minute block, and the format: introduction, discussion, design, and full class review of individual final products that were sent to a Drop box file.

I shared visual "samples" to illustrate how visual art is used as assessment of students' critical thinking on 'big idea' topics and constructs related to History: (e.g. democracy, freedom, immigration, liberty, voting). In addition, to the visual images that students create, captions offer a single sentence summation (in dual language, English and Italian) that presents the students' understanding of the concept, *from a kids' point of vi*ew.*

Initially, Dr. Tuliani wondered how an open-ended, arts-based assessment, would qualify as rigor related to curriculum competencies, since end-of-year academic assessments, that his students were required to pass, were coming up in six weeks. However, after he reviewed samples of finished products from U.S. 8th graders who interpreted World War I through their artistic images, he agreed with the practicum project and required three specific elements be included:
(1) group work, (2) content related to 8th grade world history curriculum, and (3) technology integration with final product completed on an IPAD.

The Project: *The ABC's Project From A Kid's Point of View*

When we (myself and 9 female teacher candidates) returned to teach the practicum lesson in late April (with greater command of the language), the 8th grade students were experts in working with the web 2.0 formats and familiar with group dynamics. Each teacher candidate was assigned to teach a small group of students.

Stahl (2006) argues for small groups as the productive unit for meaning making for several reasons. Small groups:
(1) are where members' methods for "intersubjective" learning can be observed;
(2) allow the full range of social interactions to play out, and
(3) enable participants and researchers to keep track of what is going on.

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What we didn't realize, was that not only were we working with small groups, but we were engaged in computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) that is an emerging branch of the learning sciences that studies how people can learn together with the help of computers, (Stahl, G., Koschmann, T., & Suthers, D., 2006)!

Kids' Thinking vs. Knowing: The "Ah Ha" Process of the Project

Dr. Tuliani introduced the project and refined the instructions: final product would be created in web 2.0 format.

I assigned teacher candidates to work with one group of three-four students. Each group received three-four letters of the alphabet. Students would select one letter and brainstorm terms related to history/politics/geography associated with that letter (hence the name, The ABC's project....)

As this was an original lesson from my own classroom teaching of middle grade students a decade ago, replicated over the years with students of my teacher candidates over the years, I explained the lesson's *purpose* to the students (in my basic-level Italian).

Then I displayed a model on the smart board that shared how each student selected one term related to World War I, with both an image and explanation, from a ***"Kids' point of view*****.**"

The 8th graders in Italy viewed the images with enthusiasm and understood the meaning behind the illustrations created by students of their same age, who lived in another country, and this prompted discussion.

I presented one additional request:"Schools and teachers require students to prove *what they know* about a topic, usually through a test. We're here to find out *what you think*, about a topic. There's a difference."

The 8th graders were incredulous. One student asked for clarification in Italian, "You mean you want to know what **we think**? Nobody ever asks us, or cares about, what we think...we're always tested on what we know."

I encouraged 8th graders and my teacher candidates, engrossed within their small groups, to deepen verbal discussions. I observed interactions that were rich, fluid, authentic, at times sprinkled with humor, and frustrating moments, when teacher candidates didn't understand the metaphors and language nuances of the 8th graders' discussions. Candidates jotted down any thing that seemed pedagogically significant.

Dr. Tuliani moved about the room to assess his students' responses and Ipad products. Fifty minutes later,"i raggazzi" (the students) were sharing "their own thinking" via digitally created images that we all viewed from the drop box file downloaded onto the large screen in the front of the room.

The students covered a range of constructs represented by a singular word : Democracy, Elections, Forced Labor, Independence, Opinion, Unity, Vote, World, Youth, etc. Each image included a one-sentence summary presented in Italian, with a sprinkling of English,and included students' name, age, and gender for data coding purposes.

Learning Outcomes, Findings, and Lessons Learned

What does collaboration look like, how does it happen, and in what curriculum contexts can mutually beneficial learning goals (both cognitive and affective) be realized? Teacher candidates reflected on these questions and what they learned from observing student's thinking on real life topics through more than a pencil paper task.

"Their images were genuine. They [the students] allowed me to see through the eyes of a child." - Danielle

"The project prompted me to think about my own perceptions and misjudgments regarding adolescent students. They are thinking, listening, observing and noticing the inequalities of people around them. That's pretty advanced. They are not kids, really, but mature thinkers." – Andrea

" I couldn't believe the discussions that we had in our small group as students were considering what captured the essence of what one topic/word signified to them. A few were so attuned to the hypocrisy of the system, especially with the word, VOTE." – Beka

Findings suggest that :

(1) students are aware of messages behind the explicit and/or mainstream terms discussed openly in the media.
(2) The internalization of these terms is often surprising to teachers or observers.
(3) teacher candidates noted how student's thinking was varied, unpredictable, original, creative, and more mature, than they anticipated, after the final products were displayed, and explained, on the Smart board.
(4) Kids IPAD images appeared to be more explicit, detailed, graphic, and emotive in content, than their written commentary.

This work draws upon the research of Michael Polanyi (1967) who termed the pre-logical phase of knowing as "tacit knowledge: the belief that creative acts (especially acts of discovery) are shot-through or charged with strong personal feelings and commitments," (p.24-25).   Polanyi theorized, "We can know more than we can tell."

This project builds upon that theory and relates and mid-level students (grades 4-8) are innovators who do know more than they can tell, especially within the contexts of standardized testing.

 Through this project the author suggests that kids' make a clear distinction between:

- *"Thinking of"* (opinion/feeling) vs.
- *"Knowing about"* (the term/content)
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Children ingest personal and direct experiences that appear emotionally linked to their point of view. The "thinking of" illustrations demonstrate, that even with months of study on focused historical content, kids think "their way," and do have an opinion, and sometimes they are able to share it in an academic setting.

Through this joint project, that integrated technology as the format for image creation, lessons were learned on multiple levels. My teacher candidates noted the benefits of small group communication with students. Students and candidates were engaged in a temporal, fully-focused, in-the- moment- idea-exchange that was genuine and served as authentic assessment. Students and teacher candidates benefitted from modeling and the "techspertise 'of Dr. Tuliani, whose prior lessons infused technology into his teaching of history through the use of these apps:

> *CBB Creative Book Builder* for creating iBooks on World War 1
> *Notability and Pages* for taking notes and writing and organizing thoughts
> *Inspiration* for creating a conceptual map
> *Doodle Buddy and Paper 53* for the design
> *Dropbox* for a full-class review of final products

8th grader's responses validated their understanding, led to authentic discussions, and engaged small and whole groups in critical thinking and pragmatic communication strategies.

Communication (verbal, visual, and computer-assisted) offered second "language learners," (teacher candidates and me) the opportunity to feel what it is like to possess advanced ideas on a particular issue, with limited second-language proficiency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Through verbal cues, body language, patience, humor, and "Google Scholar," ancillary learning occurred: communication relied upon innovative pragmatism, collaboration yielded amazing products, and, no text or e-learning could ever replicate the feelings of accomplishment, acceptance, and purpose of our being in that classroom on that day.

The result: collaboration, team teaching, dual language discussion, peer learning, and original high quality student products, created on Ipads in Web 2.0 format, that aligned with The NCSS C3R Framework and the Italian Ministry of Education's program of study (NCSS, 2013),

Implications for Practice

Teachers and faculty, who are open to sharing new ideas and strategies, learn from each other. Consider how to:
(1) take advantage of every opportunity to collaborate, commit and comingle history content in an international educational setting;
(2) extend invitations to communication; it's a nucleus of trust-building;
(3) adapt to the structures in place within an educational setting,
(4) access "student thinking" when planning instruction.

After a semester's time, candidates, students and faculty benefitted from not only integrating history content with the arts, technology, and critical thinking, but sharing methodologies and examining previously held ideas. What makes for an effective lesson might not be predetermined or particularized.

All of us deepened our understanding of each other, as well as the intricacies of language learning and teaching in a foreign country. In spite of initial challenges, we persisted, only to recognize that collaboration is a process, and global understanding, calls for human interaction in face-to-face settings, for extended periods of time. No doubt, this program will grow, and other faculty, students, and teacher candidates will engage in cross-cultural teaching experiences abroad, that include *imparando insieme (learning together).*

Data sources and products

Data included multiple samples of qualitative and arts-based products. Teacher candidates' products demonstrated successful small group management and instruction, documentation of learning goals, and ancillary 'surprises' in how language is mediated through communication competency level disparities.

8th graders' met goals that ranged from understanding the concepts through bi-lingual verbal exchange that drew upon their English-Language literacy and comprehension skills, to their creativity in interpreting, designing, and formatting a digital final product based upon their own 'thinking."

Data sources include:

Teacher candidates reflections
Pre-lesson concerns journal (How am I going to teach 8th graders in small groups?) with steps to problem solve proactively.
On-site note taking of how students completed their task
Post-lesson reflection
Student publishing of original designs created on IPADS; some requested paper to create hard-copy images.
Students discussed designs in small groups with teacher candidates who worked to clarify their thinking: What does this word/construct mean to you and why? How can you express this visual summation in one sentence to describe your ideas? How is this sentenced expressed in English and Italian?
     Drop box files of final students products created on Ipad can be viewed here:

https://www.dropbox.com/sh/e7atbdmk93jlka1/AADSmg4B47GkJKmhiSQJCsmYa?preview=

     Dr. Tuliani documented the process on his IPAD with anecdotal data on individual students. Author documented notes as she reviewed the teacher candidate small group interactions.

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