

Telecollaboration in Historical Spaces. Inservice and preservice foreign language teachers imagine future roles for online intercultural exchanges.

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Telecollaboration in Historical Spaces.

Inservice and preservice foreign language teachers imagine future roles for online intercultural exchanges.

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In recent years, the growing availability of internet connected devices and the widespread use of computer mediated communication appear to have reduced barriers to a potential 'normalisation' (Bax 2003, O'Dowd 2010) of online intercultural exchanges (OIE's) in foreign language classes. However, if informal and professional communication has been transformed by digital technology, classroom-based foreign language education has largely remained in a "walled -garden" or an analogue mode. Mentoring of OIE's could be facilitated by students bringing their personal digital devices to a wifi equipped class, but this might also result in unwelcome disruption (Conolé 2008) of teaching space. The use of Web 2.0 and informal social networking sites to set up 'Telecollaboration 2.0' projects (Guth & Helm 2010) could facilitate communication between learners but boundaries between personal and professional spaces might become uncomfortably blurred for both teachers and learners.

More complete integration of OIE's into classroom practices may necessitate a radical rethinking of both teacher and learner roles. While many teachers and learners may now accept some pedagogical benefits of OIE's, they may be ill-prepared either to invest time in such exchanges or to transform their practices to take full advantage of their virtual partners. Perhaps more complex cultural obstacles are at play here preventing OIE's from becoming a 'core' rather than a 'peripheral' (O'Dowd 2010) element of foreign language education.

The C OIE project seeks to 'build bridges' between formal and informal spaces, and to enable 848 learners from a British university (BU), a French university (FU) and a Polish university (PU) to develop digital literacy, linguistic, intercultural and pedagogical competences. The diverse means and modes of interaction and the large numbers of learners involved allow the members of the teaching network to reflect on the different possibilities and the challenges to integrating OIE activities into their pedagogical programs. At the same time, a small group of PU learners involved in the OIE are studying for a master in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and have participated in the exchange as both learners and trainee-teachers.

A group of 6 experienced and 6 trainee language teachers from the C project are to be selected. Using Scollon and Scollon's (2004) concepts of 'historical body' and 'historical space' as a backdrop, we will study and analyse narratives relating their past experiences and their current attitudes to technology use in and outside the classroom. A quantitative/qualitative survey will enable us to further identify their professional and informal practices. Examination of interactions during the OIE will help to confirm their technology uses. A semi-directed interview will enable us to capture and analyse their visions of the place of OIE's in their imagined teaching futures. How far will these teachers and learner/teachers' grounding in existing discourses of practice be an obstacle to future transformations in their classrooms?

This study's findings may help us to better understand barriers and bridges to wider, deeper integration of OIEs in future foreign language programs.