

Globalizing Programmatic Perspectives in Pandemic Contexts

Kirk St.Amant

Louisiana Tech University

Abstract. The COVID-19 pandemic has markedly heightened global awareness of online education. This entry presents approaches for addressing this international context when developing online courses and curricula in technical communication.

Keywords: Collaboration, Curriculum, Global, International, Programs, Online

The COVID-19 pandemic shifted much of education worldwide to online formats (Chen, 2020). This move brought numerous challenges from delivering instruction to engaging in classroom interactions (Tam & El-Azar, 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020). The transition was not uniform. Rather, it revealed the need for further development in online learning and in associated infrastructure across regions and nations (Amrane-Cooper, 2020; Singh et al., 2020). These events also increased educator and student familiarity with online education on an unrepresented global scale. Such a context provides unique potential for internationalizing technical communication education today.

Moves to internationalize online education are not new to technical communication (see, for example, Maylath, 1997). Pandemic-related developments, however, accelerated earlier initiatives to extend online instruction beyond national borders (St.Amant, 2017). Realizing the educational potential of today's international online environment is no simple task. It requires activities that foster international online interactions in meaningful ways (Cleary et al., 2019). Through certain approaches, technical communication educators

and program administrators can develop unique learning experiences for students in different nations. Additionally, educators, administrators, and researchers in technical communication can make important contributions to such contexts by developing approaches for addressing this pedagogical environment. This entry overviews how to engage in such activities.

The Global Shift

Historically, physical distance limited international teaching collaborations, but online communication technologies made the potential for international interactions easier (St.Amant, 2017). Within technical communication (TC) programs, early attempts to globalize online instruction often involved pairing students in different classes and nations on specific projects (see Maylath, 1997). The results were relatively limited interactions with partnering courses – often technical writing and translation studies. These partnering courses generally continued in separate but parallel ways versus offering integrated instruction and interaction across classes (Humbley et al., 2005; Vandepitte et al., 2010). This focus on one aspect (translation) often limited cross-cultural engagement to a single topic in the overall TC curriculum (Gnecchi et al., 2008; Mousten et al., 2010). More recently, educators in different nations have explored expanding international online interactions to a wider range of activities and classes (St.Amant, 2020; Verzella et al., 2021).

By moving an unprecedented number of curricula worldwide online, the COVID-19 pandemic created a new international context for online learning (Tam & El-Azar, 2020; Li & Lalani, 2020). This situation was far from ideal with several factors affecting educational experiences globally (Chen, 2020; Singh et al., 2020). The shift, however, created new online options in international higher education. It also revealed that programs could augment limitations of physical proximity through web-based approaches.

In TC, this global transition prompted certain organizations to develop resources from Facebook groups (e.g., the Pandemic Pedagogies – Professional and Technical Writing group) to webinars (e.g., Global Society of Online Literacy Educators webinars) that provided educators with information on online pedagogy. Additionally, educators in different nations used the move online to develop networks for exchanging ideas about pedagogy and programs (e.g., the International University Network in Technical Communication). Globally distributed TC educators also began collaborating via web-based events focused on online

curriculum and course development in international contexts (e.g., the 2021 Technical Communication European Academic Colloquium).

At the same time, a number of TC educators began exploring online options for collaborating internationally to enhance curricula. These developments often focused on using online technologies to bring internationally distributed speakers into online classes to share their expertise (St.Amant 2020; Verzella et al., 2021). Such situations also provided unique opportunities where students from different cultures convened online for regular interactions versus occasional exchanges (Thornberg, 2021). Additionally, these initiatives helped expand collaborations around co-teaching classes of students located in different nations (Cleary et al., 2019; Verzella et al., 2021).

These developments provided unparalleled opportunities to access international instructional expertise. They also allowed educators to augment TC course offerings, class content, and faculty available to students (St.Amant, 2020; Verzella et al., 2021). Such situations provided students with new opportunities to collaborate internationally across classes and projects (Mousten et al., 2010; Verzella et al., 2021). Ideally, these approaches will continue to expand so students can access multiple international experts who integrate their specializations into online classes.

Realizing Pedagogical Potential

Pre-pandemic, many educators and students worldwide had relatively limited experience with online education (St.Amant, 2017). Shelter-in-place situations under COVID-19, however, pushed an unprecedented number of educators worldwide into online instruction (Li & Lalani, 2020). These global developments resulted in many students gaining familiarity with online educational contexts (Tam & El-Azar, 2020). The resulting environment offers TC educators and program administrators a unique opportunity to internationalize courses and curricula. The challenge involves optimizing this opportunity. The following approaches can help TC educators provide students with meaningful learning experiences within global contexts.

Approach 1: Internationalizing Research-Based Projects

Prior international collaboration in TC programs often paired classes in different nations to examine translation and localization (see, Humbley et al., 2005; Vandepitte et al., 2010; Mousten et al., 2010). These partnerships generally involved students in each class creating independent products around a focused project. Such activities, however, limit

the interaction possible in international online contexts.

Educators should consider expanding international activities to include research-based projects focused on understanding different cultures and creating materials for different environments. These activities could include researching the audience expectations of another culture to create materials for a particular international audience. They could also include usability testing where products designed by students from one culture are evaluated by peers in another (St.Amant, 2018). Such activities would allow students to:

- Coordinate research on audiences in their native culture *and* (ideally) in other cultures
- Create group projects based on related results (see St.Amant, 2017 & 2018).

Students could present the results of these projects to their classmates and discuss how cultural factors can affect communication, design, and usability expectations. These experiences can expand student appreciation of cultural differences in TC practices.

Approach 2: Experiencing Globally Distributed Work Contexts

The COVID-19 pandemic brought work-from-home/teleworking approaches to many organizations worldwide (Chavez-Dreyfuss, 2020; Soares et al., 2021). As a result, students can expect to engage in some form of distributed work environment after graduation (Holtzwarth, 2021; Buhayar, 2020; Marchant, 2021). Sometimes, they might be the teleworkers; in others, they might be part of an on-site group working with a colleague abroad (Harrison, 2017; Global Competence, 2017). In these situations, an understanding of how to work in international online environments is essential.

Group projects where students in different nations collaborate online to plan, develop, assess, and present projects can teach the dynamics of international teleworking. Such projects can also:

- Familiarize students with factors affecting globally distributed teams (e.g., cultural attitudes toward work versus personal time)
- Help prepare students for future collaborations in global contexts

These experiences could include service-learning and internship options where educators in one nation partner with organizations in another to help students learn teleworking approaches in international settings.

Approach 3: Augmenting Instructional Expertise

All programs are limited in the faculty they have and the expertise

those faculty can bring to classes. Online media can augment this situation by permitting individuals from other nations – and individuals who have different specializations – to provide lectures, facilitate class discussions, or co-teach courses (St.Amant, 2020; Verzella et al., 2021). These options allow TC programs to integrate a wider range of expertise into existing classes (Cleary et al., 2019; St.Amant, 2020). Such approaches can also:

- Expose students to different cultural perspectives on technical communication
- Exemplify other cultural approaches to teaching TC topics

These experiences can help students enhance their knowledge of a topic while also gaining a better understanding of cultural differences.

Approach 4: Addressing Local Problems

The ability to address local problems is often limited by the expertise of individuals available to work on projects (Reynolds & Lewis, 2017). Ideally, more and different participants can provide new perspectives to examine issues and devise solutions (Burbidge, 2017; Detrick, 2021). International online education can help TC educators engage in such situations. By pooling expertise across an international group, online classes could provide solutions to problems in different regions. The approach could involve service-learning projects where students in different nations collaborate to examine a problem identified by a community partner in one location.

This approach would introduce new expertise and experiences to problem solving. It would also provide different cultural perspectives that could lead to new solutions to problems. International online classes could also reveal existing solutions from one area that apply to a problem that is new to another. These situations could also tap diverse international experiences in order to develop models for effective online education in regions where such options are limited (Thompson, 2020). Through such projects, TC students can learn about other cultural contexts, other approaches to addressing issues, and alternative ways of considering problems.

The four approaches described here are scalable to different contexts based on who participates in an online class or project. As a result, educators can use these approaches to enhance instruction in order to benefit students and communities on local, regional, or national levels.

Addressing Associated Challenges

The potential benefits of globalizing TC programs via online media are great, yet creating effective educational interactions is complex. TC educators, program administrators, and researchers need to address certain challenges to effectively globalize classes and curricula.

Challenges for TC Educators

The primary challenge for TC educators involves identifying best practices for pedagogical interactions in international cyberspace. Issues to address include:

- How to effectively convey different concepts and topics across cultures in online exchanges
- How to internationally convey ideas and information to meet student learning objectives
- How to foster productive cross-cultural exchanges in online classes
- How to engage in cross-cultural dialog that maximizes learning online (see St.Amant, 2017)

Approaches that meet these needs can make major contributions to educational practices across the field and on a global scale. TC educators and program administrators should therefore seek venues to share success stories and best practices in these areas so others can benefit from such developments.

Challenges for TC Program Administrators

Coordinating classes and curricula across nations can be a challenge to implementing. Such approaches involve balancing learning requirements, educational expectations, and scheduling across nations. TC program administrators should therefore work with partnering faculty and institutions in other nations to develop joint policies around:

- Managing enrollment across classes at different institutions
- Determining grading expectations and duties across instructors and students
- Timing interactions and assignment/exam dates across institutional (and national) schedules
- Developing procedures for addressing instructor and student concerns across cultures and systems

Such partnership policies provide TC program administrators with a foundation for developing approaches to address other issues as they arise.

Challenges for TC Researchers

For researchers of TC pedagogy and programs, the challenge involves addressing curricular issues that could impede international opportunities (St.Amant, 2017). Educators worldwide need guidance in fostering effective international partnerships their institutions recognize. Specifically, institutions and educators need:

- Resources on the legal and accreditation practices associated with education in different nations
- Policies noting how credit is awarded for teaching and perceived in relation to co-teaching
- Approaches for sharing content (e.g., readings and videos) online per national laws
- Methods for fostering continued educational connections across nations

Pedagogical and programmatic research in these areas is essential to globalizing online education effectively. The resulting resources should be widely shared so others in the field and around the world can use them to foster effective online education in international contexts.

Final Thoughts

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for educators worldwide. It also provided opportunities to re-think technical communication programs in global contexts. Addressing this situation involves effective approaches for initiating and maintaining international online collaborations. By examining this situation in classes, curriculum, and research, TC educators, administrators, and researchers can make important contributions to education worldwide. They can also become a central part of what might be the greatest paradigm shift in global education.

References

- Amrane-Cooper, Linda. (2020, August 12). The new normal of online learning in a post COVID-19 world. *University of London*. <https://london.ac.uk/news-opinion/london-connection/q-and-a/online-learning-post-covid-19>
- Buhayar, Noah. (2020, December 21). The work-from-home boom is here to stay. Get ready for pay cuts. *Bloomberg Businessweek*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2020-12-17/work-from-home-tech-companies-cut-pay-of-workers-moving-out-of-big-cities>
- Burbidge, Ian. (2017, January 23). Why diverse opinions lead to better outcomes. *Rhetoric Society of America Blog*. <https://www.thersa.org/blog/2017/01/why-diverse-opinions-lead-to-better-outcomes>
- Chavez-Dreyfuss, Gertrude. (2020, October 23). The number of permanent remote workers is set to double in 2021. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/permanent-remote-workers-pandemic-coronavirus-covid-19-work-home/>
- Chen, Natalie. (2020, July 1). The COVID-19 pandemic's impact on educational inequality. *Oppia*. <https://medium.com/oppia-org/the-covid-19-pandemics-impact-on-educational-inequality-60a6c1fc91e9>
- Cleary, Yvonne; Rice, Rich; Zemliansky, Pavel; & St.Amant, Kirk. (2019). Perspectives on teaching writing online in global contexts: Ideas, insights, and projections. *Research in Online Literacy Education Journal*, 2(1). <http://www.roleolor.org/perspectives-on-teaching-writing-online.html>
- Detrick, Ronna. (2021). Here's why different perspectives lead to the best ideas. *Fierce*. <https://fierceinc.com/blog/different-perspectives-lead-to-the-best-ideas-here-s-why/>
- Gnecchi, Marusca; Maylath, Bruce; Mousten, Birthe; Scarpa, Federica; & Vandepitte, Sonia. (2008). Professional communication and translation in convergence. *IEEE International Professional Communication Conference*, 2008, 1-15. doi: 10.1109/IPCC.2008.4610220
- Global competence: Necessary skills for a connected world. (2017, October 24). *University of Wisconsin-Madison Parents and Family Program*. <https://parent.wisc.edu/news/global-competence-necessary-skills-for-a-connected-world/>
- Harrison, Dianne F. (2017, November/December). The role of higher education in the changing world of work. *Educause Review*, 8-9.
- Holtzwarth, Aline. (2021, February 16). Remote work is (mostly) here to stay. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/aline-holtzwarth/2021/02/16/remote-work-is-mostly-here-to-stay/?sh=25f2d7064b5c>
- Humbley, John; Maylath, Bruce; Mousten, Birthe; Vandepitte, Sonia; & Veisblat, Lucy. (2005). Learning localization through trans-Atlantic collaboration. IPCC 2005: Proceedings. *International Professional Communication Conference*, 578-595. doi: 10.1109/IPCC.2005.1494227
- Li, Cathy & Lalani, Farah. (2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has changed education forever. This is how. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/>
- Marchant, Natalie. (2021, June 1). 5 research-backed reasons working from home will stick. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/06/working-from-home-covid-nber/>
- Mousten, Birthe; Maylath, Bruce; Vandepitte, Sonia; & Humbley, John. (2010). Learning localization through trans-Atlantic collaboration: Bridging the gap. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 53(4), 401-411. doi: 10.1109/TPC.2010.2077481
- Reynolds, Alison & Lewis, David. (2017, March 30). Teams solve problems faster when they're more cognitively diverse. *Harvard Business Review*. <https://hbr.org/2017/03/teams-solve-problems-faster-when-theyre-more-cognitively-diverse>
- St.Amant, Kirk. (2020). Distributed localized instruction: Using Skype to (re)create on-site learning experiences in international online education. *Research in Online Literacy Education*, 3(1). <http://www.roleolor.org/distributed-localized-instruction-using-skype-to-recreate-on-site-learning-experiences-in-international-online-education.html>
- St.Amant, Kirk. (2018). Contextualizing cyber compositions for cultures: A usability-based approach to composing online for international audiences. *Computers and Composition*, 49, 82-93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compcom.2018.05.007>
- St.Amant, Kirk. (2017). Of friction points and infrastructures: Re-thinking the dynamics of offering online education in technical communication in global contexts. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 26(3), 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2017.1339522>
- Singh, Sat; Qureshi, Imran; & Perera, Ayeshea. (2020, 23 July). India coronavirus: Online classes expose extent of digital divide. *BBC*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-53471749>
- Soares, Sergei; Bonnet, Florence; & Berg, Janine. (2021, 25 April). Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic: Updating global estimates using household survey data. *VoxEU*. <https://voxeu.org/>

article/working-home-during-covid-19-pandemic-updated-estimates

- Tam, Gloria & El-Azar, Diana. (2020). 3 ways the coronavirus pandemic could reshape education. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/03/3-ways-coronavirus-is-reshaping-education-and-what-changes-might-be-here-to-stay>
- Thompson, Georgina. (2020). Unequal access to remote schooling amid COVID-19 threatens to deepen global learning crisis. *UNICEF*. <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unequal-access-remote-schooling-amid-covid-19-threatens-deepen-global-learning>
- Thornberg, Molly. (2021, May 20). TCLoc alumni are guest speakers in usability and ux design course. *Master of TCLoc Program Blog – University of Strasbourg*. <https://mastertcloc.unistra.fr/2021/05/20/tcloc-alumni-are-guest-speakers-in-usability-and-user-experience-design-course/>
- Vandepitte, Sonia; Maylath, Bruce; Mousten, Birthe; Minacori, Patricia; & Scarpa, Federica. (2010). Interactivities between professional translators and professional communicators: What translators would like communicators to know. 2010 *IEEE International Professional Communication Conference*, 8-59, doi: 10.1109/IPCC.2010.5529814
- Verzella, Massimo; Arnó Macià, Elisabet; & Maylath, Bruce. (2021). Engineers taking a stance on technical communication: Peer review of oral presentations via the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 64(1), 66-83. doi: 10.1109/TPC.2021.3057246

Author Information

Kirk St.Amant is a professor and Eunice C. Williamson Chair of Technical Communication at Louisiana Tech University (USA). He is also and is also an Adjunct Professor of Health and Medical Communication with the University of Limerick (Ireland) and a Research Fellow in User Experience Design with the University of Strasbourg (France).

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank the Eunice C. Williamson Endowment in Technical Communication for its support in producing this entry.
