

Chapter 49

Offline Peer Dialogue in Asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication Activities for L2 Teacher Development

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies in second language (L2) teacher education (L2TE) emphasize the sociohistorical and contextual dimensions of teachers' professional development. In practice, however, teaching practice opportunities, which can help pre-service teachers experience these dimensions, are limited. Innovative technological applications can help address this issue. This chapter proposes a combination of offline and online activities in which pre-service language teachers can engage L2 learners online while augmenting their own learning through offline peer dialogues. Rooted in the sociocultural approach to learning, this chapter presents a case study analyzing the Critical Learning Episodes (CLEs; Kiely & Davis, 2010) found in the peer dialogues of pre-service teachers during their online engagement with L2 learners abroad. The findings suggest that offline peer dialogue serves as an advanced type of reflection-in-practice (Schön, 1983, 1987), utilizing text mediation, a method that assists student teachers to co-construct the situated knowledge and skills that are holistic in nature (thus requiring multiple perspectives) and purportedly crucial for L2 teaching.

INTRODUCTION

Studies on second language teacher education (L2TE) from a sociocultural perspective indicate that it is crucial for teachers' professional development that they engage in active negotiation with the social aspects of their teaching practice (e.g., Johnson, 2009; Kanno & Stuart, 2011). To promote active learning by student teachers, they need to engage in actual teaching practice that also incorporates reflective

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practice in order to become aware of the context of their teaching. However, most studies on teacher development have focused on the conditions of student teachers' learning in the workplace, as pointed out by Miller (2009). Few studies approach the issue of how to provide the social and cognitive scaffolding needed in the L2TE program in order for pre-service teachers to be able to prepare themselves to participate more fully in their future teaching contexts.

This study attempts to utilize *computer-mediated communication* (CMC) to provide pre-service teachers of Japanese with the opportunity to engage in online tutoring practice with L2 learners of Japanese, combined with an innovative reflective practice, namely offline peer dialogue. By investigating the effectiveness of online tutoring practice incorporating this unique type of reflective practice — offline peer dialogue — this study will explore ways to enhance L2 teachers' professional development through online engagement with L2 learners.

Online Engagement in L2TE: A Sociocultural Perspective

Web 2.0 is comprised of advanced Internet technology and applications including blogs, wikis, rich site summary [RSS], and social bookmarking. One of Web 2.0's crucial advantages for L2 learning and L2 teacher education (L2TE) is the increased possibilities it offers teachers and learners to engage with other people worldwide (e.g., Wang & Vasquez, 2012; Warschauer & Grimes, 2007). A rich research tradition has explored the beneficial aspects of CMC for L2 teacher development and L2 learning by connecting learners and teachers cross-institutionally. Some studies in L2TE have investigated the effects of authentic experience in online engagement with L2 learners and collaboration among teachers (including pre-service teachers) on the development of the teachers' electronic media literacy and autonomy (Fuchs, Hauck, & Müller-Hartmann, 2012) and intercultural competence (Müller-Hartmann, 2006). Another extensive research tradition in cross-institutional collaboration among L2 learners and teachers has examined the social advantages offered by new technology, using a sociocultural theory (SCT) approach (e.g., Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Thorne & Tasker, 2011).

Studies of SCT (e.g., Thorne, 2003; Warschauer, 1997) have understood CMC to be a computer-mediated tool for human activity and development. According to this perspective, language is a semiotic tool that mediates actions and higher-order mental functions (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, any social interaction, such as collaborative dialogue or teaching practice, is considered a mediating tool with tremendous impact on human development. Additionally, studies in L2TE based on SCT emphasize the significance of the contextual and social aspects of teaching and teacher training (e.g., Freeman, 2002; Johnson, 2009).

Alongside the mediated roles of CMC media in teaching and learning practices, certain key elements of CMC can further improve and optimize online practice in L2TE. One such key element is the opportunity it presents for pre-service L2 teachers to engage with distance learners. Some student teachers in preparation programs may have the chance to participate in a teaching practicum or an internship abroad (especially in the case of native-speaking teachers of sociopolitically powerful languages like English, where there is some job demand even for inexperienced teachers). However, because of locational, temporal, and financial constraints, as well as the difficulty of finding cooperative institutions abroad with teachers available to mentor practicum students, the opportunities are still quite limited for these pre-service L2 teachers to communicate with or teach learners who live abroad (Richards, 2008). Nevertheless, it is crucial that student teachers become aware of the socially and historically various learning environments of learners abroad before the completion of their program of study. Through

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