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Can Diversity be Intersectional? Inclusive Business Planning and Accessible Web Design Internationally on Two Continents and Three Campuses

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Abstract

This paper describes a three-way, international pedagogical collaboration among three instructors—one from Hungary and two from Michigan and Washington in the United States —aimed at cultivating curricular diversity and inclusion. During this one-semester project, Michigan students from a Business Communication class collaboratively created a website based on an entrepreneurial business plan developed by students in a Business English class in Hungary. Both Michigan and Hungary students received advice from graduate students from a disability and accessibility course in Washington on how to make businesses inclusive of disabled customers and design accessible websites. This workplace simulation project primarily employed emails to engage in this collaboration and interact among students due to the location of the classes in three time zones and in two countries with major linguistic variations. Early results show that the collaborative project was successful in teaching intercultural communication skills and in increasing awareness of disability and accessibility.

Introduction

This paper presents the preliminary results of an international pedagogical collaboration among three instructors—one from Hungary and two from Michigan and Washington in the United States with a focus on diversity and inclusion. It shares the diversity gains resulting from a larger, cross-border study conceptualized for designing an inclusive and intercultural business and technical communication pedagogy of disability and access. It bucks the trend of building the diversity case while excluding disability. By intersecting disability diversity with the diversity of race, culture, and language in an international, intercultural collaboration among three university faculty and their students, it adopts an integrative approach to teaching diversity. In addition, by employing easy to access technology for interaction among participants for this collaboration, it tries to erode the customary digital divide confronted by disabled users (Wood, 2015). Further, by placing disability at the intersection of race, culture, and language diversity, it asks us to open our horizons wider when defining inclusion and teaching inclusive design and communication.

During this one semester project, undergraduates from a Business Communication class in Michigan collaborated on creating a website based on a business plan developed by undergraduates in a Business English class in Hungary. Both Michigan and Hungary students also received advice from graduate

students from a disability and accessibility course in Washington on how to make the planned entrepreneurial businesses inclusive of disabled customers and how to design accessible websites that would also cater to people with disabilities. This simulation project employed emails, design and proposal documents as attachments, wire frames for website mockups, and drafted web pages to engage in this collaboration due to the location of the three classes in three different time zones and in two different countries with major linguistic variations. The Hungarian class included students from neighboring countries and who spoke other European languages as well. The active portion of the project spanned several weeks. The collaboration schedule embedded in the paper shows the patterns of activity among the three groups. Our observations and early results from research show that the collaborative project was successful in teaching intercultural communication skills while increasing awareness of disability and accessibility issues; thus, it was successful in fostering diversity and inclusion.

The Scope of This Paper

While the larger project among the three instructors—one from Hungary and two from Michigan and Washington in the United States has a broader focus, this paper presents our preliminary results on diversity and inclusion. Although we describe our intercultural and international collaboration in some detail here, our primary goal is to provide readers with an account of the "diversity gains"—a term we have fashioned after the Deaf Studies term, "deaf gains"—emerging out of our international study pertaining to business planning, web design, and Disability Studies (Bauman & Murray, 2013). While we never imagined this study as a "diversity project" in the sense "diversity" has been used in the United States and the United Kingdom, the imbrication of Disability Studies research and accessibility theory in our project design and classroom pedagogy certainly steered our cumulative thinking about the collaborative business and technical communication work in the direction of diversity. Our analyses of how this collaboration unfolded among ourselves—the three instructors—and our three classes point to the presence of the central concepts of diversity theory—deficit theory versus asset theory, difference as a strength rather than a blemish, sense of belonging as a basic human need, and homogeneity as a lack of awareness of the outside world leading to exclusionary thought about places, projects, and people (Candlin & Crichton, 2011; Strayhorn, 2012). The detailed descriptions of the project activity reflect how these concepts were implicated in this collaboration and our study's qualitative data—which is scattered throughout this paper due to its descriptive nature--should be of interest to scholar teachers seeking new directions for their curricular design and pedagogy to engage their students in disability diversity actively.

An Overview of Disability and Accessibility-Related Business and Technical Communication Literature

Growing research about accessibility, web design, and human-centered design drew the attention of scholars of business and technical communication (Carter & Markel, 2001; Slatin & Rush, 2002; Wilson, 2002; O'Hara, 2004; Kane, 2007; Bowie, 2009) in the last decade. This awareness for addressing questions of inclusion, disability, and access in communication design has resulted in further research in this decade (Butler, 2017; Meloncon, 2013; Oswal, 2014; Tucker, 2017; Youngblood, 2013; Zdenek, 2015) that questions and critiques attitudes toward disability and promotes inclusive disability and accessibility considerations. A small number of online technical and professional communication teaching studies have also been published which deal with the accessibility of delivery, but their focus has been mostly on instruction in the United States (Oswal, 2015; Oswal & Hewett, 2013; Oswal & Meloncon, 2014 and 2017). Until recently, discussions of disability and accessible design remained categorically absent in business communication literature except for a single article on the use of discriminatory language in business communication (Tyler, 1990). (For a detailed account of the

absences of disability and accessibility issues in the ABC journals, see Knight, 2018). With the publication of the landmark special issue of Business and Professional Communication Quarterly, Enabling Workplaces, Classrooms, and Pedagogies: Bringing Disability Theory and Accessibility to Business and Professional Communication, in March 2018, scholars in our field have begun to engage in Disability Studies theory and the questions of access for disabled users (Clegg, 2018; Hitt, 2018; Konrad, 2018; Nielsen, 2018; Oswal, 2018a; Wheeler, 2018).

While these recent scholarly projects have succeeded in increasing awareness of disability and access issues in the classroom and workplace on a local level, still there is a dearth of empirical research about pedagogical projects that move beyond calls for social justice, support both accessibility and agency for disabled users, and engage these issues intersectionally in the intercultural, internationally engaged, global space. Increasing globalization of economies and resulting emphasis on global education in the academy further accentuates the current gap in empirical research that addresses the intercultural and cross-border pedagogy of access that is inclusive of disabled users, students, faculty, and practitioners. In sum, the overall place of accessible design both in pedagogy and practice remains on the margins in the business and technical communication fields and requires even more attention toward empirical research on the connections between accessible design and intercultural and crossborder classrooms.

Literature in the Area of Diversity in Business and Technical Communication

Research literature in business, professional, and technical communication has considered questions of diversity and inclusion in recent decades although most of the scholarship has been concentrated in the areas of race, ethnicity, and gender diversity (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008; Fine, 1996; Grimes, 2002; Haas, 2010; Jameson, 2007; Limaye, 1994; Perriton, 2004; Williams & Pimentel, 2016), high and low context approaches to culture and language in website contents and design (Usunier & Roulin, 2010), and nationality at the intersections of race and ethnicity (Wells, Gill, & McDonald, 2015). Workplace management and human resources literature has explored race and gender diversity widely with some attention to disability (Ball, Monaco, Schmeling, Schartz, & Blanck, 2005; Baumgartner, Bohm, & Dwertmann, 2014; Foster, 2007; Theodorakopoulos & Budhwar, 2015).

Likewise, researchers in rhetoric, business and technical communication fields have discussed the relevance of diversity although publications on disability diversity remain few and far between (Clary-Lemon, 2009; Jones, Moore, & Walton, 2016). Few intersectional publications are available currently that cross race, culture, and disability categories. Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1998) focus on understanding cultural differences in global business. Connections have been made between entrepreneurship and diversity by scholars in allied business and management fields (Bhide, 2008; Calvert, 2009 and 2011; Coyle, Clement, & Garton-Krueger, 2007; Jackson, 2009; Volkman, 2004). In addition, scholars in business and technical communication, as well as in business management fields have critiqued the misuse of diversity concepts by organizations pursuing the popularity of the diversity movement resulting from the landmark publication of *Workforce 2000* (Johnston & Packer, 1987). For example, Kirby and Harter (2003) question the use of diversity as a metaphor for giving focus to organizations and their leaders by placing diverse employees in marginal rhetorical spaces. Similarly, Cheney and Carroll (1997) criticize the use of "persons" as "objects" in organizational discourse.

Designing Inclusive and Accessible Entrepreneurial Ventures: A Project Description

The idea of setting up an international collaborative project comes from an increasingly significant line of research on global collaboration that is aided by the Internet and its affordances—email, chat, online

teleconferencing, and telephone—for the purpose of teaching intercultural communicative competences (Anderson et.al., 2010; Davison et al., 2017; Palmer, 2013). In step with this research, we, however, were also interested in doing disability and accessibility in these intercultural and intersectional settings to address the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. To the best of our knowledge, no such study presently exists that combines international, intercultural pedagogy goals with web design, Disability Studies, and workplace and web accessibility. In order to gain some in-depth understanding of best practices when teaching intercultural communication skills and accessibility framework to students in such a complicated international setting, we designed a pedagogical research project based on the interactions among three cohorts of students enrolled in three different courses at three universities, two in the United States and one in Hungary.

This multi-purpose project implements the overall goals of disability-centered accessible design pedagogy—which is rooted in the concepts of diversity and inclusion--for these three geographically separated groups through a highly synchronized and carefully orchestrated collaboration among the students and their instructors. Eight groups of students from the Hungarian Business English classroom drew business plans for eight entrepreneurial projects while learning about disability and the preferences of disabled users. Another eight groups of students from the second class in Michigan designed accessible websites for the proposed eight businesses by their Hungarian counterparts. In addition, eight graduate student groups from the third class in Washington both learned and taught the basics of disability theory and inclusive business model to the respective partnering undergraduate teams in Hungary and the fundamental principles of accessible design to the partner undergraduate groups designing websites for the Hungarian teams in Michigan. This last cohort had two teams of two students each and the remaining eight graduate students worked solo with their peer groups in Hungary and Michigan. This disparity relates to the different class sizes on the three locations; however, the smallest Washington group had students with significant workplace experience and obviously were ahead of their undergraduate peers academically.

Table 1 on the following pages shows the flow of activities and interactions among the three groups. Since the study designed used a stacked model of interactions, the groups were more active at certain times than others. The Michigan web designer groups had to wait for the Hungarian groups to draft their business plans and prepare specifications for their websites before they could start their work. Of course, the Michigan groups were themselves learning to design websites in this time-frame. Likewise, the Washington groups had a late start, partly because their fall term was staggered, and partly because they were also acquiring the knowhow about disability theory and accessible design during the first few weeks of their quarter. This table displays activities of all the three classes even though the Hungarian instructor is not attending this conference and could not participate in the co-authoring of this paper.

Table 1

Timeline for Collaboration Project (Due dates refer to tasks completed by the end of the day in each time zone)

Due Date	Students in Hungary	Students in Michigan	Students in Washington
9/28 **Phase 1**	Hungarian students send short business plan description that identifies target business sector to the Michigan and Washington instructors.		
ASAP after 9/28 **Phase 2**		Michigan instructor assigns web design student groups in her own class to partner with a specific business plan student group in Hungary. The Michigan instructor sends group assignments (a Hungarian group paired with a Michigan group) to the Washington and Hungarian instructors.	After the Washington instructor receives group assignments from the Michigan instructor; he assigns specific accessibility and disability students/groups in his own class to partner with two groups (one in Hungary and the other in Michigan) already paired up by the Michigan instructor.
10/13 **Phase 3**	Hungarian student groups fill out pre-project shared survey designed by instructors. Hungarian students sign Informed Consent.	Michigan students send introductory email to their assigned group of Hungarian students and ask questions about specific requests regarding website. Michigan students fill out pre-project shared survey designed by instructors. Michigan students sign Informed Consent.	The Washington students fill out pre-project shared survey designed by instructors. The Washington students sign Informed Consent.
10/19			The Washington student groups send introductory email and questionnaire to respective Hungarian partner groups.

Due date	Students in Hungary	Students in Michigan	Students in Washington
10/26	Hungarian students answer Washington students' questionnaire AND Michigan students' introductory email + questions. Hungarian students send detailed description of their business to Michigan students (includes text that will be placed on the website).		
11/2			The Washington student groups send introductory email and questionnaire to respective Michigan partner groups. The Washington student groups send individualized introductions to disability theory and a summary of accessibility guidelines to Michigan partner groups about major issues that need to be considered when designing accessible websites.
11/3 **Phase 4**		Michigan student groups send Website Preparation Proposal to the Hungarian student groups. Michigan students respond to the Washington students' questions.	
11/9	Hungarian student groups accept Website Preparation Proposal from Michigan student groups		

Due date	Students in Hungary	Students in Michigan	Students in Washington
11/10 **Phase 5**		Michigan student groups send first drafts of website layout to Hungarian partner groups for feedback on content and layout	
		Michigan student groups send first draft of website layout to Washington students for feedback on accessibility issues	
11/16	Hungarian student groups send comments about first draft of website to Michigan student groups by answering a set of questions (Michigan instructor sends questions to the Hungarian instructor)		The Washington students send feedback on the first draft of website to their Michigan partner groups suggesting ways to improve its accessibility
11/17		Michigan student groups send email reply to Washington students	
11/22			The Washington students send individually prepared advisories to the Hungarian partners on disability issues relevant to their specific businesses
11/26	The Hungarian student groups send reply to Washington students explaining how they will use their advice in business plans (CC: all instructors and Michigan partner groups), and inform Michigan students about any changes relating to the website content relating disability issues		

Due date	Students in Hungary	Students in Michigan	Students in Washington
12/1		Michigan student groups send final draft of Website to partner groups in Hungary and Washington.	
12/8 **Phase 6**	All student groups send closing emails that thank partners for participation in the project	All student groups send closing emails that thank partners for participation in the project	All student groups send closing emails that thank partners for participation in the project
	All students fill out project evaluation survey designed by instructors	All students fill out project evaluation survey designed by instructors	All students fill out project evaluation survey designed by instructors

As we can see in Table 1, the collaboration project described in this paper spans about 2 months with most of the work taking place within a six-week timeframe. The above timeline had to accommodate not only the different semester/term structure of each institution (Hungary: 14-week semester starting in September, Michigan: 14-week semester starting in August, Washington: 10-week term starting at the end of September), but had to also consider the three different time zones and weekly class meeting times at all three locations. The collaboration project and the activities in preparation for the project at the three different institutions can be broken down into the following six phases.

Phase 1: Business Plan Creation by the Hungarian students

The collaboration project centered on businesses that were proposed and described in detail by the Hungarian students. Consequently, the first class starting work towards the project goals were the Hungarian students who were assigned to create a profile description for a business. In this phase, Hungarian students were placed by their instructor into eight teams while ensuring varied levels of English proficiency within each team. Then, these teams identified a product or service that they believed would be marketable to Hungarian or even global customers and started to work on creating a business plan for a viable business that sells this specific product or provides the specified services. As the main goal for Hungarian Business English class was to become familiar and successfully apply the vocabulary used in business contexts, writing profile descriptions and then creating formal business plans around these descriptions was an ideal task for improving their foreign language competence in this specialized area. During this phase of the collaboration project, the graduate students in the Disability and Accessibility Theory class in Washington learned about accessible design and disability theory, and students in the Business Communication class in Michigan focused their studies on learning about intercultural communication.

Phase 2: Project Group Organization

The second phase of the project was still largely focused on organizing and did not include much student involvement. During this phase, students in Michigan were placed into 8 teams of 2-3 students by their instructor (to correspond with the 8 student teams in Hungary) to allow for contributions by students with varying expertise. While a large proportion of the Michigan Business Communication students were

computer science or information technology majors, about one third of the students had majors within humanities or business. Teams were formed to ensure that at least one member of each team has a technology background. Then, the Hungarian and Michigan student teams were paired up and each of these pairs were assigned one or two accessibility experts from the graduate class in Washington. At the end of this process, there were eight numbered groups each of these groups consisting of a Hungarian student team with a business plan (4-5 students), a Michigan student team ready to create a website for this business (2-3 students), and one or two Washington students acting as accessibility experts for both the business plans and the website within the same group.

Phase 3: Team Introductions

Once all students signed the informed consent form and filled out the pre-project survey for research purposes, each of the teams at all three institutions was asked to send collaboratively-composed, introductory emails to their respective project partner group. These emails mostly focused on each team's members' background and personal and academic interests. The aim of this phase was to create personal connections between the teams and establish rapport so that they have a better understanding of everyone that is working towards the same goal: creating an accessible business and website. The emails contained a general description of the teams, as well as, included personal paragraphs about each of the team members. Several of the emails also contained pictures of the team or team members. For this phase, deadlines were assigned not only when the emails had to be sent but also for a reply date.

Phase 4: Proposal Process

This stage of work centered on each of the Michigan student teams creating a website proposal for their respective partner team in Hungary. By the time this stage began, the Michigan students had learned about persuasive writing in general and the genre of proposals. They had also looked at several sample website proposals prepared by professionals in industry. In addition, students had also been introduced to the concept of accessible design not only through classroom activities, but also through an email previously received from their assigned Washington student accessibility experts. In addition, the Michigan students had explored websites for similar businesses to those proposed by their Hungarian partner teams. During the proposal writing phase, the Michigan students took all these aspects into account and prepared a four to six-page proposal for their Hungarian partner team's business plan. These proposals then were sent to the Hungarian groups via email. Upon receipt of the proposals, the Hungarian students accepted them via a reply email in which they also included any additional questions they had about the proposed websites and specified special features or content they hoped to include in the website in addition to those already described in the proposal.

Phase 5: Website Preparation

This was the most intense phase in terms of student activity in the overall collaboration. The Michigan students started working on the websites and sent their wireframes and links to early versions of the sites to their respective Hungarian partner groups always asking for feedback. The feedback sought from the Hungarian student teams focused on questions about the structure, functionalities, wording, and aesthetic appeal of the website. At the same time, the Michigan student teams also received feedback from their Washington website accessibility experts that included general comments about how to make these sites more accessible and directed Michigan student teams to using free accessibility testing tools such as WAVE (WebAIM, n.d.) in order to establish which features of their websites did not comply

with accessibility standards. At this stage, collaboration was also ongoing between the Hungarian student groups and the Washington students to ensure that the business plan being developed by the Hungarian student teams included considerations for potential customers with disabilities. At the end of Phase 5, the link to the finalized website was sent by the Michigan student groups to both of their partner groups in Hungary and Washington and to all instructors.

Phase 6: Concluding the Project

During the last week of the collaboration project students at all three institutions sent emails to their partner teams thanking them for participating in the project. In addition, at each institution students finished the project work by presenting their final product to the whole class. Students in Hungary presented their business plans that included accessibility features and showcased screen shots of the final website prepared for their proposed business. Students in Michigan created a final class presentation that went into detail about the website creation process in collaboration with their partner teams. This presentation also illustrated the accessible features of their websites and discussed what each team learned about website accessibility during this project. Students in Washington concluded the project with an overall project review where each of them provided their instructor feedback about their collaboration experience and made suggestions for fine tuning the next iteration of the collaboration among the instructors and their future classes. These graduate students had already received feedback from their instructor on the disability and accessibility documents and other email communications they had prepared for their peers in Hungary and Michigan. Participants at all three institutions also took part in the post-project survey as the last activity wrapping up this business planning, web design, and accessibility project.

Pursuing Diversity through an Interdisciplinary Agenda

In this section, we present the diversity-related preliminary results of our teaching and learning collaboration while we complete our analysis of the quantitative and qualitative student survey data. We share these insights tentatively and with the understanding that the survey analysis might reveal unexpected data that we don't see in the qualitative data analyzed here so far. The observations and insights stated below are primarily based on the instructor notes from class discussions and the email messages exchanged by all student groups from the three campuses.

Awareness of Diversity in the Hungarian Course

The three courses participating in this teaching and learning collaboration come from three different origins: the Hungarian course is framed in the European curricular culture of Business English where English is taught and practiced as a language catering to the countries of the European Union and of the wider Europe, as well as, due to the demand for Business English from multinational corporations (Bereczky, 2009; Mészárosné Kóris, 2011; Noble, 2002; Teemant, Varga, & Heltai, 1993). Business English teaching in Hungary seems to be rooted in English language competency and applied linguistics; however, the course also engages students contextually by having them learn business genres, such as developing a business plan, for a much broader customer base by targeting an international audience. Students in this class, thus, straddle three boundaries—the local Hungarian situation, the world of European Business English, and the demands of the wider international cliental both communicationally and materially. In terms of academic and professional knowledge-base, the business plan project occupies spaces in three disciplinary homes—the learning of business English itself in the language acquisition field, gathering the genre knowledge of developing business plans by drawing from the

discipline of management, and the knowledge about the wider cultural world beyond Hungary and Europe from the field of International Studies.

Thus, the concept of diversity in this Hungarian context does not necessarily dwell upon race and gender issues; however, as the discussions of diversity elsewhere in this paper indicate, these issues are also not absent from the context. For example, the Hungarians might have come from the east one thousand years ago and are of Asian origins, they generally see themselves as central Europeans. Due to the significance of European Union trade, they might feel closer to the Western European cultures than the cultures east of themselves in Asia. The Hungarian class also included a population of students who either came from other countries as a part of study-abroad programs, or are Hungarian minorities living in neighboring countries and attending this university. As in the case of the other two classes, the interlinking of courses for this teaching collaboration further enhanced the interdisciplinary scope of the curriculum by the introduction of disability and accessibility from the graduate students in the Washington disability theory course. Because of this design feature of the course collaboration, all Hungarian groups had to integrate this disability diversity aspect into their entrepreneurial projects to reach the disabled customer-base. Also, they had to come up with business designs that would take these customers' needs into consideration by making them accessible both in product/service offered and in their usability. This round of our three-way collaboration did not specifically touch on the use of biased language per se; thus, missing an opportunity to infuse this race and culture diversity element in the use of Business English, as well as, in the overall culture of the business world. In our future collaborations, we might contemplate an addition of this nature to further strengthen the diversity aspects of all the three courses that would fetch students' attention to the intrinsic risks in certain language choices, the culturally-learned biases that are invisible to our own minds, and how they become a part of our flawed thinking about people who look, behave, or do things different from us.

Presence of Diversity in the Michigan Groups

Similarly, the Michigan business and professional communication course, which is located in a writing studies program and attracts students from across campus, draws on more disciplines than one. Due to its location in a writing studies program of the kind that have cropped up in the United States during the last four decades, it is rooted in the recent history of teaching writing within the frame of Greco-Roman rhetorical tradition and it tries to meet the diverse academic and professional requirements of the student constituency. Students in these classes can come from the sprawling fields of the humanities and the social sciences on one end to the natural sciences, computer science, and engineering on the other. For this varied constituency, instructor genre choices are affected by the students' fields of studies. As a related development, the business, professional, and technical communication courses in writing studies field on most campuses have extended their purview beyond the lone teaching of business and technical writing. Many such programs cover areas as diverse as HTML language learning, web design and project management on one end of the spectrum and to patient communication and transportation service design on the other (Anderson, et al., 2009; St. Amant, 2017). Hence, the Michigan business and professional communication course was also diverse in its content and had a significant piece of its curriculum invested in a web design project—a project which was the anchor and the interacting content for the three-way collaboration for this campus setting.

The course's participation in the collaboration pushed its boundaries to include the business planning elements of an entrepreneurial project and its contiguous website dependencies to establish its presence in the market, as well as, to sell itself beyond the local. While these business promotion issues were among the key responsibilities of the Hungarian groups, they also got transferred on the shoulders

of the Michigan web design teams once they became business partners in the provider-client relationship for designing websites for the Hungarian entrepreneurs. It also became the responsibility of the students in Michigan to design websites for their clients that would attract customers and compose content for these pages that would sell the products and services of their clients successfully and inclusively to all. The Michigan teams by their very location in the United States and the varied local cultures of each team's members added to the diversity of perspectives in the design and content of these websites even when they were building these sites to the specifications of their Hungarian business partners. With the Washington graduate students inserting their agenda of accessible design, the Michigan website designers and content developers also had to pay attention to another set of specifications spelled out in the accessibility guidelines documents received from their Washington advisors and had to integrate disability thinking in their overall project learning. While our current collaboration design did not specifically measure the influence of the introduction to disability field on the students and did not parse out the effect of accessibility guidelines on the Hungarian groups' business plans and the Michigan groups' website designs, signs of more general awareness is scattered among group to group communications, particularly the emails from the Hungarian and Michigan groups positively responding to the messages about disability and accessibility from the Washington students.

Discussion of Diversity among the Washington Cohort

In the same vein, the Washington graduate course was intrinsically rooted in an interdisciplinary space because of this master's program's very location in a school of interdisciplinary arts and sciences. The school is even more interdisciplinary than its name suggests since it also houses programs and courses that span over from human-centered design and engineering to biomedicine. While its business and technical communication courses and major is placed under a writing studies degree along with creative writing and rhetoric, the curriculum of its technical communication track mirrors the human-centered design engineering major's curriculum on another location of the same university. To make this interdisciplinarity more complex, the interdisciplinary master's program of this school permits graduate research on any topic of students' choice if they can find academic support for their work from a faculty in any of the schools of the university. While the university offers no degrees in Disability Studies on any of its locations, the instructor for the graduate course participating in this collaboration nevertheless teaches this disability theory course with a focus on accessibility because the graduate student population finds all theory courses attractive and many have intersectional interests in Disability Studies field. Additionally, this instructor's primary workload is in the area of human-centered design with a bulk of the courses on UX (User Experience) and cross-cultural design. This added interdisciplinarity was reflected in the curricular design of the disability and accessibility project participating in this three-way collaboration.

The graduate students from Washington prepared and shared accessibility guidelines for the Hungarian business plans and the Michigan websites. In addition, they also offered their input and advice on disability in general through a detailed introduction to their current course of studies with this instructor, offered a precis of disability theory's basic tenets, and some of them also talked about what Disability Studies field itself is to their Hungarian and Michigan peers. While their accessibility guidelines documents were clearly derived from the genre traditions of user-centered design, their detailed introduction emails to these peers exhibited a mixture of social sciences discourse, a general disciplinary space where Disability Studies programs often locate themselves, and the diversity of these graduate students' own research discourse depending on where their master's thesis focus was. These differing research interests of the graduate students and the interdisciplinary nature of this disability theory

course, thus, pushed both Hungarian and Michigan students' thinking in several directions, had them ponder over the place of disability in human societies, and pressed on them the significance of inclusive design of businesses and websites both with legal and market arguments.

In our written assignments, we couched diversity issues in the disciplinary language of the field so that students do not view diversity as something tacked on or an optional element of the project. For example, the Michigan class was designing websites for their Hungarian clients' entrepreneurial businesses; therefore, the assignment for the website project read: "During the intercultural project you will be able to apply your knowledge of business communication principles to communicating with people from other cultures and to creating digital interfaces that will serve your international communication partners' purpose and will be accessible by potential audiences." Likewise, the Washington students were told that "In this project, you will both learn and teach about disability from a Disability Studies Perspective with two groups of students, one based in Michigan and another in Hungary. It's an intercultural project where we're also paying attention to our cultural differences about disability." During this graduate course, the Washington students eventually realized that the Hungarians were of Asian origin, and culturally, they may not perceive themselves as the type of Europeans we might stereotype when talking about the residents of Western Europe.

The assignment had stressed to students the significance of the "local" in outlining their learning goals for this assignment: "Of course, you also want to learn about their local/national culture and how they perceive disability and accessibility over there." Thus, our communication with the students focused on the points of "difference" overtly but actively questioned students' assumptions whenever their class conversation about their Hungarian peers tended to represent the cultural or ability-based differences as deficits. In the Washington class, this kind of academic interrogation happened between instructor and student, as well as, between student and student. For instance, the Washington group had some students who expected everyone in college to have English language literacy skills if they were to survive in this era of globalization. A very quiet student listened out their classmates at some length and then interjected a question of their own: "Do we all speak English in this country and what do we know about the languages spoken over there?" This discussion, on one hand situated the question of English literacy in the local context of Hungary, and on the other hand, brought the English language privilege position to the fore. The student helped their peers realize that human diversity lives on in spite and despite of the corporate globalization of media and manufacturing in our times and that the culturally crude claims of the type of "the World is flat" require some serious questioning (Friedman, 2006).

In terms of diversity gains, the graduate students' class discussions suggested that they learned, whether with conscious recognition or not, that the Hungarian business culture had its own identity as they referred to the Hungarian groups' emails, and that Hungarian students, in fact, were doing quite well as their business plans reflected both an awareness of the local customer-base, as well as, of the international audiences of their websites to expand their market. They also learned from one another within the graduate class that their linguistic attitudes had a tinge of imperial instinct. This became evident when some of them expected Hungarian college students to have more than basic English language skills and when their classmates retorted that an average native English language speaker in the United States had little to no knowledge of a second language besides some of the Asian and Hispanic population whose children might learn their parents' native language at home.

Assessment, Diversity, and the Courses on the Three Locations

Assessment scholars have made important diversity connections between writing assessment and language assessment research to question the validity of writing assessment instruments drawn for monolingual students and their imposition on culturally and linguistically diverse students who, in fact, bring more complex literacies to the writing table. However, they are not only culturally misunderstood or ignored but also penalized for possessing richer linguistics cultural heritages. These questions of cultural validity in assessment have not just been limited to writing studies fields, such as, business and technical communication, but also have been raised in other contexts, the sciences for example (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001). Socio-cultural influences that shape student thinking cannot be pried apart from the business, design, and communication contexts. The ways in which science students make sense of specific assessment items are influenced by their individual readings; thus, complicating assessment for those instructors as well (Solano-Flores & Nelson-Barber, 2001.

Speaking broadly of Writing Studies programs, Poe (2014) states that "diversity in writing assessment research means paying attention to the consequences of writing assessment for all students' learning and writing." (271). Poe also stresses that "Assessment should be transformative, and it should transform us—as researchers, teachers, and administrators—as much as it transforms our students' learning and writing" (271). The means to accomplishing this goal include a multidisciplinary, multicultural, and multilingual perspective that brings together communication and writing fields, educational measurement, and language assessment within a programmatic, research framework (Poe, 2014, p. 271). The interdisciplinary design of our collaboration meets many of Poe's criteria even though we as individual instructors, or collaboratively, did not devise a separate standard for assessment for this project for this initial effort. We evaluated each of the projects in line with other business communication projects our students completed in these courses. Of course, we had a separate rubric for our evaluation of these collaboration-based projects as we did for all the others. (At this end of this contextual discussion about assessment in international collaborations, we present the assessment measures we used for this iteration of the project.)

Further, the stacked design of the collaboration among these three classes tries to mitigate the effects of monolingualism by putting these student groups in client-provider relationships and removing the strobe light from linguistic accuracy to entrepreneurial business and web design skills, intercultural competencies, and international market knowledge acquisition. In another iteration of our collaboration if we focus on the assessment aspect, we might question cultural validity in such a complex diversity contexts since assessing Business English competencies of Hungarian students to those of the Michigan or Washington students with the same rubric based on the same standards might involve comparing apples with oranges because these groups work with business and language learning from three entirely different contexts and diversity in each case begins and ends at a different learning point. Taking this line of argument might challenge us to ask harder questions about our overall assessment designs for such a project especially as the kind of global literacy skills promoted by the collaboration project not only necessitates a more pluralistic view of culture, but also challenges the norms underlying assumptions about course objectives, deliverables, and about the adequacy of assessment methods based on Standard American English (Starke-Meyerring, 2010). Furthermore, assessment standards and practices need to be aligned with the theoretical framework guiding our pedagogy of teaching global literacies also as it relates to linguistic standards and language use in online collaboration projects. However, the few attempts to discuss the linguistic standards that could serve as the basis for assessment in professional writing courses that involve online classroom collaboration so far have

mostly focused on second language learners and provided practical tips on how to accommodate them (St. Amant, 2007; Melton, 2008).

Interim Assessment Outcomes of this Collaboration Phase

Since assessment in intercultural collaboration projects has been the topic of several articles and presentations in our field (Craig et al., 2010; Palmer, 2011) and has been described as a complex undertaking due to different programmatic goals and languages, we set the assessment bar relatively low for this round of collaboration (Starke-Meyerring, 2010). In order to evaluate the effectiveness of our three-way intercultural collaboration project, however, we have incorporated a formal and an informal approach to assessment. As a formal way to assess the project, we asked the students at all three institutions to fill out a pre- and post-project survey. We have also analyzed their email communication to see how students used their peers' feedback to improve their website's content, layout, and design and how they would change their business plan based on the feedback. The pre-project survey focused on gaging students' previous knowledge about the topics covered in the course to establish a threshold level and to get a sense of their attitudes about intercultural communication and disability/website accessibility. The survey questions about disability and accessibility in a way introduced the topic to the students because we did not expect any of the student groups to possess an academic or professional understanding in this area. The post-project survey was a modified version of the pre-project survey aimed at measuring the changes in knowledge level and attitudes. While the data analysis from the surveys is currently in progress, preliminary results suggest that students perceived an increase in their knowledge about the topics covered by the project. Students also reported a positive change in their attitudes about intercultural communication and disability/website accessibility. The analysis of the textual data from the students' emails is expected to provide a good measure of where they stand on all or some of these issues and whether they make some intersectional connections among business planning, web design, and accessibility.

In addition to the formal assessment through surveys, we also used teachers' reflection notes based on students' deliverables. Both the Hungarian and Michigan instructors required their students to prepare a final presentation addressing not only the final product (business plan / website), but also the work process. Based on these presentations, both instructors noted that students in general did appreciate the interaction with the other groups and saw value not only in the information they received from each other but also in communicating with people from other institutions and countries. From these presentations, the Hungarian and the Michigan instructors learned that the main problem cited by the students during the project was the time and schedule difference between the classes and the lack of synchronous communication. The Washington instructor held a reflection session with his students to assess the impact of the collaborative project. This instructor's notes from this reflection session suggest that the students did not always translate their knowledge of disability theory across cultures and academic levels as intersectionally as he would have expected. What he found was that in general they articulated their knowledge of disability theory well, but it was more of a response to the teacher than to the peers. Students also walked gingerly over the technical ground of accessible design because they did not see themselves as experts in this area even though all of students were in an interdisciplinary program. Once we have completed the quantitative and qualitative analyses of our surveys, student textual data, and instructor notes, we plan to triangulate all these results to make sense of the project's overall impact in relation to our initial project goals. We hope to report these results later this year.

At the end of this phase of this IRB-approved online collaboration project across the Atlantic, we are still exploring the results from our pre-project and post-project surveys completed by our students. Our

overall goal for the whole project was to create a shared understanding as to what extent and how this project has reshaped our students' existing notions about intercultural communication, disability, and technology that allows access to all (Blanchard, 2010; Meiselwitz, 2010). This paper has achieved its form and content from the analyses of the sizeable qualitative data from course assignments, the documents developed by our students in response to these teacherly assignments, and the textual data from the student generated three-way email traffic to provide feedback to other groups. These sources helped us describe the above outcomes of this international, pedagogical collaboration in disability, cultures, and accessible design with a thick description of the landscape of collaboration on the student end while modeling the process of such analysis for those faculty just entering the field of intercultural, international collaboration in design and communication pedagogy. We conclude with the implications of our study for the broader field to encourage other business and technical communication colleagues to build similar collaborations as our study's insights, learning benefits for our students, and the challenges and the joys of meeting those challenges collaboratively point toward a more sophisticated intercultural, crossborder pedagogy of communication. We explain how other researchers and instructors can design studies that aim at enhancing inclusive pedagogy of disability and access in intercultural settings.

Implications of our Research

As we reflect on this project, somewhere deep down in our reasoning for this three-way collaboration we sense our unspoken desire for more diversity, social justice, and an inclusive curriculum in our teaching which in the first place led us to reconceptualize the ecologies of these three courses by framing them within the context of disability and accessibility. To state the point more straightforwardly, we want to strengthen these diversity aspects of our collaboration in the next phase. When reflecting on broader disciplinary questions—and in the case of our practice also the organizational and market questions--business and technical communication scholars tend to frame these questions in the context of business, industry, nonprofit, governmental, and related organizational discourse. Our project reframes and broadens this discourse to include diversity of cultures, languages, and abilities.

With intercultural and international collaboration, disability and accessibility, and business planning and web design included in this diversity package, program directors looking for practical solutions for curricular innovation and faculty engagement can glean ideas by forging program-wide, international collaborations. Our teaching and the peer-to-peer student collaborations here are not only practical and down-to-earth, they also have a robust curricular agenda and diverse content for business communication instruction. Our reliance on low-tech collaboration platform—the simple email exchanges among students and students and instructors and instructors—avoid the glamorous high-tech trap and permits all participants to contribute equally and equitably. In addition, as suggested by research (Cardon & Marshall, 2015), email is still the most commonly used communication method in most businesses worldwide. The three respective projects undertaken by our three classes in no way undermine the complexity of our business and technical communication curriculum and, in fact, they expand the dimensions of the spaces in which these planning, design, and communication activities are orchestrated by the various actors involved. Our students don't only learn how to plan entrepreneurial business ventures and build websites for them, but they also acquire the rare knowledge about disability and inclusion. Confronting these generally excluded concepts from their other university curricula expands students' mental horizon about the workplace, the users of their mental and physical labor, and their overall understanding of the world they inhabit. The business and technical communication projects of each of the three classes, when paired with the intercultural, international disability and

accessibility agenda, complicate the mundane discussions about planning and designing among student groups into socially-aware conversations about the real, and often conflicting, needs of diverse users.

While the intercultural aspects of the projects draw students' attention, particularly the students in the United States, toward the privileged linguistic space they occupy internationally by the virtue of English being the predominant lingua-franca of this era, the knowledge that many Hungarians also speak another foreign language, German, might ask them to readjust their perception of this English language privilege. One of the graduate students—whose native language was Spanish--in a class discussion in Washington pointed out that reading emails from Hungarian students placed them on an equal footing with these international peers which they did not experience with their own classmates here in the United States. By airing these views, the student not only underscored the unexpected complexities of collaborations in international spaces but also disclosed the day-to-day realities of her linguistic marginalization in the United States. Likewise, some of the graduate students—all graduate students contributed to this project as instructors and advisors for their peers in Hungary and Michigan on disability and accessibility matters--originally stereotyped their counterparts in Hungary as unaware of disability. They based this assumption on the Hungarian students' introductory emails that were very modest about their knowledge of disabled users. However, when one of these graduate students shared a Hungarian business plan draft which included a reasonable discussion of disability, this graduate class had to reconsider the complexity of the situation, nuance their own understanding of a whole country on the basis of a small number of email messages and written documents, and their knowledge of how the Hungarians as a people might view disability.

While this international collaboration across three university campuses operated in real world environment and our students interacted, co-worked, and co-produced real business, technology, and human communication products, the purposes of the projects themselves—preparing business plans, designing websites, and serving as disability and accessibility instructors and consultants—were simulations of the workplace activities (Drury-Grogan & Russ, 2013; Wheeler, 2018). The purposes of these activities for our students were at this point in their lives limited to learning skills, applying them to the assigned, simulated tasks, and of course, earning grades. In all these activities, students were learning to see the value of diversity—whether it was the linguistic diversity among the various groups, or it was in the consideration of disability in planning and designing businesses and the related websites.

We agree that real world experiences cannot be exactly duplicated or imitated in the classroom (Bourelle, 2012, p. 184); however, workplace simulation projects in business and professional communication can have great pedagogical benefits that cannot be generated through traditional assignments (Ismail & Sabapathy, 2016). For this reason, we believe that the students in our three classes acquired additional design, communication, and diversity skills by embracing one another's project ideas, specific needs, and the diverse geographical and cultural viewpoints. The distributed location of this collaboration itself forced students to ask different questions which they would not have asked otherwise. Each student group's engagement in two other groups' projects also gave them a chance to think about of the professional and academic tasks involved in other ways in such courses, and thus, grew their consciousness of the value of such class projects. Reflecting on other groups' projects also provided them with an opportunity to think of the worlds beyond their own and resulted in class moments where they brought in questions of difference unrelated to their lives that would not have arisen in other business and technical communication courses of this type. The individual student projects also benefited from this semi-simulated learning situation where the projects-related tasks were the result of their instructors' creativity and careful planning but the challenges and outcomes of formulating business plans, designing websites, and offering accessibility consultations were the

products of their real mental and physical labor. Inattention to the client's specifications and poor quality of work could cost the group their business partner's good will and satisfaction, let alone the quality of the grades earned. Moreover, students learned to work with their distant partners in a safe environment assisted by their instructors' guidance. The differing disciplinary locations of the three instructors and the interdisciplinary nature of the three projects also exposed students to three different pedagogies. Verba and Perrault describe such collaborations as interdisciplinary exchanges which form "a larger movement within design practice and education that extends beyond project-specific thinking, connecting design to other fields and domains of knowledge" (Verba & Perrault, 2016, p. 279). While Verba & Perrault do not connect other knowledge domains specifically to the knowledge or understanding of diversity, in our teaching experience, the linguistic differences and the attention to disability definitely asked students to connect the functional knowledge domains of their projects to the social ones.

Our project also has implications for diversity in the context of faculty collaborations for inclusive pedagogy. For example, while we were working on our conference paper this spring, one of us was also looking into the possibility of applying for the faculty support program of the National Center for Faculty Development & Diversity, known as FSP Bootcamp. While the business literature of this program explained in so many ways how this program can help tenure track and tenured faculty in achieving success in their academic careers, none of the program descriptions focused on how diverse faculty can collaborate among themselves to pursue research, teaching, or other professional goals. None of their programs focused how diverse faculty—who are rarely given the same leadership opportunities in graduate schools that their privileged cohorts receive and who also seldom have meaningful mentoring experiences even if they are assigned a mentor at all—can develop collaborative research and teaching initiatives in the area of diversity and inclusion and serve their institutions purposefully while filling an empty niche. We hope that we are not belaboring this point when we emphasize that the majority faculty, despite their privileged position in the academy—sorely lack theoretical backgrounds and pedagogical skills in the areas of diversity and inclusion. Growing scholarship on the experiences of diverse students reflects that these faculty often exclude their minority students when choosing their curriculum, are poorly equipped pedagogically in meeting the needs of these students, and, knowingly and unknowingly, introduce serious disparities in evaluating these students' work (Haswell & Haswell, 1996; Poe, 2014).

We believe that the faculty programs offering diversity training or mentorship must center-stage collaboration among diverse faculty. This focus on collaboration would also support diverse faculty in taking leadership roles in research and teaching initiatives that would prepare them for occupying leadership positions in the academy. As they fill leadership positions, they can begin to serve the minority students at par with their more privileged peers and become instrumental in retraining the majority faculty so that we could address the present exclusions and inequities in our delivery of higher education to all the students. With the significant growth of online courses, the international dimension of diversity also has attained a new meaning in higher education and we need to reach not only our diverse students in the United States but also elsewhere in the world. The scholarship on the issues of diversity and collaboration draws attention to another important point; that is, we seldom talk about questions of diversity and inclusion within our business, professional, and technical communication research teams. Even the general workplace collaboration research also remains narrowly focused on cultural diversity in organizations although some of this research is valuable to understand intercultural issues in workplace business, professional, and technical communication team diversity (Wells, Gill, & McDonald, 2015). Pedagogical collaborations of the kind described here are a constructive space for building diversity gains both among instructors and students anywhere in the world.

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