Chapter 7
Oral Synchronous Computer–Mediated Communication between SL Students:
A Learning Circle Approach

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Different ways of communication are encouraging the development of a different societal texture where social networking sites, blogs, or other Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) tools are employed. The "youngcast" project, an international students' exchange, has been designed to cope with the demands of this technologically globalized context we are immersed in; in this project, an online platform is used and Oral Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (OSCMC) exchanges are scheduled in order to join English and Spanish Second Language (SL) learners from different parts of the world. A case study, aimed to discover some of the preliminary factors inhibiting participants from taking part in the OSCMC exchanges, resulted in the design of an updated version of the online platform; this new environment is more focused on facilitating online communication between tandem partners and keeping track of some of their learners' production for ulterior feedback.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The 'youngcast project' is contextualized within the influence of the International Education and Resources Network (iEARN), a global non-profit network that has enabled teachers and students around the world to participate in educational projects worldwide since 1989. Among the priority objectives of these projects are to encourage awareness and respect among cultures and to promote collaborative work between schools, using the possibilities offered by ICT.

From 1994, when the first international conference was held in Puerto Madryn (Argentina), through to the last organized in Kaohsiung (Taiwan), iEARN representatives and teachers worldwide have had the opportunity to attend annual iEARN conferences in order to present their projects and share their experiences. Currently, iEARN is established in over 100 countries with the international headquarters located in Catalonia where the delegation of the network is called iEARN-Pangea.

SETTING THE STAGE

The Youngcast Project: A Tandem Exchange

The demands of the technologically globalised context we are immersed in, where the constant technological innovations have undermined not only the political and economic structures of society but also the social and the educational structures of the classroom, makes 'the youngcast project' particularly relevant. Designed by iEARN coordinators in Catalonia (iEARN-Pangea) and the United Kingdom (iEARN-UK), it has already been implemented during the academic years 2008 to 2011 in some UK and Spanish classrooms.

During the academic year 2011 – 2012, schools from other countries (Switzerland, Scotland, USA, and Slovenia) have joined the project, and teachers and students from more than twenty schools have participated in most of the activities suggested. These have included the creation of videopodcasts and the participation of the different classrooms in what Yanguas (2010) has called 'Oral Synchronous Computer-Mediated Communication' (OSCMC) exchanges.

The different online activities scheduled throughout the project take the form of an online tandem partnership between English and Spanish SL students. Tandem learning is a form of open learning in which two people or groups with different family languages work together in order to learn one another's language (Little, et al., 1999). Previous studies reporting similar tandem exchanges have for the most part portrayed positive outcomes on learners' acquisition of second languages (Stockwell, 2003; Torii-Williams, 2004; Vinagre, 2005; in Edasawa & Kabata,

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