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Learning Experiences in an International Email Exchange Project

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Learning Experiences in an International Email Exchange Project

Abstract

This study examines students' learning experience in a semester-long email exchange project as a normal class activity between U.S. and Korean social work undergraduate students in fall 2008 and fall 2009. We used a content analysis to analyze the qualitative data of the email content and of the end-of-semester surveys. The study found this email exchange helped students develop cross-cultural understanding; enhance their knowledge of social or social justice issues in both countries; learn the social work profession and its commonalities and differences in both countries; and expand their interest in other countries. This study also suggests ways to modify the project for a better learning experience in the future, based on students' end-of-semester surveys and instructors' reflections on the activities.

Keywords

International email exchange, Social work class activities

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Introduction

Advances in technology have made communicating on an international level easier and more accessible. With today's society becoming increasingly globalized, it is important for students to explore opportunities to learn about world diversity and to communicate in a global context, particularly in an educational setting. While there is some research on the effects of cross-cultural communication in education, there is little research about the effects of implementing an international communication project into undergraduate classrooms.

This study aims at examining students' learning experience in a semester-long email exchange project as a normal class activity between U.S. undergraduate students who took SOWK 487: Social Justice in a Global Perspective at the Department of Social Work, James Madison University, and Korean undergraduate students who enrolled in SW 424: Social Work at Schools at the Department of Social Welfare, Gyeong-Sang National University in Jinju, South Korea, in fall 2008 and fall 2009.

The objectives of the study are:

1. Find out how this email exchange has helped students develop cross-cultural understanding and enhance their knowledge of social or social justice issues in a global context.
2. Evaluate the students' experience of engaging in international communication and accordingly modify the project for better learning experience in the future.

Literature Review

Implementing international content into the social work curriculum is an integral part of social work education. In particular, there have been increasing numbers of international exchanges and collaborations in social work programs. Some studies have investigated what types of international social work

exchanges exist and how they are implemented among countries (Cornelius & Greif, 2005; Pettys, Pano, Cox, & Oosthuysen, 2005). Cornelius and Greif (2005) examined international collaborations in 85 US social work programs and found that 23% of the schools had at least one program of foreign collaboration. The most common form of collaboration was visits to overseas social work schools by faculty and students.

Other studies delineated advantages and gains or concerns and criticisms of international student exchange or field practicum exchange, as well as suggestions for their improvement. In their analysis of an international social work internship jointly sponsored by two universities (in the US and Thailand), Engstrom and Jones (2007) found that it expanded students' knowledge base by exposing them to different social work practices and social welfare policies and institutions; deepened cultural learning and the development of ethno-relativism; and developed students' skills and competency in dealing with diverse populations in an increasingly interconnected world. They stated that students might gain in the following five areas from international social work internship: culture and behavior; experience of being different; comparative views of social welfare; global and local responses; and different contexts and social work practice (Engstrom & Jones, 2007). Eini (2005) connected students across the globe through a number of different learning projects in Israel. She found that students learned about self-respect and respecting others as well as commitment, global collaboration, and the joy of giving (Eini, 2005). Demski (2008) also pointed out that cross-cultural, interactive learning projects for students from grades K to 12 have a more potent impact on students than just researching on a particular culture. These projects also benefited students by breaking down barriers and providing contact with other ways of thinking (Demski, 2008).

Although most studies detailed the many benefits to be gained from international exchanges in terms of cultural competency and deeper understanding of globalization and the wider world, a few raised some criticisms and dilemmas (Gray, 2005; Razack, 2002). Gray (2005) argued that international social work faced a tripartite dilemma involving issues of

indigenization, universalism, and imperialism. On the one hand, he found that indigenization worked against universalization, and thus against international cooperation; but on the other hand, he found that international cooperation fostered by universalization “can quickly become imperialistic depending on what is proposed as ‘universal’ in social work” (Gray, 2005, p231).

Razack (2002) raised similar problems. She found that western theories and practices have pervaded social work in developing countries, and that many of these developing countries were struggling to create indigenous practices and theories after being overwhelmed with western and imperialistic knowledge. International exchanges are thus suffused with the legacies of colonialism and imperialism, which is especially clear in the continuance of this unidirectional flow of academic influence from North to South. She further insisted (2002) that “hegemony” is in fact “inherent in western pedagogy, practice, education, and attempts at globalization,” and that we have an ethical responsibility to question international exchanges in this light (p255).

Studies suggest that the lack of international collaborative projects is still a significant problem in higher education (Cornelius & Greif, 2005). The social work code of ethics identifies cultural competence and knowledge of social diversity as a main ethical responsibility (NASW, 1999). The lack of international content and communication brings detrimental effects to social work education and professional practice. Ryan (1993) states the importance of connecting nations which are separated by geographical, political and cultural differences and suggests the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a means of connecting with individuals in multicultural world.

There are many advantages to using computer-mediated communication to connect students in different parts of the world. Dooly (2007) also commented that the role of computers in the learning process is becoming increasingly important in today’s educational environment. He found that the internet can be used in various different ways to facilitate classroom learning, including the use of e-mail projects, blogs, discussion boards, and much more (Dooly, 2007). Some people feel they have more freedom of expression in an online forum (Ryan, 1993).

Gianini-Gachago and Seleka (2005) focused on patterns of participation within online discussions. They outlined a number of ways in which students benefit from international communication through the internet, including: more active participation in communications; enhancement of learning; greater cognitive development; allowing students time to reflect; broader social interaction, which motivates membership and participation in a virtual community; and greater enjoyment for students. It seems that communicating through the internet is a great tool for students to learn in this globalized world.

An international email project can be an effective way to facilitate a student's learning about another culture and bridge the gap between cultures on a personal level. We found only one study which analyzes international communication via email in a class setting. Johnson (1999) evaluated an international email project between Romanian and US students and found that "email communication helps students understand personal circumstances and experiences of oppression under different political systems, thereby enabling them to bring an internationalist perspective to bear on their future work in multi-ethnic, multicultural, and immigrant communities often affected by global changes (p379)." Johnson (1999) also discussed the concept of "globalization from below": globalization from the standpoint of "ordinary people" and their interests, as opposed to the current view of globalization, which represents the interests of people with power. She held that the email partnerships succeeded in "reaching out to the 'grassroots' level of society by developing student-to-student links" (Johnson, 1999, p391).

Methodology

This study was approved by the James Madison University Institutional Review Board (JMU IRB). Since this email project is a normal class activity, all students in the class were engaged in the project during a semester. Each U.S. student enrolled in SOWK 487: Social Justice in a Global Perspective was partnered

with a Korean student enrolled in SW424: School Social Work in the email project, and they exchanged about two emails per week during the fall semester 2008 and the fall semester 2009. When students exchanged emails, they were requested to carbon copy (CC) their email content to the instructors in both countries, which allowed the professors to keep track of frequency and quality of content of the emails that students were exchanging with one another throughout the semester rather than all at once at the end of the semester. This could have influenced the students in a number of ways. It likely encouraged students to send the required number of emails per week because their professor was monitoring the frequency. However, students may have been less likely to share details that they would ordinarily share with their peers because their professor would also be reading the emails.

At the end of each semester, the instructors distributed the informed consent form to the students asking if they would allow the instructors to use their email content for the purpose of future research. Instructors decided to publish this study as a retrospective study and pursued IRB approval around the end of the 2009 semester. The study was approved by the JMU IRB in December 2009. Also, the students from both universities anonymously completed a survey that gauged what the student learned from this experience. The students who chose to participate in the study were the study sample, and their end-of-semester surveys and email exchanges comprised the data for this study.

Twelve out of 14 US students in fall 2008 and 24 out of 24 students in fall 2009 agreed to participate in the study and gave us their informed consent forms. Fourteen out of 14 Korean students in fall 2008 and 21 out of 22 Korean students in fall 2009 participated in the study. The data of this study are the end-of-semester surveys of student experience with the email exchange (between undergraduate students at James Madison University in Virginia, United States and Gyeong-Sang National University in Jinju, South Korea) as well as their email content, both in hard copies and electronic versions, which they composed during fall 2008 and fall 2009. The survey asks eight closed and open-ended questions about the students' school

year, their previous foreign experience, their satisfaction with the assignment, and the enhancement of their knowledge through the email exchange. We collected, compiled, and aggregated the data by each term.

Both the results of the surveys and the content and quality of email conversations were analyzed to determine effectiveness of the email exchange. The data analysis method for the email exchange was a content analysis dealing with qualitative data. We used the methods of successive approximation and analytic comparison, using open, axial and selective coding for this qualitative data. Answers to closed-ended survey questions were also aggregated into two categories, depending on whether the questions are Likert-scaled or multiple choices. Answers to the open-ended questions were analyzed by the same methods used to analyze the email content.

Findings

Results of the Quantitative Part of the Survey (Closed-ended Questions)

Table 1 shows the quantitative part of the end-of semester surveys (closed-ended questions in the surveys) of the 2008 and 2009 US and Korean students. The majority of students were juniors or seniors in the both universities. More than a half of the US students have been in other countries and purposes of the travel are tourism, family visit/vacation and volunteerism. However, less than a third of Korean students have been abroad. The majority of Korean and US students said that they enjoyed the conversation/discussion with email partners; the email project expanded their understanding/knowledge of the other country; and it enhanced their interest in other countries. The majority of students in both countries wanted to exchange their email once a week (see Table 1).

Table 1: Result of the End-of-Semester Survey (Close-ended Questions)

Survey items & categories		K 08 (n=14)	K 09 (n=21)	US 08 (n=12)	US 09 (n=24)
class year	sophomore				2
	junior		5	5	5
	senior	14	15	7	17
	no response		1		1
been to other countries	yes	4	6	7	15
	no	10	14	5	9
	no response		1		
reasons for being abroad	tourism	4	2	7	9
	volunteer	2	2	3	1
	family visit			3	7
	study abroad	1		3	
	mission trip		2		4
	school program		3	1	2
	lived			1	1
enjoyment of discussion	very much	6	1	6	8
	much	6	13	5	5
	somewhat	2	5	1	8
	not at all				2
	no response		2		1
favorable frequency of exchange	once every 2 weeks	2	4	1	6
	once a week	10	11	8	15
	twice a week	2	4	3	1
	other				1
	no response		2		1
expansion of knowledge of US/Korea	very much	2	4	1	4
	much	8	8	5	4
	somewhat	4	7	5	11
	not at all			1	4
	no response		2		1
enhanced interest in other countries	very much	1	1	5	7
	much	10	13	6	4
	somewhat	3	5	2	8
	not at all				4
	no response		2		1

Results of the Qualitative Part of the Survey (Open-ended Questions)

The end-of-the-semester survey also included an open-ended question asking students what they learned from the email project. For the US students, the most commonly-given answers were, in order: social issues in Korea; similarities and differences between Korean and US social work programs and profession; other countries know more about America than we know about them; the attitudes and perceptions of Koreans about America; Korean school and education; Korean culture and cultural humility; and sex trafficking, culture and crime. The US students also gave a lot of interesting comments and opinions of a more personal nature. Students found that twenty year olds can have the same interests all over the world; that social workers can gain a lot of insight from talking to people around the world; that it was interesting to hear about a country from one of its own citizens, rather than read about it in a book; and that it was easier to talk to different people from around the world than expected. Students also mentioned that they learned a lot about their partner's personal information and opinions. There were three negative responses from the 2009 students, indicating they didn't learn much due to the small number of email exchanges and to their partners' lack of interest in social issues.

For the Korean students, the most common answers given to the open-ended survey question were, in order: information about America and American culture; "friendship"; improvement of English; information about American school social work; information about international social work; American political and social opinions and social action; US election issues; information about Obama; an understanding of the American social work field in general (medical social work, school social work, etc.); American social welfare history; information about the disabled in America; differences of social work between Korea and America; and personal information about American students and their personal life.

Results of the Email Exchange Content

After a personal introduction, students discussed a variety of topics on: fields of their interest, the social work profession, the societal environment, social and policy issues including gender/sex and education, fields of social work including child welfare, school social work, welfare for the disabled, ideological and political issues, multi-cultural issues, volunteering and international social work, as well as personal topics. Because the subjects of the emails were not determined by the professors, and the course matter for both countries differed (Social Justice in a Global Perspective and School Social Work), students discussed issues that were related to their respective courses as well as topics that they were personally interested in and curious about. This allowed for students to engage in rich discussion in topics that they were learning about and discussing in class, and to discover other information about their peers such as cultural similarities and differences, current events, and personal views on various topics outside of course subject matter.

Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 show the topics and keywords of the students' email exchange content. Although student discussions were quite free-wheeling, we found that recurring broad topics emerged spontaneously in students' discussions, allowing us to arrange these discussions into common categories. Furthermore, within each discussion category, we found several keywords occurring with regular frequency.

Table 2: 2008 US Email Keywords

Category	Keywords
Introduction	- Affirming that partner's English is okay - Family - Sports - Hobbies - Dating - Birth place - Olympics
Interest field	- Juvenile corrections - International social work (adoption, AIDS work) - Foster care - Youth - Medical social work - Social work in the army - Children with disabilities - School social work - Working with communities - Mental health
Social work profession	- Low salary - Personal rewards - Prospering profession - Switching fields in social work
Societal environment	- Economic issues in US - Treatment of elderly - Poverty - TV shows - Perception of mental illness

Ideological and cultural issues	- Religion (Christianity, Judaism)
Child welfare	- Child labor & labor laws (domestic and international) - Child Welfare League of America - Head Start - Child support -DSS - Neglect, abuse, abandonment
School social work	- Qualifications - Special education - Advocacy
Gender or sex issues	- Women's rights - Unequal pay
Educational issues	- Tuition costs (JMU/other universities) - Rights of special needs students - US statistics vs. foreign countries - Gangs, drugs, overcrowding - No child left behind
Policy issues	- Health care - Taxes - Education - Welfare - Laws fighting discrimination
Political issues	- Upcoming elections - Voting
Multi-cultural issues	- Multi-cultural marriage - Gay rights - Illegal immigrants
Int'l social work issues	- Africa (guest speaker from Sierra Leone, class project on Zimbabwe, HIV/AIDS, blood diamonds) - Asia (sex trafficking) -Impact of globalization
Other	- Graduation Pledge (school project) - Homecoming - Diary of Anne Frank - Obama coming to JMU - Halloween

Table 3: 2009 US Email Keywords

Category	Keywords
Introduction	- Family - Weather - Food - Personal info (birthday, birth place) - Hobbies - Employment - Affirmation of English skills
Interest field	- Foster care - Protective services (adult and child) - Social work with animals - Special needs -Mental illness - Substance abuse - Psychology - Youth - Special education - Law - "Early intervention" - Medical - Domestic violence - International work
Social work profession	- Poorly paid - Heavily needed - Emotionally draining - Qualifications - Military social work - Description of different fields
Societal environment	- High rates of teen pregnancy in US - Youth drinking in the US - Sex offense penalties - College as a societal norm - Obesity - Poverty in the US - Mental health stigma - US history of imperialism - Children living with grandparents (US and Korea) - The economy - Crimes committed under the influence - Suicide - American view of N. Korea - Afghanistan and Iraq wars - Runaway teens - Social polarization

Ideological and cultural issues	- Thanksgiving - Christmas - Chanukah - Faith based vs. non-faith based agencies - Judaism - New Years
Child welfare	- Sexual violence against children -CPS/DSS - Children's Health Insurance Program
School social work	- Reducing bullying - Commonality of bullying in schools - Helping students with problems
Gender or sex issues	- Same-sex marriage
Educational issues	- Sex education - Lack of motivation in young people - Programs for mentally disabled in public school - School violence
Volunteering	- Requirement for graduation in JMU social work - Volunteering with elderly at Jewish Family Services
Policy issues	- Funding for special needs - Healthcare - Immigration reform - Welfare for disabled - Laws dealing with sex offenders (i.e. Megan's Law) - Abortion - Corporal punishment - Juveniles in adult court - TANF - WIC -TEFAP - Medicaid - National School Lunch Program - Foreign Policy for human trafficking and forced labor
Political issues	- Corruption in government - Benefits to democracy - Obama winning Nobel Peace Prize - Korean government
Multi-cultural issues	- Immigration - Race/racism
Int'l social work issues	- Aid between countries - Sex trafficking and prostitution in Southeast Asia - Education for girls and women - Forced labor - US foreign aid - AIDS in Africa and South America - Darfur - UN/US aid (saying what the problem is and how to fix it rather than asking) - Grassroots Soccer (AIDS education org) - Issues in Senegal
Other	- Swine flu - one-male-child families in Korea - Field placement - Travel - Dementia - Film about the US invasion of Panama - Man breaking into JMU apartments and watching girls sleep - Modernization Theory - Dependency Theory

Table 4: 2008 Korean Email Keywords

Category	Keywords
Introduction	- Chooseok (Korean traditional thanksgiving holidays, full-moon festival) - Gaechun Art Festival (National Foundation Day) - Jinju Lantern Festival - the 60 th Anniversary of our University

Interest field	- Child welfare, school social work - Medical social work, army social work - NGO, international organization (UNICEF)
Social work profession	- Job conditions, low wages, hard work, low status, values - Preference for public social work profession (stability and pay) - High Job competition
Societal environment	- Economic crisis, high unemployment rate, new poverty and working poor - Social polarization, gap between the rich and the poor - Low fertility and aging society
Ideological and cultural issues	- Confucianism - Patriarchy and family system - Lookism
Child welfare	- Adoption overseas, secret adoption, foster homes - Child problems (bullying, violence, drop out, poverty, etc.) - Child laboring
School social work	- Qualification, field practicum - Job condition (contract, birth stage)
Gender or sex issues	- Gender discrimination, women's status - Gays and lesbians, prejudice, discrimination, no legal support - HIV/AIDS, prevention, education
Educational issues	- Dysfunction of public education, public schooling system - High cost of private education, high pressure on students, high competition
Volunteering	- Volunteering in interested fields - Delivery lunch box, soup kitchen, child welfare center, etc.
Policy issues	- Change of welfare policy, economic driving policy, cuts in welfare budgets - Privatization of the health care system suggested by Lee Administration
Political issues	- Election of President Obama (health care reform) - North Korea, nuclear weapons, North Korean situation, defectors
Multi-cultural issues	- Illegal labor immigrants, international marriage of foreign born wives - Change from a mono-cultural country to a multi-cultural one
Int'l social work issues	- African countries, Asian countries, HIV/AIDS - Hunger Experience 24 Hours

Table 5: 2009 Korean Email Keywords

Category	Keywords
Introduction	- Chooseok
Interest field	- Child welfare, school social work

Social work profession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low salary, difficult job, - Social worker certification system (Social Worker Level 2 and Level 1) - School social work, irregular employment
Societal environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - H1N1, mutant virus - Low fertility society, bounty for third child birth
Ideological and cultural issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Donation, rich and poor - Dissolution of three generational families - Losing face, celebration gratuity for weddings - Internet addiction, cyber defamation, fantasy novels
Child welfare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child sexual abuse, sexual assault (Nayoung Case), light penalties - Sex crime victims, investigation process, attitude of police officers - Domestic adoption and international adoption - Children living with grandparents - Child poverty - Corporal punishment
School social work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Troubled children, parents - Services provision, liaison of service - Wang-ta, teasing, bullying, suicide, depression, school violence, runaway - Schools in poverty areas
Welfare for the disabled	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Disadvantage, alienation, prejudice - Poor services, negative wording
Educational issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special education, heavy workload and exhaustion of general teachers - School system, corporal punishment - College Entrance Exam, high competition, failure suicide, high pressure
Volunteer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - After-school program
Field practicum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Child welfare centers, school social work
Gender or sex issue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teenage pregnancy, school drop-out, prejudice, abortion, sex education - Gay rights, illegal marriage, contempt - Gender discrimination, son preference, Office of Gender Equality - Sex trafficking, sex industry - Unwanted pregnancy, illegal abortion, adoption overseas
Policy issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cut of welfare budget of governments - Move to privatization of Korean medical insurance system - American health care reform - Social welfare delivery systems

Political issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Post war era, peaceful reunification - Political climate, control of press, restriction of speech - Social movement action - Mandatory conscription, defense industry - North Korea - Korean War and help from the U.S. cf. Military imperialism in the U.S.
Multi-cultural issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Immigrants from Southeast Asia, wage exploitation - Discrimination, racial issues
Int'l social work issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food insufficiency in developing countries - North Korean food insufficiency and child hunger - Korean War and poverty, international relief, aid to other countries - African children for survival (Senegal) - African countries, HIV/AIDS

Students' email conversations usually began with a personal introduction and sharing information about social work and social welfare fields of interest. Who starts which topic was a primary determinant of how the conversations proceeded. It was generally followed by a question and then a follow-up answer. Students often brought up issues that were being discussed in class, for further exploration. At the beginning, most Korean students were not self-confident in English fluency, and started out by apologizing to their US partners for this. Only after they were assured of language proficiency by their US partners did they find the courage to continue emailing. Many Korean students preferred to introduce a Korean traditional holiday and other local festivals held in Jinju. They also appreciated that they learned about their own country's social welfare systems further, while they were searching for answers to the questions from the US partners.

A majority of Korean students told their US partners that their fields of interest were child welfare and/or school social work, as they were enrolled in the school social work class when they were engaged in the email exchange project. They explored with the US partners class topics such as child abuse, child sexual assault, school violence, bullying, adoption, and child poverty. Besides these child issues, they discussed a wide range of other social issues: gender/sex, education, policies, and political issues. Some talked about ideological issues such as the

patriarchal system and Confucianism in Korean society, and a few others chose societal news current at the time of the email exchange, such as Swine flu, the Nayoung Case (child sexual assault), health care reform (suggested by President Obama), the cutback of the Korean welfare budget (Lee Administration), and a celebrity suicide.

On the other hand, American students, who were enrolled in the international social work class, were far more interested in a variety of international social work topics such as Africa, Southeast Asia, HIV/AIDS, sex trafficking, poverty, and women's rights. The US 2008 group seemed especially interested in issues concerning politics, as the US election was going on then. The 2009 group brought up a wider range of international social work issues as well as other global policy & political issues.

Both sides, who are mainly juniors and seniors, discussed the job prospects and situation of the social work profession. Although they agreed that the profession was rewarding, growing, and filled social needs, they worried about lack of job opportunities, low wages, and heavy workloads. However, the Korean students were more concerned about their professional prospects than the Americans, especially in terms of job openings and employment security. Accordingly, a significant amount of their email contents were allocated to these issues. This probably reflects that the job market for the social work has been tighter in Korea than in America, due to how the recent economic crisis has played out in Korea.

Discussion

The international email exchange project was overall worthwhile and successful in achieving the learning objectives of helping students develop cross-cultural understanding and enhance their knowledge of social or social justice issues in a global context. It is easy and convenient for instructors to implement in any educational setting, and likely to result in decent outcomes in achieving teaching goals. Students are amazed by the fact that they have direct interaction with real people on the other side of

the globe and can quickly gain a new and personally-authentic view of the world. Mirroring the results found by Eini (2003) and Demski (2008), a majority of students in this email project agreed that the email experience expanded their knowledge of each other's culture as well as of their own culture, and that they learned different ways of thinking about social issues. Also, students emerged from the project more curious about other cultures and willing to learn more about them.

This study concurs with the findings by Engstrom & Jones (2007) in many ways. An overwhelming number of students felt this project enhanced the understanding of other cultures, in this case, Korea and the US, and expanded their knowledge of various cultural and social issues. A majority of students enjoyed this project and had great opportunities to get interested in and pay attention to broader social issues in both countries. Due to their lack of English-language proficiency, Korean students did not take initiative roles in leading discussion or raising questions, but they were able to research and expand their knowledge and information while they tried to answer questions from US partners. Korean students were eventually able to engage in deeper conversations on cultural, political, and social issues to a great extent. Students in both countries were also able to gain better knowledge of the social work profession and its fields. Most students gained some knowledge about social welfare systems and services in each country and got to know that there are important international commonalities—and differences—in the social work profession.

Although some of the Korean students showed interest in international social work issues, a majority of them were not very interested in and even ignorant of such issues compared to their American partners. There are a few plausible explanations for this. First, international social work is not taught as an independent subject in most universities in Korea. Korean social work programs require only subjects that prepare students for the qualification exam for social workers and for the public social work official exam, neither of which includes questions about international social work. Thus, most Korean students do not have a concrete idea of the subject. Second, only the handful of Korean students who have traveled abroad and participated in

international programs, such as Hunger Experience and the Global Pioneer Program, seemed to be aware of such issues as African children, HIV/AIDS, poverty in developing countries, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for the disabled people. This lack of previous exposure to international and global issues lessens their interest in such issues. Third, Korean society has long been very homogeneous, so that students are unfamiliar with a multicultural society. Recently, however, there has been a growing number of immigrant laborers and foreign born-wives in Korea. This will offer more opportunities for a better understanding of multiculturalism as students enter the field and provide services to or formulate policies for these groups.

There is an important aspect of the email project to consider: the language used for the email exchange was English. The 2008 Korean group was better than the 2009 Korean group in terms of English fluency and their interest in a variety of social issues. English fluency is the key to secure the quantity and quality of discussions for Korean students. Almost all Korean students were doubtful about their language proficiency at the beginning and felt it burdensome to write emails in English. They would apologize for their lack of English skills. After the US students told them that they could understand their English, the Korean students were more at ease and willing to talk. Those without self-confidence in English fluency throughout the period were neglectful in responding to US partners and eventually were left behind, particularly some students in the 2009 class. However, Korean students in both years felt that their English fluency improved through this email exchange project, which would be a beneficial byproduct.

The use of English gave the US students, who sometimes complained about their partner's English level, a position of higher privilege, which created an imbalanced power relationship between them and the Korean students. This unbalanced language situation raises concerns elaborated by Gray (2005) and Razack (2002), that international exchanges are reinforcing, and suffused with, the legacies of colonialism and imperialism. As Razack (2002) warns, the use of English in our international email exchange activity could exacerbate the hegemony inherent

in western pedagogy, practice, and education. We are examining and questioning our email project in the light of western hegemony in such international exchanges, in particular in an educational context.

We think that it would be ideal for students in both countries to use their own language in writing emails, which would force them (especially the US students) to think about the difficulty of language barriers and the imbalance of power when international communication is conducted in English. We suggest that we could adopt Google Translate in the email exchange in the future, where students write in their own native language and their partners have to translate the message to read it. This would mitigate the imbalance of power between the two groups and the Western hegemony which has been testified for a long time in the history of relations between the two countries.

The students themselves offered suggestions for future email exchanges. First, students wanted more built-in class time for emailing as a way to ensure more frequent responses. In particular, American students suggested that the classes enforce consistent submission of email responses (e.g. one hard copy of an exchange due each week for both professors). Korean students did indeed respond less. We assume that their responses were fewer due to their lack of confidence in English, as we discussed above. Second, students (both Korean and American) also wanted the instructors to assign a topic or suggest topics each week. They thought that free topic selection was too daunting, and that more structure in email exchange topics would be easier to handle. Some wanted to keep the topics related to only their own countries, since it was very hard for some partners to talk about other countries. They also thought it would be helpful to have the students attend the same type of class, so that the email exchange partners could more fully explore similar topics. Third, students suggested expanding the types of advanced media involved in the exchange project: digital pictures of his/her life/family/self, or photos or videos students make by themselves regarding a social issue of their interest. Since the project period is already a few years old, we could now utilize more advanced computer and internet

technology to do this. Other suggestions included learning about the partner country before the start of the project; flexibility in the frequency of email exchange; and starting earlier in the semester to have more time to develop conversational rapport.

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