Developing and Sustaining COIL initiatives in Technical Education Settings: Innovative Practices in a Post-Pandemic Era

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A. Collaborative online international learning in technical education settings (COIL)

- Definition
  - COIL projects involve the co-creation, by educators from different countries, of a digital space for experiential and internationalized learning, within which students collaborate on joint projects. While achieving the intended learning outcomes of the course, they examine the content through a global lens, becoming more attuned to geographical, linguistic, and cultural contexts (Bégin-Caouette, Hazoume & Berthiaume, 2023)

- Impacts
  - Intercultural competencies (De Castro et al., 2019)
  - Teamwork and ICT-related competencies (Vahed & Rodriguez, 2020; O'Brien & Erikson, 2008)
  - Language competencies (Francesco & Bender-Slack, 2016)
  - Educational success (Appiah-Kubi, 2020)
  - Socio-professional integration (Rubin, 2017)

- COIL in vocational and non-university higher education institutions
  - Less frequent (Custer et Tuominen, 2017) because of resource constraints, curricular focus, awareness and training (Amaral & McLay, 2024)
  - General and vocational education colleges (CEGEPS) = intermediate higher education institutions offering both pre-university (2y) and technical (3y) programs.
    - No tuition fees
    - Their programs are defined by the provincial Ministry of Higher Education, which also awards the diplomas. (Bégin-Caouette, 2017)

B. Designing and Implementing a COIL: A Teacher's Perspective

- **Customer Service course** in the *Administrative Techniques* program (2nd semester)

- **Awareness of the limited focus** on *soft-skills* development and *intercultural competencies* (both within the course and across the program)
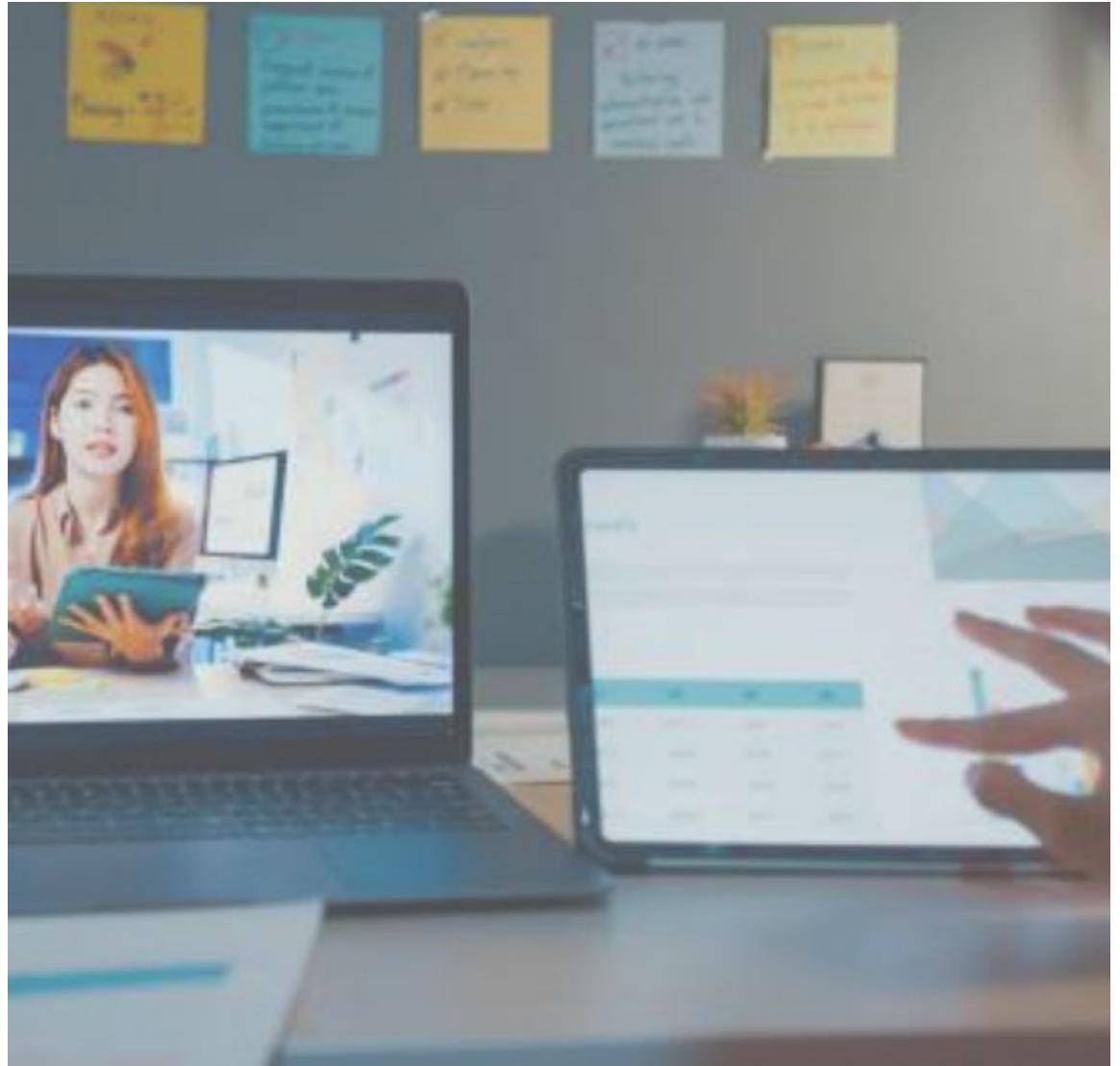
Our approach / The way we did it

- **Project focus:** Improve the customer experience of a common international company *Zara*.

- **Team structure:** Mixed groups of students (Canadians with Tunisians).

- **Activities:**
  - Designed a **customer service evaluation tool**.
  - **Visited** the company in their respective countries.
  - **Shared and compared experiences** to identify ways to improve the customer experience while considering the realities of both countries.

Management of institutional educational requirements

Courses 1 to 10: Acquisition of the competency

Courses 11 to 14: Repeating the process, but with the partner

Institutional partner

Impacts

- Exposure to new ways of doing things

- Development of soft skills

- Development of intercultural competencies

C. Administrative best practices in developing and sustaining COIL initiatives

Collaborative action research: 13 co-investigators and collaborators, 3 universities, 4 cegeps, and the Quebec Federation of Cegeps (Canada).

6 CASES (COIL)

Repeated interviews (3 X 2h) with 10 teachers, administrators, and professionals.

Thematic analysis.
4 global themes:

- **Motivations**
- **Support**
- **Communication**
- **Engagement**

SSHRC CRSH
CRSH SSHRC

1. Teachers' motivations

For their students
- Openness to the world (democratize access to an international experience + sustainable development)
- Intercultural competencies (learning about other cultures and themselves)
- Professional competencies (communication, project management, leadership)

*"**It was just perfect to boost motivation** and foster the openness to the world that students needed for their intercultural development."*

For themselves
- Professional competencies (pedagogical innovation, technological innovations)
- Intercultural competencies (knowledge of a field in other cultures)
- Exchanges and collaboration (discuss with teachers from other contexts)

*"The other thing is that the course in which I integrated this COIL project is a course I teach, and I've been the only one teaching it for several years. So, at some point, my imagination has its limits. **I had been wanting to improve certain aspects of the course for a while, and this project was a perfect fit for that**."*

2. Communication

- Reasons to communicate
  - To share details about courses, the project, ideas and follow-ups

- Frequency of communications
  - Communication evolved from sporadic to regular as the project developed (from 1/month to 2/week)
  - The intensity of exchanges correlated with the project timeline, peaking during the final preparation stages.
  - Frequent and responsive communication with all deadlines met VS sending documents (e.g., pedagogical frameworks) without receiving responses.

- Means of communication
  - "We wanted to use Teams": Zoom, What'sApp, GoogleMeet, Skype(!), and finally Teams ;)

- Challenges regarding communication
  - Differences in Institutional Structures and Schedules
  - Mismatched academic calendars
  - Connectivity issues
  - Language Barriers
  - Different communication rhythms and expectations

KEY TAKEAWAYS
- Flexibility
- ***Proactive planning***
- Maintaining communication between activities

3. Support

- Importance of support from....
  - The academic department : ensure the project has the interest and support of multiple faculty members
  - The Assistant Director of Academic Affairs (immediate supervisor) : release time (essential?), schedule accommodation (time difference)
  - International Office : Intercultural training, assistance in finding an international partner and support with administrative formalities
  - IT office : Support students and instructors in using platforms (e.g., Teams) and provide recommendations for improvement

3.1. The question of the necessity of faculty mobility

"There are a series of irritants that are practical or logistical in nature. The platform to use, things like that. It's really just logistical questions. But if, on top of that, we don't know each other, we don't know each other's programs, we've never talked about them… then it takes much longer to build trust. **That trust develops much faster when we meet in person.** And actually, we're more likely to want to work with someone when we've developed that kind of personal connection. So, I'm not saying I don't believe at all in the virtual mode only, but nothing can replace real human connection." (manager)

4. Engagement / sustainability

- Plan for sustainability from the beginning of the process
- Integrate the COIL into the institution's strategic plan and in departmental practices
- Establish clear roles for each stakeholder
- Reduced teaching load for faculty members
- Institutional recognition
- Foster resilience (frequent adaptations)

D. Institutional Support in a CEGEP: A Manager's Perspective

Impacts

Institutional Support

Sustainability

COIL and the Internationalization of the Avionics Technology Program
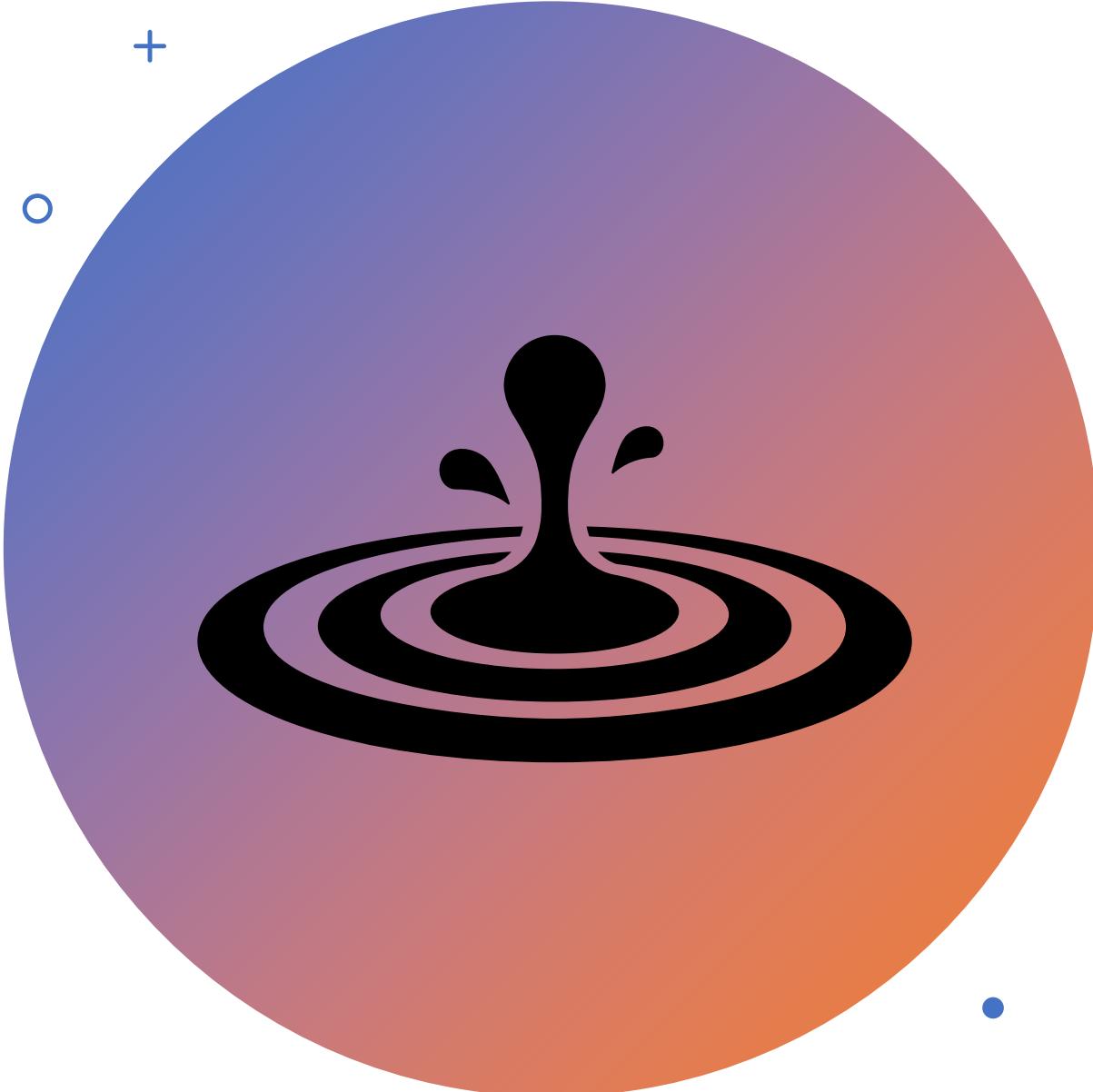
1. Impacts of a COIL Project in a CÉGEP

- Enrichment of training through educational innovation

- Enhanced internationalization of education

- Broader student reach and engagement

- Potential to spark additional international activities

- COIL professors become strong ambassadors
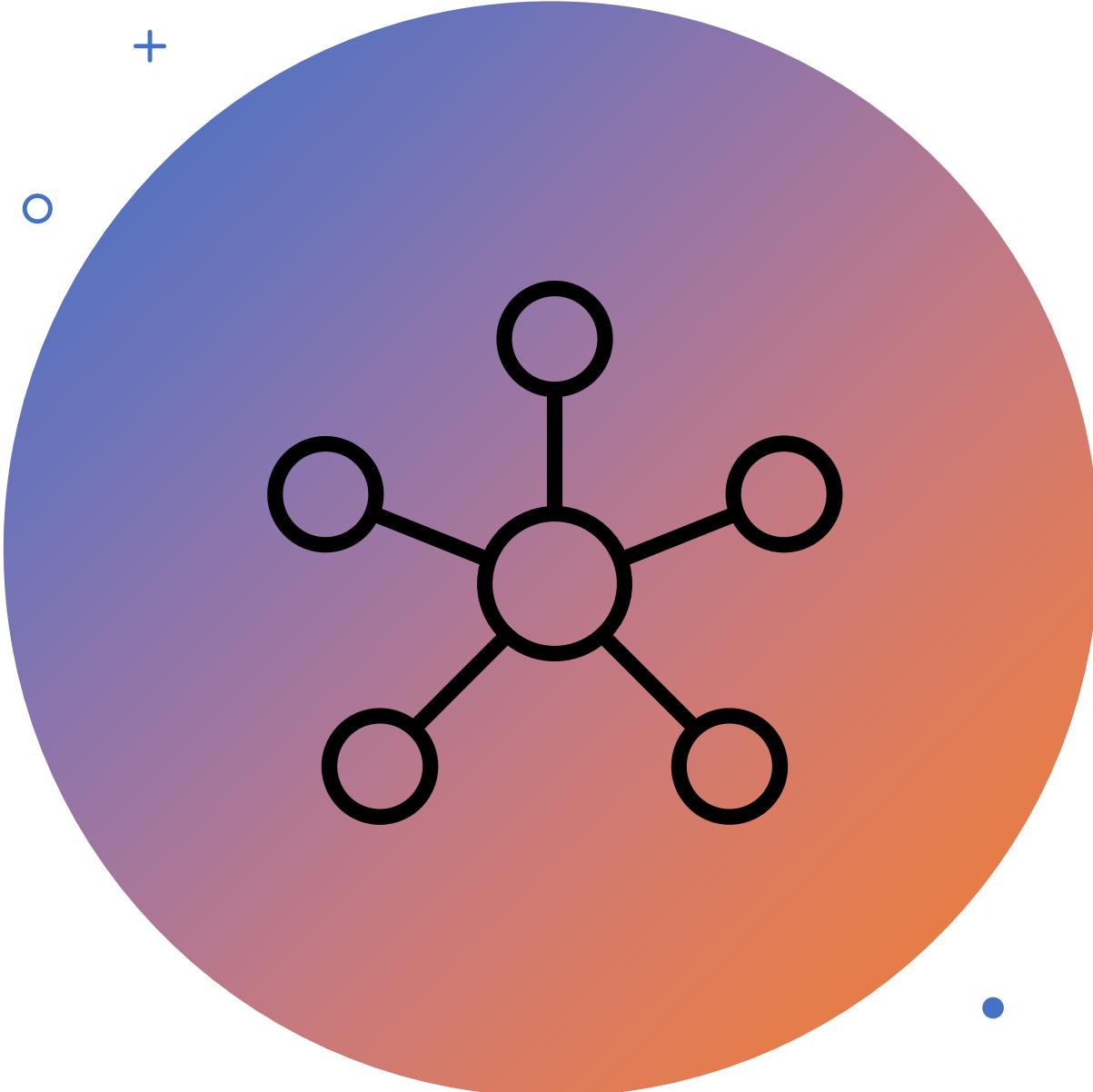
2. Support for the Implementation of a COIL Project

- COIL as an international activity:
  - Internationalization of Education Policy
  - Strategic Plan
  - Annual Work Plan
  - Partnership Agreements
  - Etc.
- Facilitation of connections with partners
- Advisory role: Ensure regular follow-up meetings
- Support in identifying available resources

3. Sustainability

- Prevent isolation among professors/instructors

- Recognize the contributions of participating faculty

- Information sharing and promotion

- Promote peer-to-peer learning

- Online collaboration begins with strong human connections

4. COIL: A Driver of Internationalization in Avionics

Partner #1 (2020)

- Faculty Mobility (4)
- Recruitment
- Research
- 1 + 1 Professors
- Student Mobility
- COIL (2)
- Industry

Partner #2 (2024)

- Faculty Mobility (2)
- Etc.
- 2 + 2 Professors
- Student Mobility
- COIL (2026)

Institutional Support – International Office
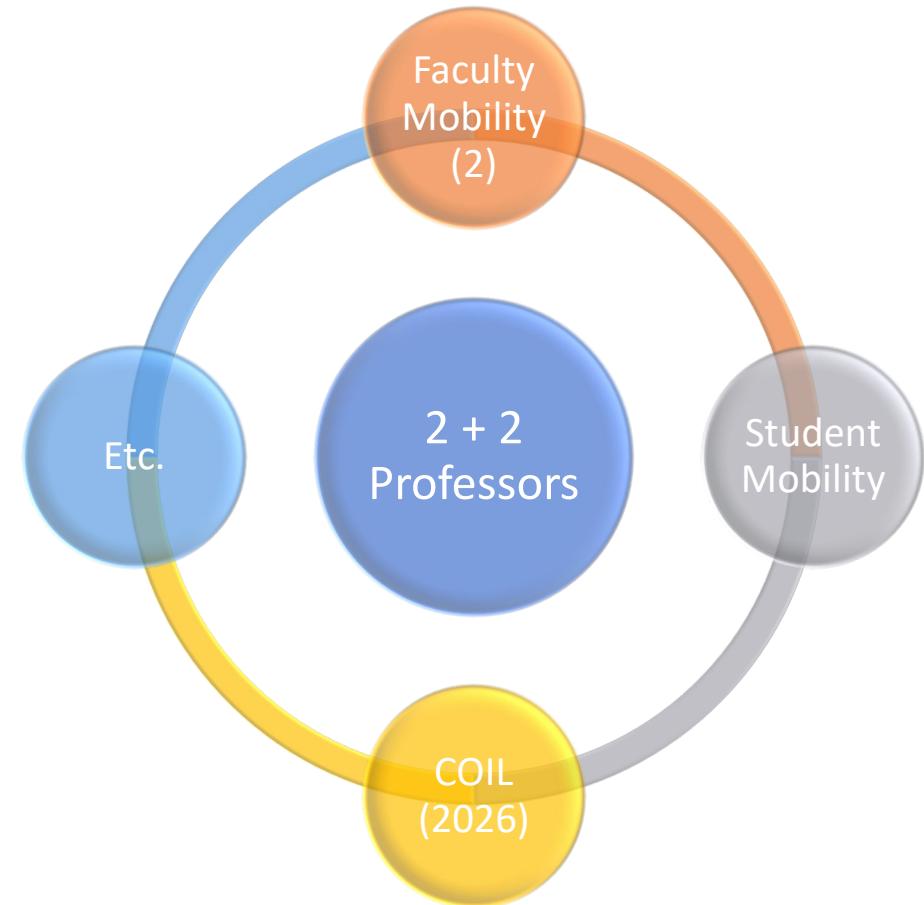
Questions & Answers

For more information (in FR) www.lires.ca/mari

Français	Español	English

APPENDIX 1 : Tips (from professors' perspective)

Planning

- Carefully select the partner (country, context; take time to get to know them and understand their motivations)

- Find faculty members with common interests

- Be humble, open, and flexible

- Schedule meetings with the partner prior to launching the COIL

- Strongly consider meeting partners in person (through faculty mobility or by hosting them)

- Identify areas of convergence between programs

- Agree on the communication platform (Google, Teams, Zoom, etc.)

- Have a "Plan B"

Implementing

- Conduct technical tests before the COIL (student lists, team formation, channel creation)

- Take into account differing academic calendars (start/end of term, holidays), the need (or not) for common time , time differences, and daylight saving changes

- Integrate COIL activities into existing course projects rather than adding extra activities

- Consider seeking support (from educational technologists or another teacher) for the first "online activity"

APPENDIX 2: How the International Office Supports Project Development at Cégep Édouard-Montpetit

A. Steps to Launch a Mobility or a Virtual Project

- **Project Initiation and Consultation**
  - Begin with considering new or existing projects and schedule a meeting with us to clarify objectives and align goals.

- **Project Analysis and Feasibility**
  - With the professor, analyze project scope, assess feasibility, and define roles to build a strong foundation for success.

- **Support and Implementation**
  - The International Office provides tools and guidance while the professor and students implement the project with ongoing support.

- **Evaluation and Sharing**
  - Reflect on outcomes, identify improvements, and share experiences to foster learning and collaboration.

APPENDIX 2: How the International Office Supports Project Development at Cégep Édouard-Montpetit

B. Guiding Principles of the International Office

MISSION

- The International Office supports faculty and students in meaningful mobility and social engagement experiences beyond the classroom.

VISION

- To offer every member of the college community the opportunity to experience mobility—whether local or international, in-person or virtual—in alignment with the values of sustainable development.

CORE VALUES

- Respect, cooperation, engagement, creativity, and innovation foster a supportive and collaborative environment.