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Telecollaboration 2.0

Language, Literacies and
Intercultural Learning in the 21ˢᵗ Century

TELECOLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

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Introduction

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> In the dynamically evolving and turbulent global culture, multiple literacies necessitate multicultural literacies, being able to understand and work with a heterogenity of cultural groups and forms, acquiring literacies in a multiplicity of media, and gaining the competences to participate in a democratic culture and society. (Kellner 2002: 166)

In the past decade, outside of education, the Internet, and especially Web 2.0, has led to a change in the way knowledge is created and shared (Benkler 2006; Magnan 2008) and, some argue, in the very nature of knowledge itself (Siemens 2006); examples would be the collective bottom-up creation of knowledge on sites like Wikipedia and the concept of 'citizen journalism' (Bowman and Willis 2003). However, in education the predominant paradigm continues to be the one-way transmission and prescriptivist organization of knowledge. This paradigm is "becoming obsolete in a global post-industrial and networked society with its demands for new skills for the workplace, participation in new social and political environs, and interaction with novel forms of culture and everyday life" (Kellner 2002: 155). This is not to say that new technologies are not used, but rather that when they are used, the technology-mediated literacy practices that are adopted "reflect a strong tendency to perpetuate the old, rather than to engage with and refine or re-invent the new" (Lankshear and Knobel 2006: 55). This contradiction needs to be overcome through new educational practices that aim to help students learn how to operate effectively in this new context. They need to develop "the resources and skills necessary to engage with social and technical change, and to continue learning throughout the rest of their lives" (Owen *et al.* 2006: 3).

These resources and skills are the "multiple literacies" referred to in the quote that opens this chapter. And how can one talk about multiple literacies without, of course, considering language? The role of language in global networks is indeed complex, and at the same time of great importance. The Internet has been seen to both contribute to the hegemony of English as a lingua franca or international language (Crystal 1997; Sharifian 2009) as well as to giving a voice to the diversity of languages of the world (Warschauer 2002; Hafez 2007). The impact of Web 2.0 is even more complex, for as Pegrum (2009) writes, "in the Web 2.0 environment, there is a dynamic fusion of media and a rich blend of cultures, languages and, within languages, evolving codes and registers" (p. 22). The practice of telecollaboration responds to the complex demands that communication in today's world puts on foreign language learners by promoting the development of language skills, intercultural communicative competence and, we would argue, new online literacies.

Telecollaboration 2.0

Given the varying interpretations of the word 'telecollaboration' found in the literature (Warschauer 1996; Harris 2002; Belz 2003; O'Dowd 2006; O'Dowd and Ritter 2006; Dooly 2008), we would like to define what is meant by telecollaboration in the context of this volume. In language learning contexts, telecollaboration is generally understood to be Internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/national backgrounds, set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence (as defined by Byram 1997) through structured tasks. Models of telecollaboration such as the *Cultura* model (Furstenberg *et al.* 2001; Bauer *et al.* 2006; Furstenberg and Levet in this volume) and institutional forms of Tandem learning (Kötter 2003; O'Rourke 2005) traditionally involve language learners

in geographically distant locations engaging in bilingual, bicultural exchanges (Thorne 2006). However, the implementation of these online intercultural exchanges in a diversity of contexts has extended the scope of telecollaboration so that it now also includes exchanges between groups of participants who are not necessarily all language learners, but also trainee teachers (Belz and Müller-Hartmann 2003; Lee 2006; Fuchs 2007), in-service teachers (Müller-Hartmann 2006), Media or Communications students (O'Dowd 2006; Schneider and von der Emde 2006) and heritage speakers (Blake and Zyzik 2003). Exchanges may be multilateral, involving more than two groups in any one exchange (Müller-Hartmann 2006; Hauck 2007; Hauck and Lewis 2007), and they may also work in a variety of configurations. Exchanges may not necessarily be bilingual, indeed they can be monolingual, involving just one of the partners' languages (Lee 2006; O'Dowd 2006) or neither's, with the adoption of a lingua franca (Basharina 2007; Guth 2008), or they can be multilingual, involving the sharing of more than two languages (Fratter, Helm and Whigham 2005). In this volume we take on this extended definition of telecollaboration, which has also been defined as Internet-mediated Intercultural Foreign Language Education (ICFLE) (Belz and Thorne 2006) and Online Intercultural Exchange (O'Dowd 2007).

In the last few years much hyperbole has surrounded Web 2.0, which for some is just a new technology bubble while for others it is a radical transformation in the way people communicate, socialise, do business (Tapscott and Williams 2006) and do politics (Tumulty 2008; Delany 2008), as seen by the extraordinary role played by social media in Barack Obama's 2008 election campaign for the US presidency or in the organization and reporting of the protests after the 2009 elections in Iran. As well as being a contested issue, there is considerable confusion as to what Web 2.0 actually is (Anderson 2007): does it refer to technology or philosophy? Tools or practices? Is it a publishing revolution or a social one (Alexander 2006)? Web 2.0 means many things to different people and the answers you get to these questions depend on who it is that you ask. '2.0' was originally coined (O'Reilly 2005) in a business context to describe changes in

the way users could use and interact on the Internet, but the impact of these changes extends to all sectors. With the development and subsequent availability of new, easy-to-use publishing tools on the Internet such as blogs, wikis and video-sharing websites, users began to become more active, generating and sharing content, and creating online communities on the Web. Web 2.0 represents a move from a view of the Web as an 'information revolution' to a "relationship revolution" (Schrage 2001), and is said to be driven by ideals such as sharing, openness, collective intelligence, flexibility and collaboration. However, Web 2.0 has also been the object of harsh criticism and some believe that:

> […] the anonymous, unfettered nature of user-generated media is contributing to [the corruption of our culture] by misinforming our young people, corroding our tradition of physical civic participation, endangering our individual right to privacy, and damaging our sense of personal responsibility and accountability. (Keen 2008: xx)

In this volume we seek not to wholeheartedly and uncritically embrace Web 2.0 but rather to conceptualise Web 2.0 from the language educator's standpoint, looking at the new tools and the types of communication and activities they facilitate and promote. We look at how not only the tools, but concepts and ideologies behind Web 2.0 can be used in telecollaboration by teachers and learners to promote deep learning of language, intercultural competence and awareness and online literacies, not for "the shameless self-admiration of the mythical Narcissus" (Keen 2008: 7). It is extremely important when implementing new technological tools and approaches in teaching and learning to consider why and how they are being adopted, and what added value they offer to the learning experience.

Tim Berners-Lee, in defense of the original World Wide Web, stated that Web 2.0 does not mark a radical break from what is now considered Web 1.0, but rather a more complete implementation of what the Web was originally intended to be (Berners-Lee 2006). Similarly, the concept of Telecollaboration 2.0 introduced in this volume does not mark a radical break from the practice of telecollaboration,

which has always exploited the social-relational aspects of the Web, but rather it expands upon 'traditional' theories and practices of tele-collaboration by introducing new issues and approaches as well as the new tools and opportunities for collaboration and exchange offered by Web 2.0. As Warschauer (1996) states when discussing develop-ments in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL):

> […] the introduction of a new phase does not necessarily entail rejecting the programs and methods of a previous phase; rather the old is subsumed within the new. In addition, the phases do not gain prominence in one fell swoop, but, like all innovations, gain acceptance slowly and unevenly. (p. 3)

Clearly we cannot claim that Telecollaboration 2.0 is a new phase, but it marks the beginning of a gradual shift towards new pedagogies, approaches and contexts for language and intercultural learning, which will be discussed from varying points of view by the authors in this volume.

Language Learning and Intercultural Communicative Competence

The goals of telecollaboration combine aspects of language, inter-cultural learning, and intracultural learning (Belz 2006). The main aim of such exchanges is not to merely provide a platform for language practice, but to lead participants to develop intercultural communi-cative competence (ICC) (Byram 1997) through interaction and ex-change (Belz and Thorne 2006). The goal of telecollaboration and, more generally, foreign language education, is no longer to produce near-native speakers (Commission of the European Communities 2003) but rather the more realistic and, for many, more desirable 'intercultural speakers' who are, as Byram (ibid.) explains, able "to see and manage the relationships between themselves and their own cul-tural beliefs, behaviours and meanings […] and those of their inter-locutors" (p. 12). As Thorne (2006) writes:

> It is not an over-bold statement to suggest that the burgeoning research and pedagogical interest in ICFLE approaches are catalyzing a new alchemy within

foreign language education, one in which linguistic precision and discourse competence continue to play roles, but in the service of cultivating the capacity to make collectively relevant meanings in the inherently intercultural contexts of everyday life. (p. 23)

An integral part of the way to becoming an intercultural speaker is intracultural learning, that is learning about one's own culture(s) and developing the ability to reflect on the origin of one's own beliefs and behaviours. As Byram (1997) states: "awareness of one's own values allows a conscious control of biased interpretation" (p. 35). Indeed, critical cultural awareness does not require students to adapt to values of the 'target culture(s)' but rather to be aware of their own values and how they may influence their own behaviour.

Intercultural competence[1] is a transversal skill that can serve learners in numerous contexts that extend beyond the classroom and the specific language being learned. Developing this competence serves humanistic and political ends. According to the European Parliament (2006), developing linguistic and intercultural competence provides:

[...] the means for intercultural dialogue and dialogue between citizens to strengthen respect for cultural diversity and deal with the complex reality in our societies and the coexistence of different cultural identities and beliefs. (p. 1)

It is also considered a key component of education for democratic citizenship (Starkey 2003). Similarly in the USA, the Modern Language Association's 2007 report on the state of language teaching in the US recognized the importance of developing intercultural competence in the post 9/11 geopolitical climate. The report (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages 2007) states: "our whole culture must become less ethnocentric, less patronizing, less ignorant of others, less Manichaean in judging other cultures, and more at home with the rest of the world" (p. 1). The association declared it was

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1   ICC is used by Byram and other authors to refer specifically to intercultural *communicative* competence in a foreign language, while intercultural competence is not necessarily linked to foreign language competence. However, in the general literature the two terms are often found to be used interchangeably.

prepared to lead the way in the reorganization of language and cultural education to produce "educated speakers who have deep translingual and transcultural competence" (ibid.: 3).

At the same time, from a more practical point of view, intercultural communicative competence is seen as a fundamental skill for success in the job market in today's global economy (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2004). Workplaces are becoming increasingly international/global as a result of the dramatic increase in cross-border mergers and acquisitions (Karain 2008) and increased mobility as well as online communication across borders means that intercultural competence is increasingly sought by employers (Lehtonen and Karjalainen 2008). In Britain, for instance, a flexible framework for NOS (National Occupational Standards) in intercultural skills has recently been developed by CILT (2008), the UK National Centre for Languages. The importance of intercultural skills for successful global trading has long been recognised and economic interests have promoted the development of intercultural skills and indeed the burgeoning of intercultural service providers (Wederspahn 2000). It is the educational sector which has been slower to recognize the importance of intercultural competence and to find a place for its development and assessment in traditional academic curricula (Gröpel 2003).

New Online Literacies

What is, perhaps, a distinguishing feature of Telecollaboration 2.0 is the prominence given to the development of new online literacies. Technology has always been instrumental to telecollaboration, but the mastering of online literacies is rarely featured amongst its goals. Belz and Thorne (2006) write in their introduction to ICFLE: "as pervasive and alluring as the role of technology in FLE might be, we do not view the adjective 'internet-mediated' to be the most important word in the title of this volume" (p. ix). Indeed, in their volume, the focus is on the 'intercultural' and:

> […] the potential for FLE to serve as a site for the complexification of the self on linguistic, social, cultural and ethical planes through lived experiences of communicative interaction with persons from other cultures in both additional and native languages. (p. ix)

While we endorse the importance of the intercultural, we also feel that the Internet and, in particular Web 2.0, is not merely a tool for mediation but a significant social phenomenon which has generated a multiplicity of new contexts in which people interact. Participation in online communities is and will become increasingly part of many people's multiple identities. A consequence of this is that "we need to engage with multiple ways of speaking, being and learning, with multilayered modes of identity at global, regional, national and local levels" (Pennycook 2007 in Pegrum 2008). Learners thus:

> […] need new operational and cultural 'knowledges' in order to acquire new languages that provide access to new forms of work, civic and private practices in their everyday lives. At the same time […] learners need to develop strengths in the critical dimension of literacy as well. (Lankshear and Knobel 2006: 16).

This is why we have included the development of new online literacies, in their many dimensions, as an objective of Telecollaboration 2.0, as illustrated in Figure 1 below.
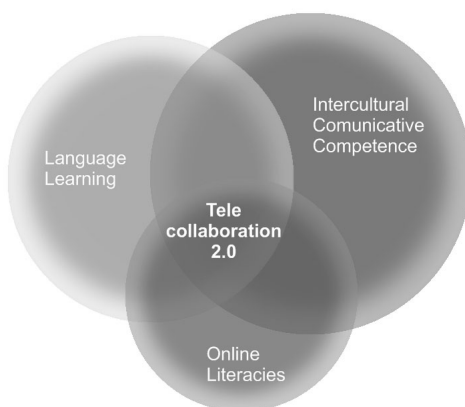

Figure 1: Goals of Telecollaboration 2.0.

Over the past 15 years, several different terms have been proposed to speak of the new skills and knowledge students need in today's so-called information society. The terms have varied depending on the context of use: information literacy (Shapiro and Hughes 1996), digital literacy (Lanham 1995; Gilster 1997), and participation literacy (Giger 2006). However, there is a growing tendency to speak not of single types of literacy in different contexts, but rather to use the plural form 'literacies' as in electronic literacies (Warschauer 1999), silicon literacies (Snyder 2002) multiliteracies (Cope and Kalantzis, 2003) and new literacies (Lankshear and Knobel 2006). We have chosen the term 'new online literacies', based on Lankshear and Knobel's definition of 'new literacies' where they mean 'new' in both a paradigmatic and ontological sense. By paradigmatic they mean a "new approach to thinking about literacy as a social phenomenon" (ibid.: 24) hence with a sociocultural perspective, rather than with a psycholinguistic perspective. The ontological sense of 'new' in their definition refers to two aspects of what they describe as the "new technical stuff" and the "new ethos stuff" of new literacies. The former regards practices which are mediated by what they call "post-typographic" forms of texts, such as text messaging, navigating 3D worlds online, uploading images from a camera to a computer, etc. The latter refers to a new mindset which is "more 'participatory', more 'collaborative' and more 'distributed' as well as less 'published', less 'individuated' and less 'author-centric' than conventional literacies" (ibid.: 25). We have chosen to specify new *online* literacies for we are writing about the online context. This is not to say, however, that new online literacies displace the conventional literacies associated with the typographic medium, for these are, as researchers have shown, "a gateway to successful entry into the world of new literacies" (Warschauer 2007: 43).

To summarize then, as was stated at the beginning of this section, Telecollaboration 2.0 can be seen as an enhancement of the practice of telecollaboration. Although telecollaboration has always posited the use of technology in language education within a sociocultural paradigm (see Dooly this volume), we believe that the Web 2.0 mindset and technologies enrich the sociocultural potential

of telecollaboration. In addition to the language and intercultural dimensions comes the new literacies dimension. The open, collaborative and relational mindset of Web 2.0 and the multimodal, social, Internet-based 2.0 environments and tools place the emphasis on collaboration and participation in Telecollaboration 2.0. As well as increasing the different modes in which learners can communicate, exchange, compare and contrast information, 2.0 tools facilitate the collaborative construction of knowledge in the form of what can be seen as new cultural practices or artifacts such as blogs, wikis and virtual worlds, to name just a few. Telecollaboration 2.0 provides a complex context for language education as it involves the simultaneous use and development of language skills, intercultural communicative competence and new online literacies which, in many ways overlap one another in their operational, cultural and critical dimensions (see Helm and Guth in this volume). But this complexity reflects the increasingly complex, connected, global society in which learners do and will have to operate.

A Critical Approach

Though online literacies are an important aspect of Telecollaboration 2.0, our approach is by no means technology-driven, rather it is experimental and critical (Kellner 2002). We are aware that we, and the contributors to this volume, are writing from the privileged position of educators working in 'Western' educational institutions and thus the references we make are limited to our specific contexts – much as we would like to broaden our scope, this is beyond the aims of this volume. Most of the technologies we use and describe here were created in 'Western' contexts and reflect the values (and often languages) of their creators. We are privileged in that we are in a position to experiment with and bring about educational reform because technological resources are not generally lacking and the various goals of Telecollaboration 2.0 are amongst those officially endorsed

by institutions such as the Council of Europe. Yet, as Kellner (2002) writes, it is important for us as educators, to be critically aware:

> Certainly, we need to design alternative technologies, pedagogies and curricula for the future, and should attempt to design new social and pedagogical relations as well, but we need to criticise misuse, inappropriate use, overinflated claims, and exclusions and oppressions involved in the introduction of new technologies into education. (p. 165)

We view Telecollaboration 2.0 from an educational standpoint as a tool to promote reflection, understanding, criticism, equality and transformation rather than to perpetuate inequalities and drive forward market-driven agendas. In this sense telecollaboration can be seen to give foreign language education in our 'Western' contexts, a social/political purpose.

Although telecollaboration is a relatively recent educational approach, practitioners have, as Lamy and Goodfellow note in their contribution to this volume, regularly reviewed and evaluated the effectiveness of their practice, and have not attempted to obfuscate the difficulties which often characterize telecollaboration exchanges. It is difficult for foreign language educators to ignore developments in communication technologies, for as Chun (2008) writes, "the advent of second-generation Web 2.0, combined with the FL teaching profession's focus on communication and cultures, propel us toward using CMC for intercultural collaborations, fraught as they may be with difficulties" (p.15). What we can do, though, is continue to reflect on our practice and address the social and educational issues involved, which is what this volume attempts to do.