

Chapter 45

Telecollaboration in Foreign Language Curricula: A Case Study on Intercultural Understanding in Video Communication Exchanges

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ABSTRACT

The development of intercultural communicative competence is increasingly important in this globalised and highly digitalised world. This implies the adequate understanding of otherness, which entails a myriad of complex cognitive competences, skills and behaviour. The TILA project aims to study how the use of digital communication means in foreign language education can contribute to the development of intercultural understanding when communicating with peers across borders. Understanding is the result of a collaborative construction of shared knowledge, which can be supported through the use of meta-communicative devices (MCDs) (Bahtina, 2013). This case study investigates how pupils used communication strategies during video communication sessions to achieve intercultural understanding. Results reveal that task-based telecollaboration sessions offer learners the opportunity to achieve mutual understanding by utilizing a variety of meta-communicative devices that help the learners to compare their cultures in relation to time, space and habits, verify meaning and clarify utterances.

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INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly digitalised and globalized society, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can be integrated into education in order to enrich language-learning processes. Furthermore, CMC can be adapted to the needs of students and their everyday use of digital media and help to develop their intercultural and digital identity. Being able to engage students in meaningful communication through the use of internet tools whilst carrying out tasks or projects with students from other countries is known as Telecollaboration (see O'Dowd, 2006, 2007; Guth & Helm, 2010).

This paper explores telecollaboration and the ways it can be used in secondary education to support meaningful language-learning processes. Telecollaboration is becoming increasingly popular in foreign language education as social media has enormous potential to support new ways of learning whereby cooperation, communication and the learner are put in the centre of the learning process following social constructivist pedagogies (Vygotsky, 1978). However, research suggests that teachers and learners do not use telecollaboration extensively for pedagogical purposes. Despite the efforts made by scholars to place digital literacy and intercultural and pedagogical innovation competences high on the educational agenda, the reality is that introducing digital innovation in traditional educational settings can be difficult (Howard, 2013; Eetmer & Otterbreit-Leftwich, 2010). This is particularly true for synchronous modes of telecollaboration in secondary education.

To date, most research studies on telecollaboration published in peer-reviewed journals refer to tertiary education (Pol, 2013). Minimal information is known about the effect of telecollaboration on the language-learning processes of foreign language students at a younger age. Based on previous research results¹ conducted at tertiary education where the impact of synchronous communication was measured on the motivation (Jauregi, de Graaff, van den Bergh, & Kriz, 2012), intercultural competence, and interaction skills (Canto, Jauregi, & van den Bergh, 2013; Canto, de Graaff, & Jauregi, 2014) of students engaged in telecollaboration, we present the results of a case study carried out during October-December 2013 at the secondary education level within the TILA project².

The research study we report on in this paper addresses the development of intercultural understanding of younger learners who participate in telecollaboration sessions. In addition, it aims to provide insight into the use of different communication strategies to promote the development of intercultural understanding. The study analyses the sequences of negotiation of intercultural meaning that arise during interactions carried out on a video communication platform.

On the basis of the obtained results, a pedagogical model has been developed about the optimal use of CMC in foreign language teaching curricula providing criteria for the creation of teaching materials and tasks that promote the development of intercultural understanding in telecollaboration projects.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Our society today is largely characterized by the global economic, political and cultural integration driven by technology and international commerce. Increasingly people view themselves as 'global' and 'cosmopolitan' citizens (Osler & Starkey, 2005). Borders are becoming less important while mobility across borders is increasing (Byram, 2012). As a result of these developments, traditional viewpoints in terms of national categories are experiencing a radical change and a more transnational perspective is

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