



## A Case Study of Faculty Development through Distance Education: Teaching Early Childhood Students in the United States and South Korea

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### Abstract

This unique format of distance education instruction was executed between multiple faculty, staff and graduate students at the University of Missouri, St. Louis and the faculty and undergraduate students at Kongju National University in South Korea. The method of instruction allowed for visual presentation from one country while only one person at a time was able to react from the other country. The purpose of the seminar was to test the use of distance education for a course in early childhood education in Korea and the United States. The undergraduate students at the Korean university also increased their ability to speak and write in English. This case study indicates a possibility for delivering cultural and curricular expertise for university faculty and staff development in a much needed area of cultural education. As a result of this course, the American and Korean faculty and students are much more knowledgeable of each other customs, history and early childhood curriculum as well as English language skills. This knowledge in turn, will enable them to better understand in their own classes. The course was a success as indicated by continued faculty and student engagement.

**Keywords:** Distance Education between American and Korean universities, Centra Software

### 1. Introduction

Technology-rich distance education is being heralded as the next big superhero in education. It is thought to have arms so long that it can reach rural and forgotten urban places that traditional university classrooms could not. Its fingers are flexible enough to fit gingerly around every student's needs. It delivers to every willing institution its special hero-juice, a type of penicillin that will cure all types of educational diseases such as teacher shortages and budget cuts. And as fantastic as this may sound, technology-rich distance education probably does exist in superhero form – but he is yet a little boy, not yet grown enough to realize his full potentials.

The reality is that technology-rich distance education programs probably still only reach those students that would normally populate a traditional classroom (Grill 2003). And studies suggest that only certain types of students flourish in distance education classes (Kochman and Maddux 2001; Jordan and Spooner 1999; Harrington 1999; Coe and Elliott 1999). Teachers of technology-rich distance education classes can easily feel overwhelmed, overworked and frustrated with handling such large class sizes online or via satellite. Perhaps the most telling characteristic of the immaturity of our superhero is that the technology-rich education is quality-poor in most institutions. Students continue to endure production problems such as poor lighting, and muffled audio.

Although the distant course may be delivered creatively to encourage peer and teacher-student interaction, it must still support a knowledge base shared among teachers (Chai and Tan, 2009; Lewis, 2003). Technology can encourage self-regulated learning for students (Miller, 2009). Some problems are that the expectations of students in distance education classes remain the same as they would have in face to face classrooms. Some students question the traditional pedagogy in on-line classes as our gawky little boy develops into the superhero we once fantasized about.

The technology-enhanced learning influences learning outcomes. One is that successful language learning depends to a large degree on the motivation and collaboration of the learners. What remains crucial for the use of the new language learning technology, is that pedagogues, while valuing the potential of technology integrated delivery, continue to maintain a critical balance between what is technically possible and pedagogically sound (Han, 2005).

Technology-rich distance education is creating new opportunities for students and also for faculties even though it has some problems (Cook, Crawford and Warner, 2009). It is already providing better access to education for many areas (Korea Herald, 2000; BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, 2005; Schneiderman, Corbridge and Zerwic, 2009; Miner and Hofmann, 2009; Mayadas, John and Bacsich, 2009; Larvin, 2009; Johnson and Gardner, 2009). Many more will benefit from this increased access in the coming years (Mayadas and Bacsich, 2009).

This article connects American and Korean universities in a seminar on early childhood education. The Internet is a useful distant education media in schools but not frequently used to educate university faculties and students. The aim is to explore the capabilities of using the Internet for instruction between American and Korean faculties. Dimensions of international Internet instruction are discussed as used for language, cultural and instructional development. Recommendations are made for future international Internet courses.

## 2. Background

December 21, 2004 Dr. Eunsoon Oh arrived at the University of Missouri, St. Louis as a Visiting Professor. Unknowingly, she selected an office in the wing of the education building where the university outreach faculties, known as continuing education instructors, were located. This faculty, Dr. Stephen Viola and Ms. Mary Ann Horvath, managed and taught courses throughout Missouri delivered through the Internet in computer skills and special education. They had previous experience teaching one course internationally to elementary children and teachers in Russia. However, the course was no longer offered because the Russian Educator Coordinator resigned and was not replaced. It was with great enthusiasm that the author and the outreach faculty arranged for Korean students from Kongju National University and kindergarten teachers to participate in a distance education course with the Missouri continuing education faculty, pre-school teachers and education faculty.

The research hypothesis was to use different methods of instruction to teach early childhood education content to Korean students using Centra educational software. The strategy was to invite guest lecturers of special education, early childhood and kindergarten centers, professors of education and graduate students employed by the University of Missouri, St. Louis. These Americans were selected by Professor Oh who served as presenter and translator and whose students were attending the distance education class at Kongju University in Daejeon, South Korea. Dr. Oh was a Visiting Professor at the University of Missouri, St. Louis. The American presenters constructed power points, showed pictures and attempted to show videotapes. The successes of the presentations were obtained by the feedback given by the students to Dr. Oh and the questionnaires administered by Mrs. Horvath, Information Technology Specialist for the University of Missouri. The original plan had been for one Korean professor to provide instruction supervision of the students and provide discussion exchanges on Korean early childhood programs from Korea. In the frequent absence of the Korean professor, the Korean students stepped into the vacuum and developed presentations, delivered them in English by necessity and continued to participate in distance education seminars where they received no academic credit. This was a very unexpected outcome and unusual for Korean students to design the content of their own learning.

Internet exchange sessions started February 25, 2005 through November 17, 2005. No sessions were conducted during vacations and one session was cut short by prior commitments. Once a week sessions were held for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. English was the language of instruction placing additional responsibilities for English preparation and translation for the Korean students and kindergarten Professor and for the co-author who assisted students and faculty with understanding in Korean and English.

The Internet software used was Centra, an Internet communications application, allowing participants and presenters to speak through the Internet from their desktop computers. Participants' names were submitted one week prior to the course. Ms. Horvath, University of Missouri Technical Coordinator, presided throughout the sessions and conducted software training and evaluation for all participants. She then sent permission identification and passwords. Only education content was recorded. The University of Missouri Extension Centra Server was utilized, free of charge for this pilot study. The time difference between the two locations was fourteen hours meaning that Missouri held the sessions on Thursday starting at 3:00 pm and Koreans started their program on Friday at 6:00 am. After November, Missouri went to daylight savings time meaning that the course started at 4:00 pm on Thursday but there was no time change in Korea.

## 3. Sessions Outline

February 25, 2005

The aim of the first session was to explore the possibility of conducting an early childhood course between the University of Missouri, St. Louis and Kongju National University. During the first trial, Dr. Viola prepared a presentation of special education. University Extension Specialist Mr. Eber Cude presented information on marionette and Russian dolls and Russian early childhood materials. Dr. Oh presented an introduction on South Korea. Ms. Horvath installed software, speakers and mikes in the different offices, downloaded power point presentations and

pictures. The speech was audible and the pictures were clear. It was determined that the software enabled the University of Missouri, St. Louis to conduct an early childhood course with Korean students and teachers.

March 23, 2005.

Ms. Horvath and Dr. Oh assisted Korean Vice Director of Kindergarten and Graduate Students at Kongju National University, Mrs. Hong. Ms. Horvath sent the software with installation instructions to Mrs. Hong. With Ms. Horvath's assistance, Mrs. Hong was able to communicate effectively with the Missouri faculty. At the second session, Dr. Oh presented a session on "Women Leaders." The second meeting also focused on things Korean students have to know when participating in distance education. Students had to tell working family members that they would be leaving earlier. Students needed to be quiet so they don't disturb the family when they leave for the 6:00 a.m. class.

April 13, 2005

Eight attended/ four Korean and four Missouri participants.

Dr. Oh presented about the Montessori Conference that opened in April in Chicago. Missouri kindergarten pictures and early childhood education were presented by Dr. Oh.

April 28, 2005

Ms. Horvath, Ms. Decker, Dr. Navin, Director of the Early Childhood Center and Dr. Oh participated from Missouri. Mrs. Hong, and seven freshmen and sophomore students from Kongju National University participated. Mrs. Hong showed pictures of her kindergarten from Chungbuk Province. Her program was government supported, not private. Her presentation was followed by a question and answer session which followed. The video camera was tried but it did not function well.

May 4, 2005

Ms. Decker presented her facilities and her kindergarten program. There were thirteen participants and not enough time for all to speak.

May 12, 2005

The presentation was on Korean Children's Day with nine participants.

Several Korean University students prepared and presented, in English, PowerPoint presentations with photos and written explanations of the children's events.

May 19, 2005

Twelve participants learned of the Kongju National University kindergarten viewing the facilities and listening to an overview of the curriculum.

May 26, 2005

Eight participants learned of UMSL's Day Care Center presented by Dr. Navin, Director of the Early Childhood Center. Ms. Horvath introduced the breakout room as structured by the Centra software system. In this process, the teams discussed the same topic. A team leader was randomly selected by the Centra software. This was a unique concept for the Koreans as they usually select the leader as the most senior person. The teams met 10-15 minutes in the breakout rooms and then returned to the total session to discuss the topics. It was agreed upon that both Korean and Missouri governments need to assist in the placement of elementary and kindergarten pre-service teachers. At this point principals and some teachers can reject student teachers. Thus, student teacher placement is difficult for faculties responsible for Korean and Missouri teacher education.

October 6, 2005

This session started later due to problems with the microphone. Dr. Navin presented the University of Missouri St. Louis's Early Childhood Curriculum and Dr. Oh presented the Kongju National University's. Dr. Navin identified the strength and the weakness, which was strong practical application of instructional procedures and its lack of content specialization. A comparison was made with the Korean curriculum, which has greater complexity and specialization. The Koreans have professors for early childhood math, language, music, dance, art, play and program development. The curriculum is weak in the practical applications needed to deliver the content. This session also included a presentation by a Korean student on the Korean Language Festival. Ms. Horvath presented photos and information on Hannibal Missouri, the hometown of Missouri author Mark Twain.

October 27, 2005

Dr. Viola presented information on Russian, Kenyan and Croatia special programs for Early Childhood and Special Education. Ms. Horvath presented pictures and the history of the American Halloween Festival. Korean students presented about Kongju City and its history and showed pictures of historical sites. Dr. Cochran presented web-based

videotape of methods used for educating elementary children as demonstrated by St. Louis children and teachers. Unfortunately the videotape was not visible in Korea so the tape was stopped.

November 17, 2005

Dr. Cochran used a power point presentation to present how to effectively teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) using children's music. Dr. Navin discussed lessons she had given in pre-schools teaching foreign languages. The Korean students presented the Division of Early Childhood Festival and the kindergarten environment at Kongju National University. The students had pictures of monthly themes in the kindergarten. For example, October is the United Nations sponsored month on the theme of Anti-Bias. Some faculty members had left the seminar. Mrs. Hong was paid to prepare for graduate thesis exams and Ms. Decker had a position where she had to prepare a test for kindergarten teachers.

#### 4. Discussion

This case study demonstrated the possibility of conducting an international class for pre teachers and teachers for an hour and a half in length. The two-way presentation was useful in several ways. First, the faculties from two different countries increased their cultural awareness. They were able to share images of their country and programs, conduct discussions and compare curriculum for the same age of children. Secondly, the technology used was at times difficult but showed promise. Initially, the mikes did not work, the videotape could not be shown from a website, and the camera, although used once, showed the capability of a more advanced function for a later date. The cultural sharing was insightful for both the Missourians and the Koreans. From the American perspective, the faculty was impressed that the Korean students were so well prepared to present in English at 6:00 am in the morning. They were also interested that students continued to come to the course even though they were not getting credit for the course. This seemed to be a testimony to the engagement of Korean students in the Internet course. The American faculty did not expect the Korean students to be told how to treat their families when they left their home. In this manner, Korean students indirectly taught the American professors about their cultural expectations.

Students were uncomfortable when they had to call the American faculties, director and their professors' by their names in sessions. In Korea, professors are addressed by their title only. The younger ones have to use the respect words to the old ones in Korean culture. In the Breakout Room, any students could become a leader, whether or not they are the older and lower one. This too was a cultural difference. The Korean students were taught the American manners and leadership models. While the Korean students were afraid to speak and present in English, American faculties encouraged them. They were happy to join the sessions, even though they had to be awakened so early, prepare in English and receive no academic credit. Americans were not aware that student encouragement and support was a motivation for attendance for the Korean students. The courtesy toward students was an unexpected area of educational and cultural difference.

The Korean students complimented Dr. Cochran on her pretty blond hair, which made her aware that the students all had black hair. This is a consistency not often found in American classrooms which have greater racial diversity. In addition, the students were pleased to have the professors be so supportive of their comments, presentations and usage of the English language. The Korean professors are much "harder" on student work. When they had technical problems in the sessions, all participants waited and faculty spoke in a relaxed manner. These were important differences to the Korean students who had a difficulty speaking and writing in English and were strangers to the American culture. Students were also pleased that the instruction as organized allowed them to ask every question that they wanted to know. And finally, festivals for children were quite different in both countries and also in those presentations made about festivals in Russia and Kenya. Cultural differences were taught in an interesting and non-threatening manner.

The students left the experience with different knowledge. As stated by Ming Keong Song, "I have been very hard. I prepared for three to four hours. But as I presented, efforts were finally rewarded." And another student wrote, "The very beginning, it helped me a lot. When I prepared my own presentation, I could become aware of several things I didn't know before. Most important part to me is that I could show some foreign people some part of my own culture. It made me worthwhile. Also, holding information in common with foreigners is useful experience to me." (HaYoung Jang). "I reached a level of proficiency in my English. The CENTRA implanted self-confidence in me and I elevated the standard of vocabulary. Secondly, I understood Early Childhood Education and system difference both in America and Korea. For example, American students have a practical training lab." (Ming Keong Song.) "I learned many, many things. I feel that Korea and America's kindergarten have many similarities." (Ilhan You.)

The uniqueness of this exchange was that many in Missouri faculty interacted with each other and with the Korean students to provide a seminar for Korean students and faculty. The usual format for Internet courses is for the teacher to interact with multiple students. In this case, the faculty in both countries enjoyed learning about each other and about their shared interest of early childhood education. The question is why were American students not included in this wonderful experience? The answer is in the nature of adult education in the United States. First, the American faculty

has a set schedule for their classes. For example, Dr. Cochran taught two classes on Wednesday and none on Thursday at 4:00 p. m when the Centra course was conducted. Her students were taking other classes at that time or working in the schools in the after-school programs. As this class started after the education courses were scheduled, there were no education students taking early childhood courses available at that time.

Secondly, the American faculties involved in this course were interested in international education even though their subject specializations were computers, special education, early childhood, and EFL and adult education. Their motivation for meeting the Korean faculty and students was one of personal knowledge expansion. So even though they received no pay, recognition from their directors, or other external rewards, they continued to prepare, come to sessions and enjoy the course. The same might be said of the students, one of whom cried when the sessions were over, as she would no longer get to meet with the American faculties. Although from the American faculties' perspective, the improvement in the Korean students' English and the increasing complexity of their presentations demonstrated that content knowledge had been increased in early childhood and English.

The limitations of this course relate mostly to the technology. While there was one person at each computer in Missouri, occasionally two Korean students shared one lab computer at Kongju National University. This was difficult as only one person could speak at a time. Observers could respond with a visual smile, clap, yes or no but there was no sound making the responses less enjoyable. Another limitation was the embryonic stages of the Centra software. While the pictures were clear and the voices well understood, the integration of website videos, tapes cameras and mikes need to be perfected. Without the excellent management of Ms. Horvath, the course would have been less than technically adequate.

### **5. Summary and Conclusions**

The world can become much smaller through the use of Internet. This was an exchange program with no need to travel. All participants received direct instruction in the culture of other country in a gentle and friendly manner. As there is frequently a need to provide cultural experiences for faculty, this course was uniquely structured to do so. Before faculty meet each other in person, the participants know each other with little or no stress. The many images and the positive responses to the presentations built trust among the participants. Students were able to acquaint themselves with American faculty and get their e-mails and correspond about presentations. Students used e-mail to frequently contact the author regarding their presentations. Student to student e-mail could also be assumed to have occurred. In summary, this seminar introduced cultural differences, shared interests and a feeling of trust among students and faculties.

There were some limitations caused by the time differences and the need to prepare in English. Many of the Korean students spent two or three days in preparation before participating at 6:00 am. They would apologize for not sending their presentation early as it had taken them such a long time to gather the information, pictures and write the dialogue in English. For them, this was the first global classroom taken through the Internet. If the video camera functioned, the class would have been improved and possibly been even more engaging.

The Missouri Television System (MoRENET) has been used to televise as many as seven locations simultaneously by a single instructor. This technology is not available for international classes. However, many of the functions of the televised system have been integrated into the Centra software where it is possible to send powerpoint presentations and pictures to support lecture presentations. This software, with a single person presenting, does not give responders the opportunity to speak and the presenter cannot evaluate the effectiveness of the presentation as he or she cannot see members of the audience.

Furthermore, Centra is effective software for adult instruction. It is a real life connection with people who are far away. If smaller children are in the audiences, their shorter concentration will require more participation activities. Managing such activities when you cannot see the children will require the presence of a teacher/director at each location. In this case study, the students were frequently without a Korean professor on site. This did not limit them from learning, developing their presentations and selecting topics that were of interest to the American faculties and other students. Again, the most interesting aspect of this case study was the composition of the adults who were learning. The first group was early childhood education students at Kongju National University and one Director of a government kindergarten. The second group was continuing education instructors in the fields of computers, special education and pre-school director. The third group was an Professor from Kongju University who developed this project through her personal contacts with the Korean University and the continuing education instructors and an Endowed Professor of Education who attended two sessions but learned the messages of this pilot study. All were all able to directly touch people half a world away, sharing knowledge, friendship and enthusiasm for learning.

During these sessions all participants spoke English. So even though participants didn't focus the English lesson, all Korean attendees could take the opportunities to practice their English skills.

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