

BFF
Beiträge zur Fremdsprachenforschung
Band 16

Maria Eisenmann/Jeanine Steinbock (Hrsg.)

**Sprache, Kulturen, Identitäten:
Umbrüche durch Digitalisierung?**



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Sprachen, Kulturen, Identitäten: Umbrüche durch Digitalisierung?

28. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für

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Vorwort

Digitale Formen der Interaktion und Kommunikation, digitale Formen der Inhaltsvermittlung, der Veranschaulichung, der Speicherung von Daten und Informationen haben das menschliche Zusammenleben und Arbeiten in den letzten Jahren sehr stark verändert. Die in der Gesellschaft stetig an Bedeutung gewinnende Digitalisierung hat auch einen unmittelbaren Einfluss auf die Schulentwicklung und erfordert eine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Einsatz neuer Medien für das Lehren und Lernen in der Schule. Medienkompetenz wurde bislang eher als ein Lernfeld betrachtet, das additiv zu vorhandenen Kompetenzen zu vermitteln ist. Zunehmend wird jedoch deutlich, dass die Digitalisierung auch unsere Sprache(n), Kultur(en) und Identität(en) sehr grundlegend durchdringt, und damit den Fremdsprachenunterricht in einem wesentlich größeren Ausmaß herausfordert. Diese Umbrüche haben bzw. werden einen großen Einfluss auf Entwicklungen in der Fremdsprachenforschung und ihre Arbeitsfelder haben. Dabei betrifft Digitalisierung nicht nur den Medieneinsatz, sondern stellt darüber hinaus Fragen an die Lerninhalte und Methoden in allen Sprachen und tangiert die Arbeit von Schule viel weitreichender.

Schon heute besteht das Angebot an digitalen Lehr- und Lernmaterialien mitunter aus vielfältigen Anwendungen wie animierten Grammatikerläuterungen, individualisier- und programmierbaren Wortschatztrainern, differenzierten Inhalten sowie Aufgaben- und Übungsangeboten. (Außer-)schulische Lernorte können durch digitale Anwendungen in ganz neuer Weise genutzt und ergänzt werden. Der Unterricht kann Phasen der frontalen Vermittlung von Inhalten in die häusliche Vor- und Nachbereitung auslagern, um so Zeit für die Dinge zu gewinnen, die nur oder besser gemeinsam in der realen Interaktion und Kommunikation gelingen können. All dies kann zu differenzierten Lehr-Lernangeboten ebenso führen, wie zu gläsernen Lernenden und Lehrenden. Dabei entstehen Fragen ab welchem Alter und in welchem Ausmaß Lernende digitalen Lernangeboten begegnen sollten: Sollten Schülerinnen und Schüler in der Grundschule schon programmieren lernen? Sollen Lernende ihr Smartphone in der Schule und in Klassenarbeiten nutzen dürfen? Führt die Nutzung digitaler Wörterbücher zu eingeschränkten produktiven Wortschatzkenntnissen? Und überhaupt: Stehen für die Digitalisierung die notwendigen finanziellen Mittel für alle zur Verfügung, ohne dabei wirtschaftliche und soziale Gräben weiter aufzureißen? Dies alles macht deutlich, dass Digitalisierung auch beim Lehren und Lernen von Fremdsprachen zwar Umbrüche anregt und bisweilen provoziert, dass damit aber noch nicht die Frage beantwortet ist, ob solche Anregungen aufgegriffen werden sollten bzw. wie den gewaltigen Veränderungen sinnvoll begegnet werden kann.

Der 28. Kongress der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Fremdsprachenforschung (DGFF), der vom 25. bis 28. September 2019 an der Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg stattfand, führte unter dem Motto "Sprachen, Kulturen, Identitäten: Umbrüche durch Digitalisierung?" die Forschung zusammen, die das Lehren und Lernen von Sprachen im Spannungsfeld von analogen und digitalen Ansätzen und Methoden beleuchtet und dabei insbesondere Sprachlernen und -lehren im Kontext der zunehmenden Digitalisierung und den damit einhergehenden Herausforderungen in den Blick nimmt. Zudem konnten bei diesem DGFF-Kongress auf sprachpolitischer, spracherwerbstheoretischer, curricularer sowie methodischer Ebene wissenschaftliche Grundlagen und konkrete Praktiken der (digitalen) Auseinandersetzung mit Sprachen, Kulturen und Identitäten im 21. Jahrhundert ausgeleuchtet werden.

Der Kongress bot den Teilnehmenden zahlreiche Möglichkeiten des Austauschs rund um das Thema der Digitalisierung im Fremdsprachenunterricht. Im Zentrum der Diskussionen standen Fragen danach, wie zeitgemäße digitale Lehr- und Lernsettings in der Fremdsprachendidaktik aussehen, wie digitale Strukturen und Werkzeuge die Arbeit in heterogenen Lerngruppen bereichern können, was sich in der Praxis bewährt hat und welche innovativen Materialien und Methoden einen erfolgreichen Fremdsprachenunterricht bereichern. Diesen und vielen weiteren Fragen widmeten sich die Kongressbeitragenden, um Antworten zu finden, die zu der Weiterentwicklung des Lehrens und Lernens von Sprachen im digitalen Zeitalter beitragen können.

Dazu fanden zwei Plenarveranstaltungen statt sowie zahlreiche Beiträge in elf Sektionen, sechs Freien Formaten, einer Posterausstellung und einer Podiumsdiskussion zum Thema "Digitalisierung und Fremdsprachenlernen". Unter der Leitung von Prof. Dr. Andreas Grünewald (Universität Bremen) diskutierten Franziska Baier (Universität Frankfurt), Dr. Lutz Goertz (mmb Institut), Prof. Dr. Detmar Meurers (Universität Tübingen) und Prof. Dr. Barbara Schmenk (Universität Waterloo) das Thema Digitalisierung im Fremdsprachenunterricht und zeigten dabei einen differenzierten Blick auf die Chancen und Risiken des Fremdsprachenlernens 2.0. Die zwei Plenarvorträge gaben dem Kongress einen inhaltlichen Rahmen und konnten zu Beginn und zum Abschluss interessante Einblicke in den Bereich der Digitalisierung in der Fremdsprachendidaktik geben. Prof. Dr. Barbara Schmenk (Universität Waterloo, Kanada) stimmte die Teilnehmenden zum Kongressauftakt mit dem Plenarvortrag "Digitalisierung, Globalisierung, Entschulung? Perspektiven der Fremdsprachenforschung" auf bildungstheoretische Perspektiven der Digitalisierung ein. Sie zeigte Möglichkeiten und Herausforderungen und besprach das Konzept der *digital literacy* und seine Bedeutung für das Fremdsprachenlernen. Mit dem Konzept der 'Entschulung' lud sie die Zuhörenden

zu einer kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit den Perspektiven für das Sprachenlernen vor dem Hintergrund der Digitalisierung ein. Prof. Dr. Robert O'Dowd (Universität León, Spanien) zeigte bei seinem Plenarvortrag mit dem Titel "Contact=Learning? Reviewing Learning Outcomes of Virtual Exchange in Foreign Language Education" Möglichkeiten des Fremdsprachenlernens mittels virtueller Austauschmöglichkeiten. Anhand konkreter Praxisbeispiele illustrierte er u.a. kulturelle Aspekte, die diesen virtuellen Austausch beeinflussen, unterzog das Konzept einer kritischen Betrachtung und zeigte mit dem Ziel der interkulturellen Kompetenz anhand aktueller Forschung die positiven Einflüsse virtueller Begegnungssituationen für das Fremdsprachenlernen.

Die elf Sektionen, die von den Vertreterinnen und Vertretern verschiedener Fachbereiche gestaltet und moderiert worden sind, bildeten thematisch eine differenzierte Betrachtung des Kongressthemas. Die Themenbereiche umfassten

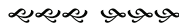
- Lehr-/Lernmaterialien und *Blended Learning*,
- neue Lehr-Lernwelten für junge Fremdsprachenlernende,
- Text- und Kulturdidaktik analog und digital,
- Mehrsprachigkeit, plurikulturelle Identitäten und Digitalisierung,
- Diagnostik, Bewertung, Evaluation: digitale Umbrüche?
- das Spannungsfeld von Kompetenzen, Inhalten und Digitalisierung,
- Digitalisierung und Lehrerbildung,
- curriculare Herausforderungen durch Digitalisierung,
- Forschungsmethoden und -methodologie,
- die Erschließung von neuen Lernorten und Lernräumen sowie
- Heterogenität und Inklusion.

Die "Freien Formate" bereicherten den Kongress mit unterschiedlichen Austausch- und Informationsangeboten in den folgenden Bereichen:

- Das fachdidaktische Wissen (FDW) angehender Fremdsprachenlehrkräfte
- Nachwuchs-Café (*reloaded*): Auf dem Weg zur Professur
- *Linguistic Landscapes* und ihre plurilinguale und -kulturelle Dimension aus fremdsprachendidaktischer Perspektive
- (World Café) zum Thema: Inklusiver Fremdsprachenunterricht in Zeiten digitaler Transformation – Möglichkeiten und Herausforderungen
- Die Künste und der Fremdsprachenunterricht – Schnittflächen und Perspektiven sowie
- Re-thinking picture books for intermediate and advanced learners

Die Postersektion bot den Teilnehmenden einen interessanten Einblick in und Austausch zu verschiedenen Forschungsprojekten. Mit dem Posterpreis wurde in diesem Jahr Leonhard Krombach ausgezeichnet, dessen Poster den Titel

"Schriftliche Sprachmittlung im Englischunterricht der Sekundarstufe II – eine qualitativ-empirische Studie" trug.



Der vorliegende Band enthält die überarbeiteten Texte der beiden Plenarvorträge, von den Sektionsleitungen ausgewählte Beiträge aus den einzelnen Sektionen sowie die Berichte über die Freien Formate.

Der hier dokumentierte Kongress wurde nur durch die großzügige Mithilfe zahlreicher Personen und Institutionen ermöglicht.

Wir danken:

- der Julius-Maximilians-Universität Würzburg und der Hochschulleitung für die Möglichkeit, den 28. DGFF-Kongress durchführen zu können
- Dr. Markus Söder, Ministerpräsident des Freistaats Bayern, für die Schirmherrschaft
- dem Vizepräsident Prof. Dr. Baris Kabak für seine Grußworte
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- dem Studentenwerk Würzburg, insbesondere der Catering-Abteilung
- der B. Neumann Residenzgaststätte und dem Maritim Hotel Würzburg
- dem Vorstand und Beirat der DGFF
- allen Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern des Lehrstuhls Fachdidaktik – Moderne Fremdsprachen unter der Leitung von Prof. Dr. Maria Eisenmann und Dr. Elena Dieser aus der Slawistik

Ein besonderer Dank gilt den beiden Hauptvortragenden, Prof. Dr. Barbara Schmenk und Prof. Dr. Robert O'Dowd, den Diskutanten und dem Moderator der Podiumsdiskussion, den Sektionsleitungen, den Moderatorinnen und Moderatoren der Freien Formate, den vielen Vortragenden und Michelle Zirkel und Alexander Hemmerich für die sorgfältige Einrichtung des Manuskripts.

Maria Eisenmann & Jeanine Steinbock
Würzburg, im September 2020

Plenarveranstaltungen

ROBERT O'DOWD

Reviewing the Learning Outcomes of Virtual Exchange in Foreign Language Education

1. Introduction

Higher education is increasingly concerned with the task of preparing graduates to be active and responsible global citizens in a world which is inherently digitalised, globalised and multicultural in nature. However, while contemporary students may have been born in a digital age, research has shown us that digital natives are not necessarily good at formal digital skills such as information retrieval, online communication or content evaluation (Kirschner & van Merriënboer 2013). Similarly, while international travel is relatively inexpensive and easy to engage in, we find that international student mobility in the European Union and the USA remains under 10%. And while access to other cultural perspectives through the media and the internet has never been easier, it seems that this often leads our students to enter into intercultural contact in only the most superficial of ways (Kramsch 2014).

International mobility programmes were for many years considered the most effective way to prepare students to be 'global citizens' and develop their "capacity to critique the world they live in, see problems and issues from a range of perspectives, and take action to address them" (Leask 2015: 17). However, the numbers of students who have engaged in study abroad programmes remain stubbornly low and research has demonstrated the limited impact of study abroad on students' intercultural attitudes and awareness. This has led educational institutions to look increasingly at 'internationalisation at home' (IaH), defined by Beelen and Jones as "the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments" (2015: 9). Models of global competence have been used to structure and integrate IaH in the curriculum (Leask 2015; de Wit 2016).

As part of their IaH initiatives, a growing number of higher education institutions are engaging their students in Virtual Exchange – a rich and multifaceted activity which refers to online intercultural interaction and collaboration projects with partner classes from other cultural contexts under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators (O'Dowd & Lewis 2016; Dooly 2017). In foreign language education, models of Virtual Exchange such as telecollaboration or e-tandem have been in use for decades and form an important part of Computer Assisted Language Learning (Warschauer 1996; Ware & Kramsch 2005) but, over the past two decades, approaches to Virtual Exchange have evolved in different contexts

and different areas of university education and these approaches have had, at times, very diverse pedagogical objectives. For example, approaches in foreign language education have explored the development of autonomy in language learners, foreign language competence (O'Rourke 2007) as well as aspects of intercultural competence (Belz 2001). Facilitator-led models of Virtual Exchange such as Soliya have focussed on bringing students from the West into dialogue with students from the Muslim world with the aim of developing a deeper understanding of the perspectives of others on important socio-political issues and also to develop critical thinking, intercultural communication and media literacy skills (Helm 2017). Meanwhile, initiatives from the field of Business Studies such as XCulture have striven to develop in students the necessary competences to work in what are commonly described as Global Virtual Teams (GVTs) and to give them first-hand experience in online international collaboration in professional contexts (Osland et al. 2013).

In this chapter we review the main approaches to Virtual Exchange in foreign language education and use examples from student reflections in order to illustrate learning outcomes as well as challenges which can emerge from exchanges.

2. Common Approaches to Virtual Exchange in Foreign Language Education

It is useful at this stage to review the two main models of Virtual Exchange which have been used in foreign language education have been the e-tandem and telecollaborative models. Each of these will now be looked at briefly.

The first of these, e-tandem (O'Rourke 2007), emerged from the tradition of tandem language learning which has been widely practised in many European universities. Tandem learning is essentially a language learning activity which involves language exchange and collaboration between two partners who are native speakers of their partners' target language. Its online equivalent, e-tandem, thus involves two native speakers of different languages communicating together and providing feedback to each other through online communication tools with the aim of learning the other's language. E-tandem exchanges are based on the principles of autonomy and reciprocity and the responsibility for a successful exchange generally rests with the learners, who are expected to provide feedback on their partners' messages and on their FL performance. In this sense, tandem partners take on the role of peer-tutors who correct their partners' errors and propose alternative formulations in the target language. In the e-tandem model, the teacher assumes a facilitating role and learners are encouraged to take responsibility for finding their own themes for discussion, correcting their partners' errors, and keeping a learner diary or portfolio to reflect on their own learning progress. E-tandem began to gain popularity throughout European

universities in the early 1990s and a centralized internet site with resources, bibliography and guidelines was financed by European project funding during this time. Today it is still very popular, especially in English-speaking countries where universities connect their students of Spanish, French and German with students of English as a Foreign Language in these countries.

In my own research I have found e-tandem approaches to provide numerous benefits for language learners, especially those of lower levels and those who do not have many opportunities to use their foreign language with native speakers. For example, students report increased confidence in using the foreign language as these extracts from student learner diaries illustrate:

I did this activity and I feel really great because I can see that other people from another county can understand what I am trying to say but also this person can help me to improve.

I find this project very useful and very interesting, because it gives us the opportunity to learn things that we can't find in the textbooks. It's easier to learn when we talk with someone who is in our same situation.

Students also report having opportunities to learn vocabulary in context:

I learned many new things when talking to my partner. I learned colloquial phrases like 'I couldn't help it', 'very drab' and 'pretty much'. I also learned terms specific to his region such as 'brisket' and 'ribs', since they are types of barbecue in Kansas City.

In a related development, there is also a growing interest in higher education in online platforms that provide 'ready-made' e-tandem conversation partners for their students (for example, <https://www.conversifi.com/> and <https://talkabroad.com/>). These platforms function in different ways but the majority connect foreign language students with native speakers in videoconferencing sessions, usually in exchange for a fee which is paid for by the universities involved. When the agreed number of conversations have been completed, the company then provides the students and/or their teachers with recordings of the conversations which can be used as part of students' evaluation. This 'outsourcing' of Virtual Exchange takes a considerable organisational and technical burden off the teacher but there is currently a lack of research as to how learners can develop their linguistic and intercultural competences through such un-mentored virtual conversations with native speakers.

In contrast to e-tandem models, the telecollaborative approach to Virtual Exchange places a greater emphasis on intercultural aspects of language learning and requires students to work together with their international partners in collaborative and comparative tasks related to culture and language. Belz (2001),

for example, reports on a USA-German exchange which involved developing a website which contained bilingual essays and a bilingual discussion of a cultural theme such as racism or family. Another popular intercultural task for classroom integrated exchanges has been the analysis of parallel texts. Belz defines parallel texts as 'linguistically different renditions of a particular story or topic in which culturally-conditioned varying representations of that story or topic are presented' (2005: n.p.). Popular examples of parallel texts which have been used in telecollaborative exchanges include the American film *Three Men and a Baby* and the French original *Trois hommes et un couffin*. In German, telecollaborative projects have engaged learners in the comparison of the German fairy tale *Aschenputtel* by the Brothers Grimm and the animated Disney movie *Cinderella*.

A further task which reflects this approach was the application of ethnographic interviewing in synchronous online sessions. O'Dowd (2005) trained a group of German EFL students in the basic techniques of ethnographic interviewing and the students then carried out interviews with American informants in the USA using group-to-group videoconferencing sessions and one-to-one email exchanges before writing up reflective essays on their findings. The combination of synchronous and asynchronous tools allowed the students to develop different aspects of their intercultural competence. Videoconferencing was seen to develop students' ability to interact with members of the target culture under the constraints of real-time communication and also to elicit, through a face-to-face dialogue, the concepts and values which underlie their partners' behaviour and their opinions. However, e-mail was employed to both send and receive much more detailed information on the two cultures' products and practices as seen from the partners' perspectives. In other words, e-mail was suited to foster cultural knowledge, while videoconferencing supported the development of students' intercultural negotiating skills.

Another intercultural OIE activity which has become very popular in recent years is the *Cultura* exchange (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet 2001; O'Dowd 2005). This intercultural exchange uses the possibility of juxtaposing materials from the two different cultures together on web pages in order to offer a comparative approach to investigating cultural difference. When using *Cultura*, language learners from two cultures (for example, Spanish learners of English and American learners of Spanish) complete online questionnaires related to their cultural values and associations. These questionnaires can be based on word associations (e.g., What three words do you associate with the word 'Spain?'), sentence completions (e.g., A good citizen is someone who . . .), or reactions to situations (e.g., Your friend is 22 and is still living with his parents. What do you say to him/her?). Each group fills out the questionnaire in their native language. Following this, the results from both sets of students are then compiled and

presented online. Under the guidance of their teachers in contact classes, students then analyse the juxtaposed lists in order to find differences and similarities between the two groups' responses. Following this analysis, students from both countries meet on online message boards to discuss their findings and to explore the cultural values and beliefs which may lie behind the differences in the lists. In addition to the questionnaires, learners are also supplied with online resources such as opinion polls and press articles from the two cultures which can support them in their investigation and understanding of their partner class' responses. The developers of *Cultura* (Furstenberg et al. 2001) report that this contrastive approach helped learners to become more aware of the complex relationship between culture and language and also enabled them to develop a method for understanding a foreign culture. It is also important to point out that in this model, while the data for cultural analysis and learning are produced online, the role of face-to-face teaching is considered vital in helping the learners to identify cultural similarities and differences and also in bringing about reflection on the outcomes of students' investigations on the *Cultura* platform.

In my own research with telecollaborative approaches, I have found several findings emerge repeatedly from students' reflections in portfolios and learner diaries. First, it is clear that telecollaborative exchanges provide students with a much more personal and 'insider' perspective on cultural issues which is also more contextualised than the information usually provided in foreign language textbooks. For example, one student writes:

She [her partner] believes the United States has a history of accepting immigrants from many countries around the world. Her country is basically made up of immigrants, as she said 'no one, except the Native Americans, truly originated in America'. All throughout history, America has been a place people could come to if their own country is in the middle of a crisis, and it is one of her favorite things about America. Immigration is an important topic for her, because as I said before, the country that she lives in is almost made up entirely of immigrants.

As regards whether telecollaborative exchange helps to develop students' openness to cultural otherness and their curiosity about other people and other cultural perspectives, three different tendencies emerge from the student data. First, there are students that clearly benefit from the interaction and are led to develop a more open attitude to the target culture. For example:

I think that helped me to be more open minded. Now I am more interested to know the way of thinking of other people. I think that now I think in another way because I realize that it is important to see things from a different point of view. It is wrong to have only one point of view and only one opinion.

However, there are two more negative attitudes which can also be seen in the data. The first of these can be described as a 'minimisation of difference' (Bennett 1993) and involves students either not noticing cultural difference or choosing to treat difference in a simplistic manner. This often appears in the data in the form of comments which suggest 'deep down we are all the same'. For example:

I have realized that my partner and I aren't so different, in fact, we have similar hobbies and ways to spend our free time. Like I have said, the main differences I see between her country and mine are the timetable and the weather.

The second negative reaction to cultural difference which emerges from the data can be described as 'defence against difference' (Bennett 1993) and occurs when the student's own culture is experienced as the most superior or best way to live. For example:

There are things of USA that I don't like, for example, I think that the young people they don't have as much freedom as in Spain. They are more limited. I am totally against the theme of the weapons. I think that is very dangerous and illogical.

An example of students using videoconferencing and text-based communication in their telecollaborative project work can be seen in the screenshot below:

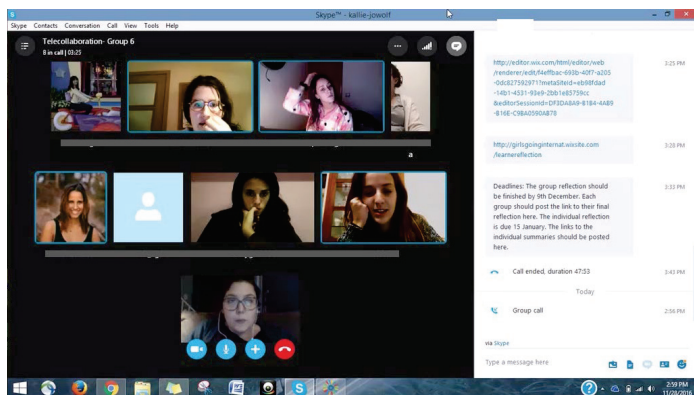


Figure 1: A screenshot of Virtual Exchange taking place in a videoconferencing environment

3. Problems and Challenges

While there are clear benefits to be gained from engaging learners in Virtual Exchange, the examples above confirm what has also been seen by other researchers: Class to class Virtual Exchange often results in negative attitudes

towards the partner group and their culture, misunderstandings and unachieved objectives. The main question which has occupied many researchers is why this is the case and whether these instances of intercultural communication breakdown should be seen as something problematic or as opportunities for learning.

Kramsch and Thorne (2002), for example, found that the reasons for online communication breakdown between their French and American students was due to both groups trying to engage in interaction with each other using not merely different language styles, but culturally different discourse genres, the existence of which both groups appeared to be unaware. While the French students approached the exchange as an academic exercise and used factual, impersonal, restrained genres of writing, the American group regarded the activity as a very human experience which involved bonding with their distant partners and taking a personal interest in finding solutions to the problems which arose.

Several other studies also looked at how the outcomes of intercultural exchanges could be influenced by both macro- as well as micro-level aspects of the environments in which they take place. Belz (2002), reporting on a semester long e-mail-exchange between third-level German and American foreign language students, found that the context and the setting of the two partner groups had a major influence on the success and results of the exchange. Issues such as different institutional and course demands and varying levels of access to technology led to misunderstandings with regard to deadlines for team work and therefore hindered the development of relationships on a personal level.

Other research has revealed how individual students' motivation and intercultural communicative competence can have an important influence on the outcome of online partnerships. In reference to motivation, Ware (2005) identified individual differences in motivation as being an important factor in the low functioning of an exchange. In her study, success in the asynchronous exchange required students to spend a substantial amount of time reading and replying to correspondence, and this often clashed with the amount of time students had put aside for such an academic activity. The importance of individual students' intercultural competence is also illustrated in O'Dowd's study (2003) of five Spanish-English e-mail partnerships. He found that the essential difference between the successful and unsuccessful partnerships was whether students had the intercultural competence to develop an interculturally rich relationship with their partners through the creation of effective correspondence. This type of correspondence took into account the socio-pragmatic rules of the partner's language, provided the partner with personal opinions, asked him/her questions to encourage feedback, tried to develop a personal relationship with the partner, and was sensitive to his/her needs and questions.

The question remains as to whether the repeated cases of communication breakdown and intercultural misunderstanding should be seen as a negative aspect of telecollaborative exchange or rather as a potential 'jump-off' point for exploring why members of different cultures interpret behaviour differently and how different cultural perspectives can be reconciled. Intercultural communication in face-to-face contexts and out of the classroom is also often characterised by misunderstandings and the need to deal with different behaviour and beliefs. It is therefore fair to argue that these cases of 'failed communication' should be exploited as 'rich points' for learning in the classroom. Belz goes so far as to argue that "the clash of cultural faultlines in telecollaborative learning communities ...should not be smoothed over or avoided based on the sometimes negative results of a study such as this one; indeed, they should be encouraged" (2002: 76).

4. Transnational Virtual Exchange in Practice

In recent years more transnational approaches to Virtual Exchange have emerged which move away from a bilingual-bicultural approach to language and culture learning. In comparison to common telecollaborative practices in foreign language education, a transnational approach suggests that it is not sufficient to merely engage second language learners in reflective interaction with members of other cultures. Instead, it is necessary to move from what Byram (2008) describes as 'pre-political' to 'political' levels of acting interculturally. Pre-political approaches (which reflect more traditional approaches such as e-tandem and telecollaborative exchange) involve engaging students in intercultural interaction and then reflecting critically on these encounters. However, global or intercultural citizenship approaches go further and involve learners either instigating change in their own societies based on their collaborations with members of other cultures or actually working with members of other cultures as a transnational group in order to take action about an issue or problem which is common to both societies. During such transnational collaborations, students learn about their partners' cultural practices and also have opportunities to compare cultural perspectives but this is not seen as the ultimate goal of such collaborations.

At the University of León, we are exploring how to introduce a global citizenship approach to our virtual exchanges across different subject areas which take into account but also go beyond pure second language learning. For example, in a project called 'Visions of Europe', students coming from classes of Spain, Finland and Poland worked together using English as a lingua franca to carry out a series of tasks where they explored the significance of being European and what a European identity meant in each country.

The tasks which they carried out were the following:

Task 1: In this task, students should use a video creation tool such as Adobe Spark – <https://spark.adobe.com> or a blogging tool such as www.blogger.com or any online presentation tool to create a presentation about yourself, your hometown and your university. You can also talk about your relationship with your country and with Europe. For example, students in Spain – what does it mean to you to be 'Spanish', 'Polish' or 'Finnish'? And how much variety is there in your country? How different is your town to other parts of your country? And what does being European mean to you on a personal level? When you have shared your online presentation in your working group, watch the presentations of your international partners and leave them some follow-up comments and questions.

Task 2: There are currently many issues which are affecting Europe. However, they are often experienced in different ways in different countries. In this task, students work with their international partners in their working groups to compare how various social and political issues are affecting their countries. They will then report to their local classes about what they have learned about the topic.

Each working group should choose one of these topics. The topics include, for example, how are our countries dealing with the refugee crisis? and with Brexit – opinions and reactions in our countries

Task 3: In this final task we bring together all the issues that we have been discussing over the past number of weeks. In each international working group you will work together with your international partners to create a document suggesting how the European Union can be made more relevant for young people.

In your local class, discuss with your classmates and your teacher what 'being European' and 'belonging to the European Union' means to you and to young people in your country. Each class carries out the following short survey with their friends and other young people – collecting information on what 'being European' means to young people in our countries. You should interview at least 10 people for your survey. The questions to ask include 1) What comes to your mind when you hear the word 'Europe'? and 2) Do you think young people in your country are proud of being in the European Union?

Each class should collect all their results in one report (e.g. Survey results from Spain, Survey results from Poland etc.) and then share these results with your partners in their working groups. You can then meet via zoom with your working group partners to discuss the results of the survey. Finally, in your working groups, you should create a Google doc together called "Making European Union relevant for young people". This document should have a list of suggestions/proposals about how Europe can be more relevant and 'useful' for young people."

The exchange ended with a videoconferencing session which brought together the three classes in a structured interview with a member of the European Parliament representing Poland. The MEP listened to the students' findings from task 3 and then responded to their questions about the European Union and the challenges which young Europeans were currently facing. A screenshot from the videoconference can be seen here.



Figure 2: Screenshot of students meeting with a member of the European Parliament

The students' portfolios and learner diaries highlight some differences between transnational projects and more 'foreign language focussed' models such as e-tandem. First, they tend to move learners away from explicit comparisons between the home and partner cultures and, instead, encourage them to focus on cultural difference per se and how this emerges in contexts of communication and collaboration:

Learning how to communicate in video conference taught me that it is important to be patient and respectful of the other members when speaking since if everyone try to speak and comment at the same time the voices overlap and the understanding turns impossible and messy. So, when video conferencing respecting the others time to speak is key, also organising the turns of intervention of each member and speaking clearly so it can be understood by everyone.

They also report developing more transversal skills related to collaboration and group work. For example this student reported developing time-management skills as well as empathy:

The fact of working with people from other countries prepares us for the future problems that we may have. That is to say, we learnt how to face problems of timing or agreement. I have also learnt that we have to understand and respect other people thoughts.

They also reported becoming more sensitive to cultural differences in how people communicate and express themselves in online contexts:

I have not learned new language but I have learned to express my ideas more accurately so there is not any miscommunication. I have also learned to be careful with the way I present my viewpoints and communicate with people from other cultures, because there can be cases when what I say may be misunderstood. So it is necessary to select appropriate language.

5. Conclusion

There are undoubtedly many arguments for promoting Virtual Exchange in foreign language education contexts and I hope some of them have become evident in this paper. However, as we move forward, it is important to keep in mind that bottom-up class-based practice will not alone ensure the success of Virtual Exchange. It will also be necessary for higher education institutions and policy makers to take certain concrete steps in order to ensure the activities growth and effectiveness. These include providing increased training in order to introduce teachers to the activity, the publication of research to demonstrate impact to potential practitioners and to university management and, finally, the inclusion of Virtual Exchange in educational policy documents and curricula in order to promote the activity and to ensure recognition of students' and teachers' work.

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