

Chapter 13

Cross-Institutional Blended Learning in Teacher Education: A Case Study

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents findings from an exploratory case study, with the purpose of illustrating how student teachers of English as a Second Language (ESL) in the United States and student teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Germany evaluated a blended learning course that focused on jointly creating Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) units via the Internet. This project enabled participants to share perspectives about teaching contexts and practices in other countries and learn about TBLT through model learning (Willis, 2001). Consequently, student teachers not only became more proficient users of technology, but also grew from the unique opportunity of collaborating with their future colleagues abroad. The author presents the German and American student teachers' perspectives with regard to what both groups gained by participating in this project. Finally, the author makes suggestions for language teacher training.

BACKGROUND

Educators have advocated a strong need to integrate technology into teacher education (see Hubbard & Levy, 2006; Kassen, Lavine, Murphy-Judy, & Peters, 2007) and to advance pre-service

language teachers' professional literacy by modeling "innovative uses of technology" (Willis, 2001, p. 309). Or, in Pasternak's terms, "[i]f technology is to be used as practice, the data show that experimentation needs to start in the methods classes for it to move into the field experiences and beyond" (2007, n.p.). As a result, more and

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more institutions have formed partnerships in order to systematically integrate technology into their teacher education programs (for an overview, see Dawson, Swain, Johnson, & Ring, 2004). Additionally, the importance of intercultural competence and the role of technology have been stressed increasingly (e.g., Lamy & Goodfellow, 2009; Levy, 2007; Thorne, 2003), and a special issue of *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education* focuses on intercultural education and the role of technology to facilitate such education in formal courses of teacher education and in the lifelong reflective practice of educators (Davis, Cho, & Hagenson, 2005). For example, in the International Leadership for Educational Technology project, participants rated intercultural experience as very important because such experiences helped them “expand their cultural awareness and enhance their understanding of educational technology in different contexts” (Davis et al., 2004, n.p.).

In line with these calls, this exploratory case study builds on previous work on technology-based model learning in pre-service teacher education (e.g., Gibson, 2002; Gimbert & Zembal-Saul, 2002; Hubbard & Levy, 2006; Munday, Windham & Stamper, 1991; Willis, 2001). A number of studies have focused on the integration of online and blended learning formats in cross-institutional teacher education settings (e.g., Arnold & Ducate, 2006; Arnold, Ducate, Lomicka, & Lord, 2005; Fuchs, 2003, 2006a, 2006b; Lord & Lomicka, 2008; Müller-Hartmann, 2005; Scherff & Paulus, 2006; Shaughnessy, Purves, & Jackson, 2008). Doering and Beach, for example, report on how using hypermedia in a collaborative writing project with middle school students helped student teachers learn how to model literacy practices of making intertextual or hypertextual links (2002). In addition, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) courses can be made more authentic and relevant to participants by enhancing contact and engagement between pre-service and in-service teachers (Egbert, 2006).

Along similar lines, the purpose of the project described in this paper was to create a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; see also Hanson-Smith, 2006) to support blended learning and model the implementation of technology through experiential learning (e.g., Fuchs, 2006a; Müller-Hartmann, 2005). More specifically, the project involved student teachers at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the Pädagogische Hochschule Heidelberg (Germany) who served as unique cultural and professional resources for one another especially with regard to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and task-based language teaching (TBLT). Finally, the teacher educators hoped that participants would be able to apply the project’s format to their future teaching.

The reasons for fostering technology use in L2 teaching are manifold. First, the Internet provides a wealth of current and authentic information allowing language learners to expand their knowledge in any discipline, and Web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs, and chats also offer unlimited sources of authentic language use for native-speaker and non-native speaker interaction (e.g., Chapelle, 2003; Egbert & Hanson-Smith, 2007; Herring, 1996; Hubbard & Levy, 2006; Kassen, Lavine, Murphy-Judy, & Peters, 2007). One strand of research into such tools is *telecollaboration*, a term first introduced by Warschauer (1996) and further specified by Belz (2002; 2003) as the institutionalized, electronically mediated intercultural communication under the guidance of a languacultural expert (i.e., teacher or peer) for the purposes of foreign language learning and the development of intercultural competence. Formal telecollaborative partnerships are of “particular interest with respect to social dimensions of language learning and use since this type of learning environment consists of pairs or groups of distally-located students embedded in different sociocultural contexts and institutional settings” (Belz, 2003, p. 61). Thus, the potential of CMC to foster intercultural learning is generally seen as the main attraction of telecollaborative ex-

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