

Chapter 31

Using Telecollaboration 2.0 to Build Intercultural Communicative Competence: A Spanish–American Exchange

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports a Spanish-American telecollaborative project through which students created blogs, VoiceThread presentations, and video chats for intercultural exchanges over the course of one semester. The chapter outlines the methodology for the project including pedagogical objectives, task design, selection of Web 2.0 tools, and implementation. Using qualitative data collection, the study explored the extent to which Web 2.0-mediated learning could contribute to learners' intercultural communicate competence (ICC) development. The findings revealed that students exhibited the skills outlined in Byram's ICC model. Students showed positive attitudes and curiosity towards the target culture, and gained new cultural knowledge. They also demonstrated skills of discovery and interaction that helped them build critical cultural awareness. The study suggests that learners' ICC can be assessed by the implementation of a well-designed telecollaborative exchange using Web 2.0 technologies.

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly globalized world, the ability to communicate across cultural boundaries has grown substantially in importance. In the context of L2 teaching, developing linguistic proficiency as the sole aim of language learning is no longer adequate in and of itself. Rather, today's climate demands that intercultural communication skill acquisition be an integral part of the language learning process and L2 instruction. According to Byram (1997), ICC involves more than just knowing about another culture and its language. As well, it requires a greater cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity to shape one's

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own cultural values, attitudes and beliefs. Among existing approaches to intercultural learning, telecollaboration offers a unique new avenue to ICC through which learners can easily interact and collaborate with people from other cultures via computer-mediated communication (CMC). In addition to the study discussed in this chapter, a number of other research studies have explored the impact of intercultural exchanges on both L2 development and ICC in various instructional settings. Distinct learning outcomes have been reported in edited collections (Guth & Helm, 2010; Levy & Stockwell, 2006; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). Also, as highlighted by various researchers, affordances of telecollaboration include linguistic gains (Lee, 2011a; Ware & O'Dowd, 2008), pragmatic awareness (Chun, 2011; Kinginger & Belz, 2005), intercultural competence (Lee, 2012; Schenker, 2012), and increased motivation and autonomy (Lee, 2011b; Little, 2016). Aside from these positive outcomes, challenges, namely differing communication styles, intercultural misunderstandings caused by stereotypes (O'Dowd & Ritter, 2006), and scheduling conflicts (Lee & Markey, 2014) have been reported. In particular, teachers face the challenge of engaging students in interacting on a deeper level (Helm, 2013), and training them to communicate effectively with their distant NS partners (Basharina, Guardado & Morgan, 2008). Moreover, task choice plays an essential role in fostering learners' involvement with online exchanges (Lee, 2000; O'Dowd & Ware, 2009).

While existing research enhances our understanding of telecollaboration, most findings are drawn from intercultural exchanges involving Web 1.0 tools (email, discussion boards). Of note, communication using Web 2.0 tools (blogs, videoconferencing) is increasingly multimodal, often combining text, images, audio and voice to afford a more interactive and inclusive learning environment (Hampel & Stickler 2012). Because there is a lack of research on intercultural learning via Web 2.0 technologies (Dooly & O'Dowd, 2012; Perry & Southwell, 2011), the Spanish-American telecollaborative exchange project was aimed at filling this gap in the literature. By employing the conceptual framework for ICC development proposed by Byram (1997), this study focuses on investigating to what extent online communication exchanges involving interactions between distant NSs, and L2 learners affect L2 development and cross-cultural learning. Further, it offers a sound pedagogical understanding of how students utilize the interaction opportunities offered by Web 2.0 resources to engage in intercultural dialogue with their NS partners in ways that go beyond a superficial 'facts only' approach and promote in-depth intercultural learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

ICC, Telecollaboration, and Intercultural Learning

Bennett and Bennett (2004) underscore that learners may be linguistically competent, but unable to cope successfully with real-life situations where they need to negotiate meaning with others within the framework of cultural context. For this reason, it is vital that learners develop their ICC skills alongside their L2 skills. To build student ICC during this project, Byram's (1997) model was used to provide language pedagogy guidelines and as a curricular framework. His model describes ICC as the ability to "understand and relate to people from other countries" (p. 5), and to "establish and maintain relationships" based on mutual respect (p. 3). Accordingly, learners need to be open-minded in their interactions with people from other cultures in order to interpret cross-cultural perspectives in a non-judgmental

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