

Capítulo 6

COIL as a teaching-innovation practice for European–Latin American cooperation around shared educational challenges

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Abstract

COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning) is a documented methodology that connects students and teachers from at least two partner universities inside an existing course for a module of five to fourteen weeks, with each home institution grading the shared work under its own standards. Developed at the State University of New York in the early 2000s, it now reaches more than two hundred higher education institutions across different geographies. The question this chapter asks is not whether COIL works; it does. The question is whether the European alliance instruments that finance COIL planning also reach the Latin American universities that share the educational challenges COIL is suited to — student disengagement, artificial intelligence in the classroom, the gender gap in science and technology, and the impact of trauma on learning, together with a wider set the volume itself can extend. Opening a Latin American line in each alliance's COIL funding, with AUIP and AUGM as the contact points, would close the loop, and is offered here as an agenda for the years ahead.

Keywords: Teaching innovation; Internationalization of higher education; Educational cooperation; Transdisciplinarity; Collaborative Online International Learning; European–Latin American cooperation.

Introduction

The book to which this chapter belongs starts from a premise. Education is a border territory that no discipline owns. The problems now reaching schools and universities demand transdisciplinary answers. The chapter takes that framing as given. Inside it, the chapter asks a narrower question. What is the operational format through which European and Latin American universities could organise work on problems of this kind, rather than on the institutional metrics that currently shape cooperation between them?

The four problems do not belong to any one discipline. Each mixes cognition, culture, economy, and technology in ways that no single field can handle alone. A researcher studying trauma soon meets the neuroscientist, the public-health worker, and the school. An engineer building a classroom tool soon meets the teacher, the ethicist, and the family. The conventional university response is to assign each problem to a faculty and trust that adjacent disciplines will keep up. The four problems make that trust harder to extend, because they all sit at the seams between fields. The word transdisciplinarity is older than its current fashion. Klein (2004) traces it to a 1970 OECD conference, where it first meant a common system of axioms across a set of disciplines. She notes that this original definition was later supplanted by one of problem-solving across disciplinary cultures, which is closer to what the present chapter needs. The book's image of education as a border territory follows from this, and the chapter takes it as its starting point. The chapter also reads Collaborative Online International Learning, the format it proposes to widen, as a teaching-innovation practice. COIL is treated here as one of the documented innovations in university pedagogy of the last twenty years, the kind a section on innovation in higher education would name as a working example rather than as a future promise.

The chapter is written from inside an Andalusian university that coordinates one of the European alliances, and it keeps the Latin American dimension in view throughout. The challenges that cross the Atlantic are not European. They play out differently in each context, in

ways that make reciprocal cooperation more illuminating than either side's internal debate. The chapter treats the challenges the book takes up as illustrative of a wider set of shared problems that the volume itself can extend. It argues that Collaborative Online International Learning, usually known by its acronym COIL, is the operational form a reorientation could take. COIL connects existing courses across partner institutions. It embeds students and teachers in shared virtual collaboration for a module rather than a programme, and is documented, financed, and running. The chapter reads COIL through the lens of the challenges the book treats. It follows the format across the Atlantic in one direction and finds the infrastructure that could carry it the rest of the way. It is a reflection and a proposal rather than a report. It does not present original empirical data. It reads policy documents, the public records of alliances and university networks, the declarations of Latin American regional conferences, and a set of bilateral programmes. It asks what cooperation between European and Latin American universities could become if it organised itself around shared problems and a format that is already suited to them.

The chapter proceeds in four moves. The first introduces COIL as a transdisciplinary format and shows why it fits problems of this kind, drawing on the challenges the book treats as illustration. The second traces how the format already crosses the Atlantic in one direction and stops at Europe's border in the other. The third reads the AUIP, AUGM, and CRES 2018 architecture, together with the double degrees the University of Sevilla already runs with several Latin American universities, as the infrastructure that could carry COIL across. The fourth proposes the operational step that would close the loop. A short conclusion and a note on positionality close the chapter. The four moves are the four substantive sections that follow, and the conclusion gathers them.

COIL as a transdisciplinary format for shared educational challenges

Collaborative Online International Learning is a defined methodology rather than a brand name. It was developed at the State University of New York in the early 2000s. Since then it has been consolidated as a methodology with documented design principles and pedagogical goals (Rubin, 2019). It is now in use at more than two hundred higher education institutions in over thirty countries. Mexico runs it through the USA-Mexico Multistate COIL Program. Conceptual frameworks continue to extend its application to intercultural competence development (Borger, 2022). A COIL connects students and teachers from at least two partner universities. It is embedded inside an existing course rather than offered as a new one. It runs for a module of five to fourteen weeks, and is graded by each home institution under its own standards. The format does not produce a joint qualification. It produces a shared learning experience within courses that already exist.

COIL sits inside the wider catalogue of teaching innovations that have reshaped university practice in the last two decades. It shares with problem-based learning, service learning, and project-based learning the move from a transmissive lecture model to a collaborative, task-centred one. The literature on teaching innovation in higher education treats these formats as a single family, identifiable by the role the student takes inside the course and the change in assessment that follows from that role. COIL adds one element the others do not. The classroom is distributed across borders, the collaboration crosses languages and institutional cultures, and each side grades the shared work under its own standards rather than under a common rubric. It is a teaching innovation that can only run in partnership.

Three features of the format make it a good fit for problems of this kind. The book takes a set of challenges as illustration — student disengagement, AI in the classroom, the gender gap in science and technology, the impact of trauma on learning, and others the volume

itself extends. The chapter reads them as examples of a wider class of shared educational challenges. The first feature is the format's transdisciplinarity at the scale of a single course. The Ulysseus COIL Handbook specifies that teachers from different fields can meet around a common point of intersection rather than requiring disciplinary alignment (Ulysseus European University, 2025). The point of intersection is where the format lives. Shared educational challenges are themselves points of intersection that cross disciplinary cultures. Student disengagement asks why undergraduates detach from their studies. It runs through the labour market, mental health, and the digital environments that now mediate academic life. Artificial intelligence in the classroom is the inverse problem. It is a tool that can generate competent text on demand, and it forces a renegotiation of what teaching and assessment are for. A 2023 OECD–Education International discussion paper notes that general-purpose tools such as generative AI can be extremely powerful despite not necessarily being educational in purpose. The paper warns that the rapid arrival of such tools has outpaced the curriculum, assessment, and teacher-training response in most education systems (OECD & Education International». Unificar en ambos sitios (preferimos «OECD & Education International, 2023). The gender gap in science and technology is older and more stubborn. Statistics can measure the pattern, but it only changes when curriculum, professional culture, and the formation of teachers move together. Trauma and learning join neuroscience to university pastoral care and public health. Each is a problem that resists being assigned to a single faculty.

The second feature is speed. COIL is fast, light, and replicable. It sits inside a course rather than above it, and a well-designed module can be agreed, run, and assessed within a single academic term. The Seed Fund Call that finances COIL planning inside the Ulysseus European University, in its April 2026 edition (Call V), offered up to two thousand five hundred euros per applicant. It opened the call to teachers from any discipline at any of the eight Ulysseus partners, and added support for in-person planning meetings with two-way mobility (Ulysseus European University, 2026). The instrument has run every

year since 2024. A format that can be financed at this scale and at this rhythm is one that an alliance, a network, or a pair of universities can adopt without negotiating a multi-year programme.

The third feature is reciprocity at low cost. Leask and Bridge (2013) make the corresponding point at the level of curriculum design. Internationalisation of the curriculum cannot be achieved by adding international content or a study-abroad experience. It must engage the discipline-specific way each programme is taught and learned, and it requires academic staff working in partnership at the level of each programme rather than declarations made at the level of policy. COIL operationalises that observation. Two teachers from different universities meet around a question neither could pose alone. The students join the question online, and the result is read by the home institution under its own standards. The instrument is light, but the partnership model it embodies is not.

The conceptual frame behind COIL connects it to the broader turn in internationalisation theory. Knight (2003), whose working definition is still the most cited, describes internationalisation as the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions, or delivery of postsecondary education. The revised definition that emerged in 2015 added the language of intentionality and social contribution, signalling that internationalisation should be judged by what it does for students and for society, not by how many agreements a university can sign (De Wit et al., 2015). COIL is one of the formats that already operationalises that social-contribution reading at the scale of a single course. Whether the format can cross the Atlantic on the European side is the question the next section takes up.

COIL already runs across the Atlantic — and stops at Europe's border

Inside the Ulysseus European University, COIL is operationalised through a recurring Seed Fund Call for Teachers. The April 2026 edition financed COIL planning for teachers from any discipline at any of the eight Ulysseus partners. The eight partner universities are

all European, and the Seed Fund Call finances collaborations between them (Ulysseus European University, 2026). A COIL funded through Ulysseus is built around an existing course at a Ulysseus partner. The partner that joins must already be a member of the alliance. The Latin American dimension that the alliance format talks about at the level of strategy has not yet been wired into the Ulysseus Seed Fund. The handbook frames the alliance's purpose as shaping global citizens equipped for the challenges of the future (Ulysseus European University, 2025). The alliance's mission statement names Asia, Latin America, and Africa as the three regions in which it intends to open branches (Ulysseus European University, 2023). The published goals page commits Ulysseus to an open-to-the-world model extending beyond European borders, without naming the regions itself (Ulysseus European University, n.d.). The first such branch, formalised in May 2024, is the University of Da Nang in Vietnam (Ulysseus European University, 2024). Latin America remains at the stage of intention.

The pattern is consistent across the European alliance landscape. Latin American institutions appear in European alliances, when they appear at all, in the softer categories of associated, global, or strategic partner. UNITA, an alliance built around Romance-language universities, runs a non-EU partner programme called *Geminae*. It includes institutions in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, and Uruguay (UNITA, n.d.). EELISA, an alliance led by the *École des Ponts ParisTech* and centred on engineering and science, recently added the University of São Paulo among its new associate partners (EELISA, 2024). EUTOPIA, coordinated by the *Université Paris-Saclay*, counts the *Universidad de los Andes* in Colombia among a small group of global partners listed on its public site (EUTOPIA, n.d.). The *Geminae* programme shows that a European alliance can build a substantial Latin American partner network without making those partners full members. What it does not show is that the partner can access the pooled alliance budget, take a seat in the governing bodies, or shape the joint programmes that carry the European Degree Label. The agenda is set by the full members, who are European. The partner is invited into projects the full members have already shaped.

The arrangement can be productive. It is not, however, an arrangement in which COIL is financed across the Atlantic.

Two sub-arguments pull apart here. The first. European university alliances close to non-European applicants at the level of the instruments that finance COIL. The second. The European instruments that do reach Latin America do not finance a COIL. They finance programmes, projects, and mobility. The European Universities initiative is now consolidated policy. The European Commission frames it as a key pillar of the European Education Area and counts sixty-four alliances under Erasmus+ (European Commission, 2024). The Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education action treats Latin America as one of the regions of the current call cycle. It funds multilateral projects that pair European and Latin American institutions around curricular reform, governance, and internationalisation (European Commission, n.d). The priorities of the instrument are close to the educational challenges named earlier, but they are not identical with them, and the gap is telling. Capacity Building speaks the language of transitions and governance. The challenges facing young people speak the language of classrooms and lives. The instrument is also time-limited and project-based. It builds capacity and then it ends. Much of the institutional learning dissolves when the funding stops. The Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree has, between 2014 and 2019, included thirteen universities from Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, and Mexico as full hosting partners in nine masters, with eighty-nine of two hundred and four programmes including a Latin American associate role (European Commission, 2019). The format reaches Latin America in two ways. It shows that the European-Latin American cooperation the alliances have struggled to formalise at their core is already routine one layer down. The Jean Monnet EULAS network adds a different layer. EULAS connects European and Latin American higher education institutions with the Caribbean and works on European-Latin American academic and policy synergies (EULAS, 2024). It is a network for research and teaching on the relationship, not an alliance that restructures its members. None of these instruments finances a

COIL. They finance programmes, projects, and mobility. They do not finance the five-to-fourteen-week module inside an existing course that COIL is built around.

The Latin American cooperation architecture is already substantial

The bridge is closer than the alliance-level picture suggests. Latin America is not waiting for a European invitation. The Asociación Universitaria Iberoamericana de Postgrado, AUIP, gathers universities across Latin America, Spain, and Portugal. It runs mobility scholarships for postgraduate students and staff, including a dedicated line for double-degree programmes (AUIP, 2026). AUIP is a practical operator of academic mobility. It has the quiet virtue of treating the Ibero-American space as a normal environment for postgraduate cooperation rather than as an exception. The Asociación de Universidades Grupo Montevideo, AUGM, is an association of public universities across six South American countries founded in 1991. It operates a credit-recognising mobility programme for students and staff and has built its identity around the proposition that higher education is a social public good (Asociación de Universidades Grupo Montevideo, n.d.). AUGM brings its own networks, its own principles, and its own thirty-five-year experience of cooperation among equals. The regional architecture is already substantial on its own terms.

The declaration of the 2018 Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRES 2018) is the political frame within which AUIP and AUGM operate. The 2018 declaration reaffirmed higher education as a social public good and a human right, rejected its commodification, and called for internacionalización solidaria, paired with regional integration and intercultural dialogue (Conferencia Regional de Educación Superior, 2018). Its core claim, that internationalisation should serve society and strengthen regional cooperation rather than markets, is close to the social-contribution language that the revised definition of internationalisation introduced

on the European side (De Wit et al., 2015). Both traditions are responding to the same unease about an internationalisation that measures itself by student flows and signed agreements rather than by what it does for knowledge and for society. Bringing the two repertoires together is the move the chapter proposes.

The bilateral double degree is the second bridge. The University of Sevilla maintains a web of them with Latin American partners. Three examples illustrate what integration already achieves at the level of single programmes. In May 2026 the Governing Council of the University of Sevilla approved, among five new double degrees, an agreement linking its Master's in Advanced Auditing and Accounting with the Master's in Accounting and Auditing of the Universidad Nacional del Litoral in Argentina. The agreement draws on AUIP mobility scholarships, so a bilateral signature draws on multilateral infrastructure (Andalucía Informa, 2026; AUIP, 2026; Universidad de Sevilla, 2026; Universidad Nacional del Litoral, n.d.). With the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (PUCP) the University of Sevilla offers a double master's degree. It links the Master's in Gender Studies and Professional Development with the PUCP's Master's in Gender Studies. Students spend their first semester in Sevilla and their second in Lima. The programme speaks directly to the gender gap the book names as a transdisciplinary challenge (Universidad de Sevilla, 2021). At the doctoral level, in 2019 the rectors of the University of Sevilla and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) signed a cotutela. It covers the forty-one postgraduate programmes UNAM offers, with an arrangement administered through CONAHCYT, Mexico's federal science and humanities council, supporting Mexican students' mobility (Universidad de Sevilla, 2019). What ties these cases together is not a shared discipline but a shared infrastructure of AUIP, CONAHCYT, and Fundación Carolina funding, and the accumulation of mutual recognition, staff familiarity, and student trajectories in both directions (Escuela Internacional de Doctorado, Universidad de Sevilla, n.d.). Each bilateral agreement already produces the mutual recognition, staff familiarity, and student trajectories that an alliance-level structure would otherwise have to create from scratch. AUGM's

cooperative model among equals is, in some respects, a closer fit with the CRES 2018 principle of solidarity than the European alliance format is. AUIP's daily operational experience of postgraduate mobility across the Ibero-American space is something the European alliances have not had to develop. The aim is to bring these two repertoires together, so that each side recognises what the other already knows rather than assuming what the other lacks.

Wiring COIL through the Latin American networks

The proposal that follows from this reflection has two elements. The first is to wire COIL into the European Seed Fund Calls that finance it, opening a Latin American line in each one, and to use AUIP and AUGM as the Latin American contact points through which partner applications arrive. The second is to make transdisciplinarity the criterion of relevance, so that each cluster is built around a shared educational challenge rather than around a disciplinary pairing. The operational form both elements take is COIL, one cluster per challenge, with the bilateral double degree as its long arc and its complement.

The operational form is concrete. Each cluster would be a Collaborative Online International Learning initiative organised around a single question, built between one teacher at a European university and one teacher at a Latin American university. The question might be student dropout and engagement in first-year university courses, or AI literacy and assessment redesign in undergraduate programmes, or women's under-representation in STEM master's and doctoral programmes, or wellbeing and mental health among university students from high-violence contexts. The student cohorts of both courses join the question online for the duration of a module. The handbook specifies that teachers from different fields can meet around a common point of intersection rather than requiring disciplinary alignment (Ulysseus European University, 2025); the challenge becomes that common point. A double degree in gender studies, of the kind already running with the PUCP, becomes the slow-moving backbone of a wider cluster on

the gender gap in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics; the COIL is its fast-moving edge. A joint doctoral supervision in the sciences, of the kind already running with UNAM, becomes the long arc of a cluster on artificial intelligence in the classroom; the COIL is the place where the question first appears in undergraduate teaching.

The missing step is small and procedural rather than structural. It is to use COIL as the entry point through which Latin American universities integrate into the European alliances already constituted, by opening a Latin American line in each Seed Fund Call that finances COIL planning, once such an instrument exists. Whether it is already running as in Ulysseus or is adopted by other alliances that finance COIL planning through their own internal instruments, the instrument is the same shape. The line would finance a Latin American teacher to plan and run a COIL with a teacher at an alliance partner. AUIP or AUGM acts as the Latin American contact point through which partner applications arrive and are checked. Ulysseus is the worked example because its Seed Fund Call is the most clearly documented. A Latin American university that already runs a double degree with a Spanish or Portuguese partner can use that partnership as the institutional backbone of a cluster and reach the European alliance instrument through it. A pair of universities without an alliance or a bilateral agreement can still run a COIL, just without the Seed Fund line. The format is the vehicle for integration. The alliance is the host institution. The Latin American partner enters the cooperation on equal terms, rather than as a recipient of a frame designed elsewhere.

The challenges that the book takes as illustrative, together with the climate-and-sustainability transitions that already structure both regions' educational agendas, stand here for a wider horizon of shared problems against which this chapter argues cooperation should be organised. Marginson and Rhoades (2002) make the more general point that higher education cooperation has to be read through the simultaneous interaction of global, national, and local layers of agency, and that no single layer is enough on its own. Whether any single challenge becomes the focus of a concrete cluster is a question the chapter does not pretend to settle; what it argues is that the organising

principle, and the test of whether cooperation is doing the work it is for, has to come from problems of this kind rather than from institutional visibility.

Conclusion

The instruments are already there. The European Universities initiative has built the deepest transnational cooperation between universities that the region has known; the AUIP and AUGM networks have done the same for Ibero-America; the bilateral double degrees run by Andalusian universities with several Latin American partners carry much of the day-to-day work. What is missing is the connection, and the reorientation from institutional and disciplinary logic toward shared educational challenges. Read as a teaching innovation, the proposal extends a practice that has been running for twenty years, rather than asking either region to invent something new.

The argument can be stated in shorter form. COIL is a documented methodology that already crosses the Atlantic in one direction and stops at Europe's border in the other. The Seed Fund Calls that finance it inside the European alliances are closed to non-European applicants. The Latin American cooperation architecture, anchored in AUIP, AUGM, and CRES 2018, and the European alliance architecture, anchored in the European Universities initiative and its Erasmus+ funding, have evolved separately and have complementary strengths. Bringing them together needs neither new money nor new institutions. What it does ask is that each European alliance open a Latin American line in the Seed Fund Call that finances COIL planning, that AUIP or AUGM act as the Latin American contact point for the line, and that each cluster be built around one challenge with the bilateral double degree as its long arc. The format carries the integration. The alliance hosts it. Each side builds on what the other already knows, rather than on what the other is presumed to need.

None of this is structural. A format designed for collaboration across borders is, by construction, suited to the cooperation between Europe and Latin America that the educational challenges demand. The missing step is procedural rather than structural. Each cluster built

around a chosen question, whether on student engagement, AI in the classroom, the gender gap in science and technology, the impact of trauma on learning, or the climate-and-sustainability transitions already on both regions' agendas, would let the format do what it was designed to do. It would let the Latin American partner join the cooperation on equal terms.

Disclaimer

This chapter expresses the personal views of its authors. It does not represent the position of the University of Sevilla, the Ulysseus European University, or any other institution with which the authors are affiliated. The arguments, claims, and recommendations offered here are written in a personal capacity and should be read as one situated reading rather than as an institutional assessment.

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COIL como práctica de innovación docente para la cooperación entre Europa y América Latina en torno a desafíos educativos compartidos**Resumen**

COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning, aprendizaje internacional colaborativo en línea) es una metodología documentada que conecta a estudiantes y docentes de al menos dos universidades socias dentro de una asignatura ya existente, durante un módulo de cinco a catorce semanas, en el que cada institución de origen califica el trabajo conjunto según sus propios criterios. Desarrollada en la State University of New York a comienzos de los años 2000, hoy llega a más de doscientas instituciones de educación superior de distintas regiones del mundo. La pregunta que plantea este capítulo no es si COIL funciona, porque funciona, sino si los instrumentos de las alianzas europeas que financian la planificación de COIL llegan también a las universidades latinoamericanas que comparten los desafíos educativos para los que COIL resulta adecuado, como la desvinculación del estudiantado, la inteligencia artificial en el aula, la brecha de género en ciencia y tecnología y el impacto del trauma en el aprendizaje, junto con otros que el propio volumen puede añadir. Abrir una línea latinoamericana en la financiación de COIL de cada alianza, con la AUIP y la AUGM como puntos de contacto, cerraría el círculo, y se propone aquí como agenda para los próximos años.

Palabras clave: Innovación docente; Internacionalización de la educación superior; Cooperación educativa; Transdisciplinariedad; Aprendizaje internacional colaborativo en línea; Cooperación entre Europa y América Latina.

COIL como prática de inovação docente para a cooperação euro-latino-americana em torno de desafios educacionais compartilhados**Resumo**

COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning, ou Aprendizagem Internacional Online Colaborativa) é uma metodologia documentada que conecta estudantes e professores de pelo menos duas universidades parceiras dentro de um curso existente, por um módulo de cinco a quatorze semanas, com cada instituição de origem avaliando o trabalho compartilhado segundo seus próprios critérios. Desenvolvido na State University of New York no início dos anos 2000, atualmente alcança mais de duzentas instituições de ensino superior em diferentes geografias. A questão que este capítulo coloca não é se o COIL funciona; ele funciona. A questão é se os instrumentos das alianças europeias que financiam o planejamento do COIL também alcançam as universidades latino-americanas que compartilham os desafios educacionais aos quais o COIL é adequado — desengajamento estudantil, inteligência artificial em sala de aula, a lacuna de gênero em ciência e tecnologia e o impacto do trauma na aprendizagem, juntamente com um conjunto mais amplo que o próprio volume pode estender. Abrir uma linha latino-americana no financiamento de COIL de cada aliança, tendo a AUIP e a AUGM como pontos de contato, fecharia o ciclo, e é oferecido aqui como uma agenda para os próximos anos.

Palavras-chave: Inovação docente; Internacionalização do ensino superior; Cooperação educacional; Transdisciplinaridade; Aprendizagem Internacional Online Colaborativa; Cooperação euro-latino-americana.