

'Not Who You Are, but What You Do': Collaborativity beyond Language and Culture

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Abstract: In recent years, the internationalization of Japanese higher education has led to the implementation of several types of English-medium instruction courses, which are often part of a broad, liberal arts or general education curriculum (Brown 2014). Combined with the top-down push for more students to complete long or, more frequently, short-term study abroad programs (for example, the 300,000 foreign students by 2020 MEXT campaign), Japanese universities have witnessed an increase in the number of programs that target the understanding of a “foreign” language or culture by visiting another country or by participating in summer/spring intensive workshops held in English, and which are also attended by short-term international students who come to Japan for that purpose. This paper presents a preliminary analysis of a short-term collaborative learning program which aims at promoting the reflexive understanding of an academic topic using Japan as a local context. This Global Study Program (GSP) has been organized by Chiba University since August 2013, with university partners from several countries (Vietnam, Finland, Greece, Malaysia and Germany) and is usually attended by approximately 15 students from each side. In the process of ensuring the academic quality of GSPs, despite, or rather because of the participation of students from several cultural, disciplinary and linguistic backgrounds, it was essential to build a course that fosters collaborativity and goes beyond mere language or cultural understanding; in other words, a course that adds a third dimension to the 4Cs framework of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Bentley 2010), and that offers specialized knowledge combined with cultural empathy and linguistic competency.

Keywords: collaborativity, study abroad, CLIL

Issues of short-term study abroad programs

The terms ‘global citizen,’ ‘global human resources’ and ‘global’ or even ‘super/top global university’ have recently become buzzwords in Japanese higher education. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT)’s project for the promotion of global human resource development, which several universities, including the authors’ institution, took part in from 2012 onwards, aimed ‘to overcome the Japanese younger generation’s “inward

tendency" and to foster human resources who can positively meet the challenges and succeed in the global field, as the basis for improving Japan's global competitiveness and enhancing the ties between nations.¹ However, a first issue that was pointed out early on by researchers in education concerned the fact that these internationalization policies tend to reinforce rather than loosen national boundaries. For example, in an analysis of the meaning of this expression 'inward tendency,' Yonezawa argues that it refers to the issue that 'high requirements in language ability, in addition to critical thinking and intercultural understanding capacities, cannot be fully met by the Japanese education system today' (Yonezawa 2014, 46). Whereas, in relation to the emphasis on 'Japanese younger generation' and on 'improving Japan,' Poole notices that '[t]he training of more globalized workers is almost always with reference to workers born and raised in Japan and educated in Japanese schools (...) [which means] that at a local level, administrative practices and institutional structures reinforce national boundaries, and in doing so remind university actors (students, administrative and academic staff) that their social identity is, or should be, a national identity' (Poole 2016, 210-211).

The second issue with the recent internationalization policies is one that is not limited to recent reforms, but one which, we argue, has tainted curricula for a long time: this progressive, step-by-step notion of education. This idea, for example in the case of the global universities, that a student would progressively become 'global,' in other words that global qualities are to be acquired in carefully planned subsequent steps, as if the skills and human qualities required by MEXT could be offered bit by bit, like language competencies, lays, we believe, far from reality. This is especially the case for study abroad programs, as we are going to note later in this paper. Of course, we are not the first to criticize what we propose to call here an "evolutionary" type of curricula. This has been indeed a rather old concern for educators of our information era, a period that requires an ever more enhanced critical and multi-perspective of the world.

'The postmodern world simultaneously demands and delivers increased "metaknowledge" - often in ways that elude us (...) Yet our curricula are becoming overwhelmed by practices of diagnosis, intervention, and remediation grounded (...) in old and outmoded forms of basic skills (...) The post-modern philosophical concepts of antifoundationalism and post-epistemological standpoint invoke logics and sensibilities that privilege active pursuit of *ways of looking at the world* rather than absorbing *predefined content and skills* [italics added] grounded in extant worldviews' (Alba, González-Gaudiano, Lankshear, Peters 2000, 9).

But in Japan, this has not been the case so far, because what internationalization in Japanese higher education often means is studying abroad and learning English. Indeed, looking at the number of students from Japanese universities who have studied abroad in recent years, there are more and more who do so, but especially who do so in short term programsⁱⁱ. Also, in terms of destinations, in 2014 for example, 40,282 of them chose to study in either of the following four countries: United States, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom. However, these countries remain expensive destinations particularly for a rapidly increasing number of short-term programs. Thus, non-native English speaking countries in Southeast Asia and Europe have attracted new programs that rely on the supposedly novel idea of learning English in, and of experiencing a different, non-English culture.

Our university offers, for example, several such programs in Southeast Asia for students who have never been abroad or who say that they feel unsure of their English language abilities. Considering that students at Japanese universities rarely express conviction in their foreign language abilities (e.g. Sasajima 2011), this type of courses has become very popular. They usually comprise two or three hours of conversational English classes in the morning, and guided tourist visits or cultural activities in the afternoon. Participants from Japan do local sightseeing and have also one or two chances to interact with local university students through basic intercultural communication sessions in which they are asked to present about topics they believe to be representative of their country of origin. In our experience, this type of programs presents at least three major issues. The first is the separation of language from content (e.g. Byrnes 2002), which emphasizes language learning in the classroom, despite the limited amount of time that students spend abroad, and at the expense of the experiential learning to which their environment would in reality be best suited. Secondly, such brief sessions of intercultural communication end up reinforcing cultural stereotypes (e.g. Kurylo 2013) rather than breaking them. Indeed, often rushed to the task and with no sufficient pre-course education, students mainly rely on tourist guidebooks and Internet websites to find material for presentations that ultimately seldom show culture as the presenters live it in daily life. Thirdly, and in connection to the other two issues, most of these programs lack academic content or perspectives. They are in effect elaborate sightseeing tours disguised under the format of study abroad courses (e.g. Caton and Santos 2009).

To counter those issues as early as possible in our own efforts to organize and run short term study abroad programs, we established at least three principles. Firstly, we would not have any English language requirements, but will base our evaluation criteria on the ability of participants to use any possible means to convey their thoughts to the other party. Secondly, we would not focus on language learning or sightseeing, but on proposal-based learning, namely the goal of the programs

would be a group presentation aiming to suggest improvements to a current situation regarding a pre-set topic. Finally, to ensure the academic quality of the course, we would consider and treat the program as any other module offered by our university's liberal arts and general education curricula.

Alternative approaches

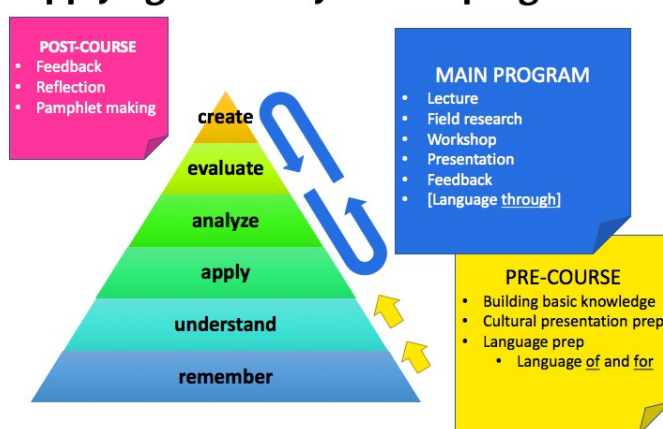
Many educational programs are knowingly or unknowingly built based on some type of children's learning theories. The previously mentioned evolutionary curricula that are prevalent in today's schools are based on Piaget's stage model (1920s-50s), which has been significantly criticized in the research field of education (e.g. Weiten 1992). It assumes that children learn step-by-step and proceed to higher stages when they are ready for more difficult tasks. Whereas Bruner suggested 'a spiral curriculum,' which is based on the idea that learning happens at any time of the child's development: 'any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development' (Bruner 1960, 33). What is interesting is that these theories have been discussed for decades, and yet, we still struggle with the same exact issues today. Instead of the step-by-step education or pre-defined skills, we believe that it is the 'ways of looking at the world' that should become the central focus of short-term study abroad programs. For example, classes certainly need more field research and more workshops, more active learning as widely claimed, but these need to be complementing each other in order to triangulate information and knowledge offered to students, and in order to allow them to return to older ideas so that they can collaborate on improving them.

These issues have recently resurfaced with the relative popularity of Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In CLIL, various foundational theories, such as Piaget's or Bruner's, which are mentioned above, or 'scaffolding' (Wood, Bruner and Ross 1976) and 'zone of proximal development' (Vygotsky 1978) are incorporated into methodologies that draw attention to the issues discussed briefly in the first part of this paper. We have personally been trying to tackle these same issues since 2013, when we took the helm of the Global Study Program (GSP), a short term collaborative learning abroad program held in several countries and in cooperation with our partner universities abroad. The GSP generally lasts for two weeks, during which approximately fifteen of our students join fifteen students from our partner university, and conduct field research on a specific topic that changes every year. The location (Japan or the country where our partner university is located) also changes every year. The programs include preparatory sessions which correspond to the same number of credits (two credits) as the study abroad course itself, and several post-arrival sessions. In many ways, GSP uses CLIL pedagogies such as translanguaging (Coyle, Hood and Marsh 2010, 16) and 'language through learning'

(ibid., 38) in order to become ‘catalyst for “living” intercultural experiences which are fundamental to deeper understanding of global citizenship’ (ibid., 39). However, contrary to CLIL’s interchangeable use of ‘language’ and ‘communication’ (ibid., 42), one of the major objectives of GSP is to separate language ability from communication ability. To do that we tweaked Bloom’s taxonomy (1956), which is a foundational learning theory in teaching and learning, and which is used as a central framework in CLIL. In GSP, to maximize students learning experience, in the pre-course, main program and post-course education, we integrated the components illustrated in this taxonomy in a circular/spiral way (see figure 1).

Indeed, it is often said that remembering and understanding are low order

Applying to a study abroad program



<Figure 1. Taxonomy in Global Study Program>

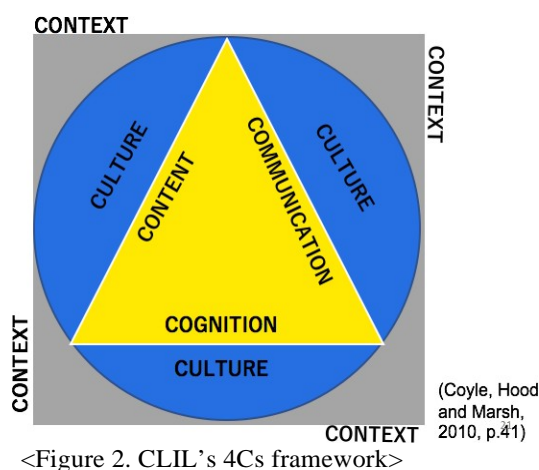
thinking skills; however, this process becomes very important in collaborative learning programs whose participants possess diverse linguistic, cultural and academic backgrounds. Building shared knowledge and a logical framework are crucial in order to create a dialogic space to collaborate. By being exposed to academic vocabularies in a topical field which students may not be familiar with, participants can gain a basis to

communicate their ideas with others. In terms of high order thinking skills, students repeat the cycle of ‘apply, analyze, evaluate and create’ through lectures, field research, and workshops in the main program. By doing so, students reflexively deepen and expand their understanding of the lower order thinking skills.

Case study of a GSP with Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece)

In this paper, the case of a GSP held with Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) in 2016 is examined. The topic was *archaeological sites and their impact on local development*. Seventeen students of Chiba University (CU) and sixteen AUTH students participated in the program. Six academic hours were spent for pre-course education and two to three hours for post-course education, in addition to the main program, in which two weeks were spent in Greece, in August 2016. In this program, we used the extended case method (Burawoy 1998) to have students consider the challenges of breaking down the walls that often separate archaeological sites from their local communities. Four types of questionnaires were made during the preparatory sessions for the four types of stakeholders (visitors, local residents, site

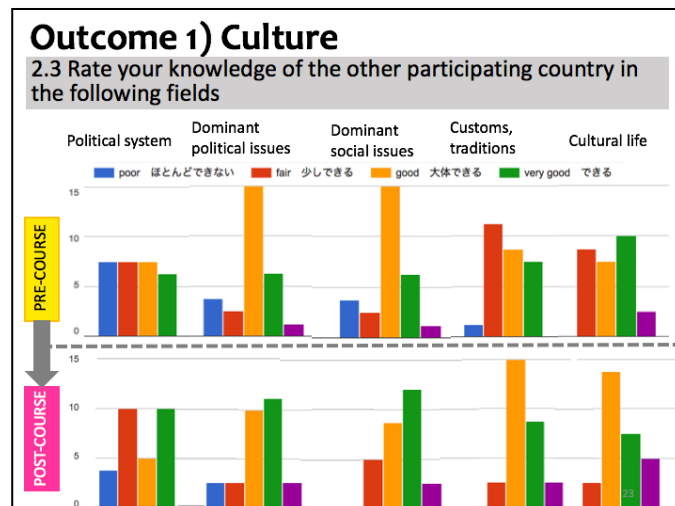
employees, souvenir shop owners) that we were going to meet on location, and at least several approaches to public archaeology were considered through academic readings and case-studies from Japan. Then, the first field site was used to situate the topic within the wider social, economic, political and historical fields that structure the processes related to this year's topic: the impact of archaeological sites on local development. Next, field sites two and three were compared to the first in an integrative approach, namely we causally connected them to the first site and considered how have the extralocal and intralocal forces that impacted on the situation in the first site influenced the second and third sites. And finally, students were tasked with considering complementary layers of proposals for improving the situation in the three sites, without losing sight of the entire ecological context and the possibilities offered by other contexts such as that of Japan.



As described above, while a major focus of CLIL is language learning, the method has the advantage of placing learning components in their context, a structure that CLIL's practitioners have called the 4Cs framework (see figure 2). Every study abroad program should probably deal to a certain extent with each of these components, regardless of its ultimate focus. The reason for this is, of course, the importance of context. No study abroad program can ignore the specific

characteristics of its location, and how these may influence content, cognition, communication and the culture of the participants. In the rest of the paper, we aim to analyse data collected through questionnaires completed by GSP participants before and after taking part in the program, in order to find out how the learning outcomes compare to CLIL's 4Cs framework. However, our objective is not to just verify or confirm the legitimacy of CLIL. Our final aim is to actually offer an alternative/enhanced version of CLIL -- a version that takes into account something that, we believe, has been missing from CLIL's framework, despite its emphasis on active learning: collaboration, which is 'a philosophy of interaction and personal lifestyle where individuals are responsible for their actions, including learning and respect the abilities and contributions of their peers' (Panitz 1999, 3).

4 Cs Framework: Culture



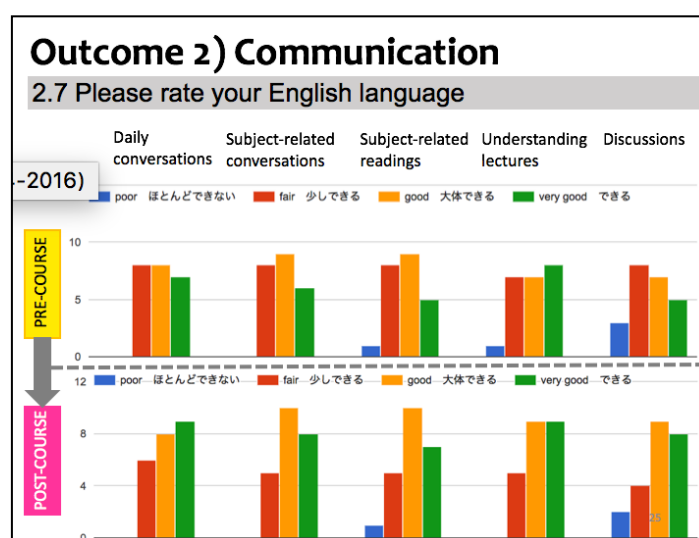
<Figure 3. Culture before and after participation in GSP>

Figure 3 shows answers to a question asked before and after the main program regarding the participants' cultural understanding. The question asked respondents to 'Rate your knowledge of the other participating country in the following fields.' Most students answered that they did not know much about the counterpart's culture before, but increased their understanding afterwards – as an international collaborative learning program, this outcome is no surprise. But consider how collaborativity worked towards the acquisition of such cultural empathy. This is something that can only be achieved when students meet and work with students from another culture, on the same level; neither as tourists nor as guests. Indeed, question 3.5 in the post-course questionnaire asked, 'Were the expectations you had of the other culture met? Why or why not? Did your image of the other culture change over the course of the program?' (note: students' answers in *italics* are translations from Japanese to English by the authors)

- *Honestly, my image of Greece before departure was that of a dangerous place. However, when I actually got to live there, I realized that there was an "everyday life" to Greece too, and that life did not seem especially dangerous. On the contrary, I felt that Greeks spend each day with joy, as if they glorified life itself. I was ashamed for having been duped by the media's stereotypical portrayal of the country, but it was also a chance for me to experience at first hand the necessity to be more media literate in the future.* (Chiba U student, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 1st year)
- Initially I did not have any specific expectations, maybe I would have thought that the relationship between the two cultures would stay the same way it appeared to be on the first day. For the first couple of days it appeared to be that way, but as time went by the Japanese students started expressing themselves more and more and we started working more organically as a team. (AUn student, Faculty of Engineering, 3rd year)

As both students' answers indicate, interacting with each other helped them understand each other beyond their initial stereotypical images toward the other culture. The first student even reflected that he would need more media literacy so he would not be haunted by media's stereotypical portrayal.

4 Cs Framework: Communication



<Figure 4. Communication before and after participation in GSP >

Similarly, students' rating of their English language increased after the main program, which is, again, not a surprise considering that this is an international study abroad program. However, communication for students who are asked to collaborate is not limited to merely language. It first means the learning of expressing one's ideas in every way possible. Moreover, communication is not a one-way activity, but a mutual one. Below are some of the students' answers to the question '3.2 What kind of skills did you learn or built upon during this program?'

- I can get communication skills, not only using English, but also gesture, drawing, writing, showing. And I can get the feeling, not be afraid [sic] to say opposite opinion. (Chiba U student, Faculty of Horticulture, 2nd year)
- *The ability to understand nuances in language use. The ability to communicate and somehow get one's opinion through*. (Chiba U student, Faculty of Education, 2nd year)
- I learned how to work in a team when people have various ideas and deal with situations that are not always comfortable, as conflicts between members of the team. I built up my ability to work in English and express my ideas in this language and surely I learnt to listen to others' opinions and ideas in order to get the best out of it! (AUn student, Faculty of

As described above, many students observed that they learned to use various communication mediums including not only vocal but visual tools by realizing that what is important is to have an idea and conveying it to others. Moreover, the importance of 'listening to others' was also listed as an equally significant component of successful communication. Again, many students realized that communication has to be a mutual process.

4 Cs Framework: Content

Content is often understood after it is instructed or experienced. In this sense, students (and teachers) who are used to a linear structure of curricula may find GSP disconcerting, because they need to do a lot more effort to connect the dots than in a linear, step-by-step curricular progression. This is why time for repetition and reflection is important, especially during post-arrival sessions. The comments below show students' evaluation of the pre-course education after completing the main program: '3.6. *How useful were the pre-course sessions? What kind of pre-education education would you have liked to receive?*'

- It was useful when we discussed to deepen and make convincing proposal because I had learned a real relationship between archeology and local people, and that different perspectives toward archeological site depend on different stakeholders. (Chiba U. student, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 1st year)
- *They [pre-course education sessions] were useful to understand the specialized topics of the program. I felt that the readings and workshops were more useful than the lectures. The difficult political relations between the Republic of Macedonia and Greece became the subject of discussion several times during these pre-education sessions, so I had originally thought that it is something significantly related to the main program. However, I did not have the chance to actually realize why this was important. I still wonder what this had been about.* (Chiba U student, Faculty of Engineering, 2nd year)
- *I thought that changing teams for each task, such as for making the readings' summaries, was a very good idea. It allowed me to know the other students better and to realize that even among Chiba University students, opinions and approaches to solving tasks differed, which was interesting. During the pre-course sessions, I did not know most of the information given. I sometimes could not even distinguish between location names and people's names. But as I progressed through this situation of confusion, I slowly got used to the terms used and they all started fitting together like a puzzle.* (Chiba U student, Faculty of Engineering, 2nd year)

Given students' diverging readiness to acquire the required specialized knowledge and English proficiency in order to understand readings and lectures, their depth and width of understanding as well as ability to find a logical link between various given information consequently differed. Yet, as the above students' answers show, what did not make much sense in the beginning of the pre-course education started to make more sense as they layered their learning experiences in a spiral manner, like finding the right way to put the puzzle pieces together.

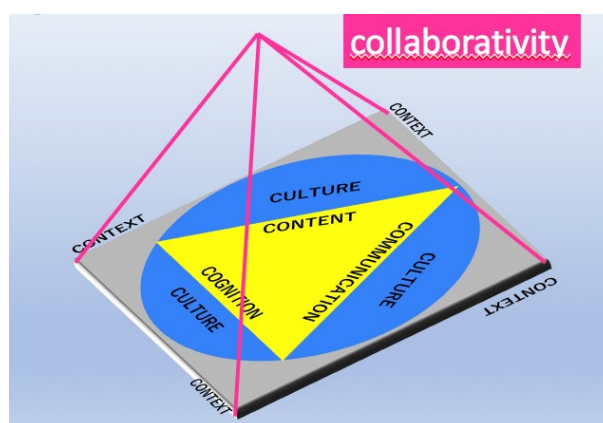
4 Cs Framework: Cognition

Cognition happens interactively. This is where the presence of other students who find themselves in the same position with the same tasks is important. Below are answers to the post-course question '3.7. *How did you react when you were challenged by students holding a different point of view during the course of this program?*'

- *I made sure to clearly convey my opinion and understand the other's opinion. And if we disagreed, I tried to suggest a solution that would satisfy both sides. I also asked for the opinion of other members.* (Chiba U student, Faculty of Education, 2nd year)
- *At first, I just made sure to listen to everything that was said and to share my opinion after that. I shared even opinions that, in Japan, I would have just held back. So I enjoyed communicating with students whose viewpoints were different from mine.* (Chiba U student, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 1st year)
- *I tried to understand their point of view and compare it with mine to see if it is more suitable to the current problem. So, of course, I let them explain it until I was sure that I get what they mean. But if even then I still believed that mine was better I'd try to persuade them and show why I believe that. Most of the times their different points helped improve mine so it was very constructive.* (AUn student, Faculty of Sciences, 4th year)

The students' answers above, which are also linked to the communication factor, illustrate that they co-constructed their ideas by carefully building their discussion on top of that of other members. In that process, most students observed that their ideas espoused those of the group's and became stronger and more concrete.

Collaborativity onto the 4 Cs Framework



<Figure 5. 4Cs + Collaborativity>

From the above, it hopefully becomes clear that collaborativity supports in a sense the changes occurring within each of the 4Cs framework components, as if it was a third dimension in CLIL's original illustration (see figure 5). As described, for example in the answers to the post-course question '3.8 Now that the program has ended, what is your image of collaborative learning?', student reactions show that by the end of the program it was not anymore about being a Japanese or a Greek student.

- *I had originally thought that collaborative learning was about competing with others over who holds the best argument, but in this program I felt that making compromises is also part of collaborative learning. Of course, it is necessary to strike opinions with others, but simply debating ends up just being a loss of time. I think that the main objective of collaborative learning is about finding ways to compromise and reach the best possible conclusion for both parties involved. (Chiba U student, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, 1st year)*
- *'The images of a three-legged race up the stairs, or of playing Super Mario Bros in cooperative stage clear mode come to mind.'* This was my response to this questionnaire when I took part in GSP last year. Today, I think that probably the second image is more appropriate. Mario, Luigi and the princess all have unique abilities, but also weak points. Combining each other's abilities to support each other is only possible as a team, and the courage to recognize that you cannot do something and have to trust someone else to do it is also extremely important. Ultimately, what I understood best was that thinking that every participant coming from different backgrounds should contribute equally to the task is an ideal image of collaboration that is limited perhaps to a few cases. What is important is to rather split roles according to each member's specialization.

and put all efforts into playing one's own role in order to build up an original proposal. (Chiba U. student, Faculty of Engineering, 2nd year)

These students' answers illustrate how they went beyond the boundaries of language and culture that they had imagined in the beginning and embodied an idea of collaboration by acting responsibly in learning and respecting the abilities and contributions of their group members (Panitz 1999).

Discussion and Conclusion

GSP aims to provide students with a new type of study abroad experience through content learning from multiangular perspectives in a spiral manner by using a collaborative learning approach. In GSP, we focus on creating dialogic space, which is 'the space of possibilities that opens up when two or more incommensurate perspectives are held together in the creative tension of a dialogue' (Wegerif & Yang 2011, 1). Students' comments, regardless of the CLIL factor investigated, show an increased concern for the need to acquire different viewpoints, critical literacy and a multiangular perspective on the content of the course through interaction with the course material, the local stakeholders and, most importantly, their peers. In this way, each individual's distinct spiral interacts with other spirals, and allows for expansion and linking of ideas beyond their own space bubble. Each component of GSP is a medium for the others, and complements each other. The discovery and awareness of different cultural modes of expression were undoubtedly linked to alternative understandings of communication, which seemed to also inform the felt need to cross-check the opinions of the various stakeholders involved in this project. And this of course impacted on cognition as well, since students were then compelled to form their opinions after a thorough understanding of their and others' positionality. Hence, we argued in the end that what glues every CLIL component together and works as tool to enhance these components is collaborativity. In this sense, collaborativity is on a different dimension of the 4Cs, something like the atmosphere that allows the CLIL framework "breathe." Indeed, during a second reading of the students' comments one cannot miss, through for example the use of the personal pronoun 'we', the constant feeling of being part of a collaborative project, even in their answers regarding content-related questions. After the end of the program, they all may not have interpreted collaborative work in the same way, some for example emphasizing role division over compromise, but they all seemed to have gone beyond their ideas about language and culture, and to have espoused the benefits of collaborative learning. Indeed, many GSP students often realize that it is not about who they are, but about what they do.

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ⁱⁱ http://www.mext.go.jp/a_menu/koutou/ryugaku/1345878.htm [accessed 7 March 2017]