

Building up Telecollaborative Networks for Intercultural Learning in the Digital Age



Andreea Rosca
Ana Sevilla-Pavón
(editors)

EDITORIAL COMARES



Interlingua

BUILDING UP TELECOLLABORATIVE NETWORKS FOR INTERCULTURAL LEARNING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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Foreword

There are three crucial elements in terms of language learning in the title of this book. On the one hand, telecollaborative networks; secondly, learning in diverse intercultural settings and, lastly, contextualization within the digital age we are currently immersed in. These are, no doubt, three of the most challenging scenarios we, as language teachers, can implement within the foreign language classroom. However, as will become apparent after reading the chapters in the book, each and every one of the authors has managed to scrutinise and focus on one, two or all three of these aspects in their research or reflective practice studies.

Telecollaboration, understood as a form of network-based language teaching, focuses on the pedagogic practice of bringing together classes of foreign language learners through computer-mediated communication for the purpose of improving their language skills, intercultural communicative competence, and digital literacies. It is recognized as a subfield within computer-assisted language learning as it relates to the use of technology in language learning.

Furthermore, telecollaboration is based on the sociocultural views of learning inspired by Vygotskian theories of learning as a social activity. To this end, and always bearing in mind the ultimate goal of supporting language learners in their endeavour to improve their communicative skills through social activity, many 'daring and brave' language instructors have set about to support their students in meeting the challenges set forth in intercultural communication and overcome many of the possible communication breakdowns for the sake of developing skills geared towards a knowledge society.

Intercultural awareness is, on the other hand, the ability to understand both one's own and other cultures, and particularly the similarities and differences between them. The nuances characterising a person's culture may in many respects define that person's behaviour and communicative strategies. Knowledge of these nuances can, no doubt, help learners overcome the burden of the misunderstandings, mistrust and uncertainties brought about when encountering fellow students who may react in an unexpected manner when confronted with a fellow learner belonging to a different cultural reality.

Despite technology having been mainstream for the past forty odd years, we are nevertheless experiencing the initial stages of the digital revolution that still awaits us. Educational technologies must still take giant steps to satisfy the possibilities of what digitization has to offer, especially in terms of improving accessibility to and sharing of information, increased productivity, cost efficiency, information preservation, etc.

I would like to stress the fact that the editors of this book have been successful in bringing together and linking four crucial aspects of research in applied linguistics, that is, having attracted funding to conduct a research project to promote telecollaboration in language learning geared towards broadening understanding of diverse cultural realities; having successfully implemented the project and conducted research based on a carefully-designed methodology; organised an international conference bringing together scholars from around the world to share and build upon similar projects and experiences and, ultimately, assembled this book that will, no doubt, be inspirational for many other colleagues wishing to gain insight into the very many sides of telecollaboration for language learning, with an intercultural focus, in a technology-enhanced environment.

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This book brings together and links crucial aspects of research in applied linguistics, that is, conducting research to promote telecollaboration/virtual exchange in language learning geared towards broadening understanding of diverse cultural realities; bringing together scholars from around the world to share and build upon projects and experiences and, ultimately, assembling this volume as inspiration for colleagues wishing to undertake or study similar projects and experiences.

There are three crucial elements in terms of language learning in this book: telecollaborative/virtual exchange networks; learning in diverse intercultural settings; and contextualization within the digital age we are currently immersed in. These are three of the most challenging scenarios language teachers can implement within the foreign language classroom. However, as will become apparent after reading this book, each and every one of the authors has managed to scrutinise and focus on one, two or all three of these aspects in their research or reflective practice studies.

Despite technology having been mainstream for the past forty odd years, we are nevertheless experiencing the initial stages of the digital revolution that still awaits us. Educational technologies must still take giant steps to satisfy the possibilities of what digitization has to offer, especially in terms of improving accessibility to and sharing of information, increased productivity, cost efficiency, and information preservation. This book aims to help practitioners and researchers alike gain insight into the very many sides of telecollaboration/virtual exchange for language learning, with an intercultural focus, in technology-enhanced environments.



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