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17. Learning from the Past and Looking to the Future of Online Intercultural Exchange

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As this volume goes to press, Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) will have been employed in university foreign language education for more than 20 years (Cummins and Sayers, 1995; Eck, Legenhausen and Wolff, 1995; Warschauer, 1995). During this period, we have seen the activity play an increasingly important role in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) practice. This is clear from the significant number of articles related to the subject which have appeared over the past decade in research journals such as *Language Learning and Technology*, *ReCALL* and the *CALL Journal*. Recent years have also witnessed a gradual growth in awareness of telecollaboration in mainstream foreign language education – particularly at university level. This can be seen in the presence of chapters on OIE in many of the recent overviews of foreign language methodology including the Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics (2007) and the Routledge Handbook of Language and Intercultural Communication (Jackson, 2013). It is also demonstrated by reflections on telecollaboration in volumes related to intercultural foreign language education (Corbett, 2010; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013) and bilingual education (Mehisto, Frigols, and Marsh, 2008).

This volume aims to contribute to the literature on online intercultural exchange by providing an overview of how OIE is currently being implemented and integrated in university foreign language education around the globe. It also intends to provide insights into how this activity can continue to improve as a tool for developing language and intercultural learning in university students. The chapters presented here portray an activity which has developed a solid body of research and which has evolved in a myriad of ways, providing models of practice which can be integrated into foreign language classrooms (see chapters by Leone and Telles, by MacKinnon and by Furstenberg) and others which can be adapted across academic disciplines (e.g. chapters by Helm and by Rubin). While authors in this volume have highlighted the barriers which exist to OIE's further recognition and integration at an institutional level (see chapters by de Wit, Guth, Wilson and Tudini), the contributions by Dooly, Hauck and MacKinnon and Nissen all pointed to practical ways in which OIE can make a bigger impact as an educational activity.

However, while OIE has undoubtedly grown steadily in recent years, there clearly remains a great deal of work to be done in relation to its dissemination and its development as an effective tool for language and intercultural learning. For example, OIE is an educational tool which remains unfamiliar to a large majority of university educators outside of foreign language education and also to those decision makers who are responsible for developing policy related to initiatives such as *Internationalisation at Home* (Deardorff and Jones, 2012) and *Open Learning (European Commission, 2013)*. It is significant, for example, that an activity such as telecollaboration which has received significant funding in the form of various European research projects (see, for example, the projects reported by Dooly, 2008; Kohn and Warth, 2011 and O'Dowd, 2013) is not mentioned or recommended in recent European Education policy documents such as the publication on *'New Modes of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education'*(2014) by the High Level Group on the Modernisation of

Higher Education, or the European Commission's document on '*Opening Up Education*' (2013).

OIE is also an activity which has received its fair share of criticism in the literature and at times there is a clear skepticism among commentators as to its effectiveness in developing intercultural awareness (Kramsch, 2009; Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013) and as to its contribution to internationalisation processes at university level (Lawton, 2015).

With this in mind, in order for OIE to continue to grow and become an effective tool for university foreign language education, this chapter sets out to explore in detail the main criticisms and concerns which have been expressed in the literature in relation to OIE and reflect on how both practitioners and researchers can react and learn from these critiques. As has already been pointed out by Lamy and Goodfellow, "[t]he field of telecollaboration for language learning has been remarkable for its willingness to review its own effectiveness regularly" (2010:109) and this chapter aims to continue this tradition by proposing how OIE can continue to improve its efficiency as a tool for learning by listening to the criticism it has received from others. I will also explore how OIE may innovate and develop in the future by becoming an integrated tool for university education - not only in foreign language education but also in other disciplines and learning contexts.

LEARNING FROM THE CRITIQUES OF OIE

Hopefully it has become evident from the many different models and initiatives presented and explored in this volume that there is not one single approach to carrying out telecollaborative exchanges. There is a huge range of pedagogical models, task types and online tools available for online exchange and teachers inevitably carry out the projects with their students in a myriad of ways. With this in mind, it is necessary to approach any dismissal or criticism of online intercultural exchange *per se* with extreme caution. The criticisms which some approaches and projects may merit, may not be deserved by other initiatives. Nevertheless, recent publications from authors working outside the immediate area of telecollaborative research have served to highlight certain weaknesses or tendencies which warrant attention in future research and practice in this area. These criticisms relate to a general lack of authenticity involved in engaging classes of language learners in interaction together (Hanna and De Nooy, 2009); the false impression of universality in online communicative practices which teachers and students often bring to OIE (Kramsch, 2009; Kramsch and Ware, 2005; Kramsch and Thorne, 2002); the lack of opportunities for reflection on interaction which telecollaboration allows (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013); and the two-tier approach to student mobility which telecollaboration helps to bring about in university education. Each of these will now be looked at in detail.

OIE and Authenticity

While many educators have been drawn to telecollaboration due to its potential to engage learners in 'authentic' interaction with native speakers or with learners from other countries and to give them first-hand experience of 'real' intercultural communication, the authors Hanna and de Nooy (2009: 88) have pointed out that in class-to-class telecollaboration, "[i]nteraction is restricted to communication with other learners, a situation that is safe and reassuring for beginners and younger learners, but somewhat limiting for more advanced and adult learners, who need practice in venturing beyond the classroom" (2009: 88). The authors propose that it is more authentic and more advantageous to engage learners in interaction in authentic second language (L2) discussion forums such as those related to L2 newspaper and

magazine publications. Their own work focuses on engaging learners of French as a foreign language in discussion forums of French magazines such as *Le Nouvel Observateur*. The authors compare class-to-class telecollaboration with their model and suggest that class to class OIE lacks authenticity as learners are not motivated by a genuine interest in exchanging ideas but rather by an obligation to get good marks for their online interaction. In contrast, by engaging learners in online discussion forums with native speakers "interaction takes place in a context driven by a desire to communicate opinions and exchange ideas rather than by assessment or language learning goals" (p.89).

The authors see two other related weaknesses in OIE. First, they suggest that telecollaboration is problematic due to the personal, friendly relationships which characterize much of online intercultural exchange: "[t]he success of telecollaboration and e-tandem learning activities tends to rely on the quality of the relationship that develops between geographically separated participants. …it is an exchange between a pair of individuals, already positioned as friends" (p.92).

Second, the authors question what they perceive as the overuse of the genre of personal conversation and in particular self-presentation in telecollaborative exchange: "[A]lthough personal conversation is an indispensable genre, it can be a limiting one. …it predisposes the student to launching conversations about the self that inevitably position him/her as the exotic little foreigner/ the other. He/she may fail to learn strategies for opening and maintaining communication of other kinds" (p.195).

These criticisms of online class to class exchange are challenging and should lead us to reflect on some basic aspects of the activity. For example, it is fair to question the level of 'authenticity' of bringing together two or more classes in order to carry out communicative tasks together in different languages. This is inevitably communication which is brought about at the instigation of the teachers involved and not the students themselves. However, one can also question the practicality and 'scalability' of the alternative proposed by Hanna and De Nooy which involves bringing classes of learners to engage in online interaction with 'real' native speakers in unprotected online platforms. If one class of French learners is to participate in an online forum belonging to a French newspaper then this may well be acceptable to other users of that forum. But what if various classes were to participate at the same time? Or if a class of 80 plus students were to begin participating in the same discussion topic? One can wonder how regular users of these forums would react to their online discussions becoming the homework of many non-native speakers. Indeed, Kern (1998) discussed a similar project to that of Hanna and De Nooy and reported how many French native speakers abandoned their online discussion forums due to the many language errors which students were committing in the online interaction. Hanna and De Nooy's model is therefore likely to face serious barriers to wide-scale replicability. On the other hand, what telecollaboration may lack in authenticity, the model makes up for with a certain reliability that it can be easily repeated on a regular basis and be used by a large number of classes. Engaging students in the wilds of 'genuine' online interaction may guarantee a much more authentic cultural experience but it does not ensure in any way these other outcomes.

As regards telecollaboration's overreliance on personal friendships and on the genre of personal presentation, this very much depends on the set-up and tasks of the exchange in question. While most exchanges do begin with some form of personal presentation by the students, this can be (and usually is) followed by other task types which engage students in the comparison of cultural texts or the collaborative development of a project (see O'Dowd and Ware, 2009 for a typology of telecollaborative tasks and how they are usually combined in task sequences). Furthermore, while telecollaboration does require students to respect each other's opinions and to work together in a respectful manner, I would suggest it is an exaggeration to argue that successful telecollaboration depends on the establishment of

friendships. In many telecollaborative exchanges, students regularly work in online groups of 6-8 students over a period of 6-8 weeks. It would be unrealistic and naïve to expect any sort of genuine friendships to emerge from such short-term contact and my experience is that teachers and students do not expect this. However, that does not mean students cannot learn a great deal from each other in these online interactions as they are exposed to the personal insights of their distant peers – people who they often perceive of as 'people who matter' (Belz and Kinginger, 2002, 2003).

Nevertheless, telecollaborative practitioners would do well to heed Hanna & De Nooy's criticisms and question the authenticity of their telecollaborative exchanges. This is particularly the case when it comes to the type of tasks in which we are engaging our learners. Much has been written, for example, on how communicative language teaching for many years neglected its original aims of social justice and political education. Kramsch suggests that foreign language education was "under pressure to show evidence of efficiency and accountability" (2006, p.250); while Byram refers to "an over-concern with the instrumental purposes of language teaching for communication" (2015, p.209). Similarly, it has been noted by Helm (2013 and this volume) that as telecollaboration becomes more popular, there may also be a tendency in this area to shy away from difficult themes and subject matter and to smooth over difference in all but its most superficial manifestations. Many of the telecollaborative tasks described in the literature often reveal a superficial approach to culture based on traditional communicative classroom themes such as musical tastes, travel, sports etc. For example, some representative tasks on the UNICollaboration.eu platform include the following:

- This task allows the partners to prepare a PowerPoint presentation about places to go out at night in their hometown...
- This task aims to have students explore and reflect on stereotypes…
- Students have to post an image to the forum that exemplifies an aspect of their daily routine...
- This presentation task allows the telecollaborative partners to speak about their daily lives by producing a video or a commented slideshow…

Tasks such as these, while perhaps useful as initial ice-breakers or for generating language practice, are likely to have little effect on students' understanding of the partner culture or to lead to a critical reflection on students' own culture. This can often be accompanied by a tendency in exchanges for students to use the outcomes of their online interactions to sidestep difference and to focus instead on what cultures may have in common at a superficial level. Some examples of students' comments from a recent Spanish-American exchange illustrate quite clearly what Kramsch and Ware describe as "the illusion of commonality" (2005, p.200) which students can take away from intercultural contact:

Student 1: "I will say that I liked the exchange very much and that Missouri students looked like very nice people. I talked to them about my city and about theirs *and it was nice to see that there are little differences but not as much as I thought*." (italics added)

Student 2: "Summing up, it has been such an exciting experience because we have learned English while we have known a different culture. To my mind, we aren't too different, both of

us like sports, music and spending time with our friends. We have different lifestyles but the same goal: helping people with our jobs."

It would be regrettable if an activity such as telecollaboration was not to exploit its potential for developing themes of social justice and intercultural citizenship in university education and to thereby lead to a more challenging and authentic intercultural experience. This is particularly true if our goal is not merely internationalization and its aims of supporting and enabling student and staff mobility, but also *internationalism* and the development of students' critical thinking and their adherence to cosmopolitan and democratic societies (Byram, 2011). It is the telecollaborative teachers' responsibility to challenge the potential banalisation of our activity and make students' online experience as authentic as possible by engaging students in virtual exchange on issues of political, historical and social importance for the partner classes. In other words, it is necessary to ensure that "the empty babble of the communicative classroom" (Pennycock, 1994, p.331) is not replaced by the superficial chatter of the networked classroom.

With this in mind, many educators are beginning to explore telecollaboration's potential for focusing learners' on themes of responsible global citizenship and democratic engagement and intercultural dialogue. Responsible global citizenship, as we understand it here, is defined by Leask as an educational practice whose main objective is to help learners "critique the world they live in, see problems and issues from a range of perspectives, and take action to address them" (2015, p. 17). In the present volume, we have already seen examples *Soliya* which brings together students from the USA and Arab/Muslim countries to engage in open yet guided dialogue on cultural and political issues which affect their countries' relationships. A further example, reported by Porto (2014), shows British and Argentinean students engaging in collaborative project work related to the Falklands War and producing documents and activities which aimed at supporting reconciliation between the two communities. Projects such as these offer students the opportunity to engage in intercultural dialogue on themes which form part of their countries' historical memory and to become more aware of alternative perspectives on themes which have been viewed until now through one particular cultural prism. The goal of such exchanges is not, of course, to establish 'right or wrong' or to identify 'the truth' but first, to develop students' understanding of how living in different cultural contexts can lead people to see and experience events differently and, second, to engage students in a critical comparison of their own norms, values, beliefs, assumptions, and those of their online partners. In many ways this reflects the *savoir* component of Kramsch's symbolic competence: "savoir means not just knowing the facts of grammar, vocabulary and pragmatics, and not only a general psychosocial knowledge of self and other, but understanding German-American relations during and after WWII, the current perceptions of the United States around the world, and having some knowledge of the major ideologies of our day" (2009b, p.118). Engaging learners in telecollaborative tasks related to social justice and of political significance can help to make these differences in norms and beliefs explicit and can challenge learners to expand their interpretative frameworks beyond the mono-cultural and the ethnocentric.

Apart from rethinking the themes of telecollaborative exchange, it is also beneficial to review the intended outcomes of online intercultural tasks. In an attempt to organise the wide variety of tasks being employed in telecollaborative exchange, O'Dowd and Ware (2009) categorised 12 telecollaborative task types which they had identified in the literature into three main categories – information exchange, comparison, and collaboration. The first category, information exchange tasks, involved learners providing their telecollaborative partners with information about their personal biographies, local schools or towns or aspects of their home cultures. Tasks in this category were usually 'monologic' in nature as there was

usually little negotiation of meaning (neither cultural nor linguistic) between the interlocutors. The second task type, comparison and analysis tasks, were seen to be more demanding since they required learners not only to exchange information, but also to go a step further and carry out comparisons or critical analyses of cultural products from both cultures (e.g. books, surveys, films, newspaper articles). These analyses or comparisons could have a cultural focus and/or a linguistic focus. The final task type, collaborative tasks, required learners not only to exchange and compare information but also to work together to produce a common product or come to a joint conclusion. This could involve the co-authoring of an essay or presentation, or the co-production of a linguistic translation or cultural adaptation of a text from the L1/C1 to L2/C2. These types of activities were seen to require a great deal of coordination and planning but the authors suggested that they also brought about substantial amounts of negotiation of meaning on both linguistic and cultural levels as learners attempted to reach agreement on their final products.

It would appear that most telecollaborative exchanges never move on beyond the first and second task types as students present, exchange and compare information but rarely go that extra step to actually collaborate together to complete a document or project together. I would argue that it would be very beneficial for telecollaboration practice to focus more on this third type of telecollaborative task type in order to exploit the learning potential of this activity to the maximum. The importance of getting different cultural groups to go beyond simply exchanging information and to actually collaborate in the elaboration of projects or products is, of course, not new. The influential social-psychologist Gordon Allport (1958) looked at the value of contact for reducing prejudices and warned that contact in itself was no guarantee of improved attitudes to other groups. Allport looked at a technique used in progressive schools in the USA at the time called "social travelling" which involved bringing groups which held negative stereotypes of each other into contact together. The example he mentions involved middle-class students spending time with Afro-American families in Harlem. He concluded that the key to success of such educational programmes was that both groups needed to be brought together in order to pursue a common objective:

"The nub of the matter seems to be that contact must reach below the surface in order to be effective in altering prejudice. *Only the type of contact that leads people to do things together* is likely to result in changed attitudes" (my italics) (1958, p.276).

More recently, Guth and Robin (2015) reflect this approach in their description of OIE tasks: "tasks must be designed so that students depend on one another to complete the task. For example, rather than having students write a collaborative essay in which each individual writes his or her own part and adds it to the whole, students could be asked to carry out interviews locally, which are then shared with their peers and interpreted through online discussion and edited jointly" (2015, p.39).

In summary, by developing tasks based on themes of political and social relevance and by engaging learners in activities which bring them to create and collaborate together telecollaboration is likely to address some of the weaknesses highlighted by Hanna and De Nooy and to give students a more authentic online intercultural experience.

OIE and Learning from Online Interaction

A second area of criticism relates to the potential which OIE offers learners for reflecting on and learning from their intercultural encounters and interactions. In their recent monograph on intercultural language learning, Liddicoat and Scarino (2013) suggest that the goals of intercultural tasks should be three-fold:

"to *participate in communication* to exchange meanings and to *discover*, in and through experiences of interacting in communication with others, the variability in meaning-making, the linguistic and cultural assumptions made in constructing knowledge and, ultimately, to *develop self-awareness* of their own interpretative system…" (my italics) (2013, p. 64).

The authors underline here the importance of creating communicative experiences for learners which will make transparent the different langua-cultural rules and assumptions which both they and their partners bring to their online interactions. Of course, in order for these learning experiences to be successful, it is not only necessary to engage students in communicative activity, but also to provide sufficient opportunities for learners to reflect on and learn from their experiences.

In their publication, the authors pay ample attention to the role of online exchange initiatives and how they can contribute to intercultural learning and they appear to be particularly skeptical of their impact. For example, they make the following warning that telecollaborative practitioners should not assume that online contact will automatically lead to learning:

"The problem is that exposure to interaction of itself does not necessarily equate with intercultural learning…To be able to contribute to learning, the interaction must first become available in some way for students to reflect on and interpret. It is therefore necessary to consider not only what these technologies permit students to do , but also consider how their experiences may contribute to learning" (2013, p. 112).

They go on to carry out a review of several well-known telecollaborative studies and come to the pessimistic conclusion that "interaction using a social technology has not necessarily resulted in intercultural learning… The tasks involved students in exchanges across cultures…but the intercultural learning was supposed to happen as an automatic result of communication or engagement with others" (Liddicoat and Scarino, 2013, p. 117).

But is that really the case? While it is clear that intercultural learning is not always the outcome of OIE, are the authors right to conclude that telecollaboration research assumes intercultural learning will take place as a direct outcome of the online interaction? I would argue that this is definitely not the case. Indeed, there appears to be now a general consensus in the literature that telecollaboration should not happen autonomously without its integration into a classroom context where students can receive guidance and support from a teacher or facilitator in their online interaction with their foreign partners. Chun, for example, urges that "it is essential for teachers to help students to go beyond comprehending the surface meaning of words and sentences in order to understand what their intercultural partners are writing" (2015: 13) while elsewhere, Müller-Hartmann (2012) suggests that "[t]he role of the teacher is crucial in initiating, developing and monitoring telecollaborative exchanges for language learning" (p. 172).

While this may contrast with initial trends in online exchange where e-tandem partnerships were often seen as extra-curricular activities (O'Rourke, 2007), it is fair to argue that most telecollaborative activity in recent years has taken a blended approach where learners' online interactions and their reactions to this interaction has been discussed, analyzed and framed with the help of a *langua-cultural* expert (i.e. their teacher). For example, the *Cultura* model on online exchange (see Furstenberg et. al. 2001; and Furstenberg, this volume) is based completely on the alternation between online intercultural interaction and classroom reflection and analysis. Furthermore, it was seen in chapter 2 of this volume how many authors regularly recommend combining students' online interaction

with reflective reviews of transcripts or recordings of the online interactions. Belz (2006) refers to this at "the alternation of Internet-mediated *inter*cultural sessions with face-to-face *intra*cultural sessions" (p. 214)" while Cunningham andVyatkina (2012) refer to 'pedagogic interventions' where teachers transcribe and code extracts of students' telecollaborative videoconferences and then review these transcripts with their students during class time. Kern (2014) also refers to using '*la salle de rétrospection*' in his online exchanges where French and American student-partners were giving tasks requiring them to review and reflect recordings of their telecollaborative videoconferences.

Then why is it the case that authors such as Liddicoat and Scarino criticise online exchange initiatives for expecting intercultural learning to be achieved exclusively online interaction? Why do the authors feel it necessary to warn that "the technologies make available possibilities that need to be developed as experiences of learning in parallel with the interactions that technology facilitates" (2013, p.118)?

This may be due to a failing of the telecollaboration research literature to pay sufficient attention to the work that goes on in the classroom based on the interactions of telecollaborative exchange. Considering the importance attributed to this 'intracultural' classwork for helping students to understand the process involved in online intercultural communication, it is fair to ask whether telecollaborative research has paid sufficient attention to investigating and highlighting the workings of the off-line discussion and analysis which takes place during telecollaborative exchanges. A review of the research data used in the studies of learning outcomes in telecollaborative exchange (chapter 2, this volume) reveals that practically none of the studies used classroom interaction transcripts or field notes to explore how teachers engaged with learners in the analysis of their online interactions. The vast majority of telecollaborative research studies tend to present data stemming from the students' online interaction in combination with pre- and post-exchange interview and survey data. There are, of course, some exceptions. Belz (2002) combines extracts from class transcripts with interview data to illustrate students' reactions to their interactions, while O'Dowd (2006) transcribed sections of his classes in Germany which were related to the exchange and later transcribed them for analysis. More recently, Dooly and Sadler (in press) made extensive use of class transcripts to look at learning sequences in primary school telecollaboration.

But why in the main has this valuable source of evidence for intercultural learning been neglected to such an extent in telecollaborative research studies? First, it is clear that the transcripts of online interaction between students in different geographical locations can be considered easier to collect than transcripts of teacher-learner reflections and analysis of the online interaction. Furthermore, recordings of classroom interaction may be more difficult to analyze impartially, especially when the researcher is also the teacher of the class in question – something which is commonly the case in university-based telecollaborative research.

When interviewed via email on this issue, various telecollaborative researchers provided some realistic insights into why classroom transcripts are not used more to illustrate episodes of intercultural learning:

Researcher 1:"I think one important point is that through the work with computers we already store so much data that we have the feeling that we are able to present a multi-perspective in terms of data presentation. But we would need more data in this regard to see what actually transpires in the classroom."

Researcher 2:"I often take notes after classroom sessions but not in a structured way. One would need to video- or at least audiotape the classroom sessions which obviously is an additional workload. Also, it really would need to be done by all partners involved, which I

find is one major problem in TC research anyway because often there are ethical concerns or institutional constraints that disallow data collection. I have had this problem with the U.S. a lot."

Researcher 3:"**Why is not done?** It takes A GREAT DEAL of time and work (not exaggerating). Am currently working on CA transcriptions of 1 and half hours of online conversations right now and it is, to the clock - 1 minute of conversation requires 1 hour of transcription. I am also experiencing serious tendonitis in my right arm (common ailment of transcribers…And I am a fairly experienced CA transcriber AND this is only audio (no video), so if you do the maths, it's around 100 hours of work more or less ... SO much easier to nab those online data ...but I agree, it needs to be combined with what is happening in the classroom). Plus, there is the question of getting permission to record students in schools (teachers, parents, school authorities may be reticent), getting enough useable data from the recordings (we use 2 cameras at a time usually and still a lot of yap-yapping that can't be understood)…In short, I think it requires a fairly large infrastructure to do in-class research and most people doing telecollaboration are individually motivated teachers going at it alone."

These comments highlight quite clearly the complexities of collecting classroom data for telecollaborative research. The increased workload involved in recording and transcribing classroom interaction, the ethical requirements regarding student and institutional permission and the added complexity of coordinating research in two classrooms all make it harder for teachers to present and investigate the work that goes on in their classrooms. Nevertheless, future telecollaborative research would do well to dedicate more time to recording and analyzing the periods of class-time which focus on telecollaborative 'rich points'. This data does not necessarily have to involve full transcriptions of classroom interaction. Glaser (1998), for example, warns that recording and transcribing can often take up more time than they are worth and that basic note-taking based on recordings is often sufficient.

Apart from a greater focus on the off-line interaction and learning which take place during online exchange, there are other ways in which research studies on telecollaboration could continue to grow in order to provide more revealing insights on the impact of this activity in university education. These include the use of tools from the area of social cognitive neuroscience (Exchange 2.0, 2015), but also the increased use of longitudinal studies which would help to demonstrate the impact of long-term virtual interaction and exchange on students' foreign language and intercultural competences.

Despite the general consensus that foreign language competences develop over long periods of time, there are relatively few longitudinal studies in this area (Ortega and Iberri-Shea, 2005). Neither are longitudinal studies common in the CALL literature although there have been various calls for their use in this field of study (Lomicka, 2003; Swaffar, Romano, Markley, and Arens, 1998). Based on the review of the empirical research publications in chapter 2 of this volume, it would appear that telecollaborative research studies to date have not attempted to evaluate the impact of virtual contact and exchange on learners over a period any longer that one university semester. This is not surprising as the majority of online exchanges last no longer than this period. In a recent survey of telecollaborative practice in Europe, (Guth, Helm and O'Dowd, 2011) 54% of university educators reported that their exchanges lasted between one and three months, while 26% reported that the duration was between three and six months. Belz explains that collecting telecollaborative data over longer periods is extremely problematic as "such longitudinal data are difficult to collect in the tutored North American context where language courses typically last for only one semester" (2004, p.587).

Nevertheless, it would be worth striving in the future to collect data over longer periods of time in order to explore the impact of long-term virtual contact on aspects of students' foreign language development, such as pragmatic competence and intercultural awareness. While it may be nigh impossible to maintain the same class-to-class exchange over a number of years, it may nevertheless be possible to study particular students' linguistic and intercultural development as they take part in various telecollaborative exchanges with different contact groups during their university degrees. The results of such studies are likely to provide a more comprehensive overview of the impact on online exchange on students' attitudes and language skills.

Finally, telecollaborative research would also benefit from the application of investigative tools from other fields of research which are also interested in the outcomes of intercultural contact such as the field of social cognitive neuroscience. Bruneau (in print) reports on an ongoing study which uses such tools to measure the impact of the Soliya Connect programme (see Helm, this volume) on American attitudes to Islam and the Muslim community during and after virtual contact with members of these groups. The tools used in this study measured different variables including the degree to which students felt a sense of commonality with the other group, the meta-perception of whether students felt the partner group respected their own group and a 'feeling thermometer' that is commonly used to assess intergroup negativity.

Of course, no one study or set of tools will provide definitive findings on the value and impact of telecollaborative exchange. However, paying greater attention to the learning which takes place off-line during telecollaborative exchanges, the introduction of measurement tools from different fields and the increased use of longitudinal studies will undoubtedly contribute to the quality of the corpus of research on telecollaborative learning and may help to provide a more convincing account of this learning activity to educators and decision makers outside of our immediate field.

OIE and the impact of the medium on intercultural communication

In recent years, Claire Kramsch has written considerably about online intercultural exchange both on her own (2009) and also in collaboration with other colleagues (Kramsch and Thorne, 2002; Ware and Kramsch, 2005; Kramsch and Malinowski; 2014). Rather than expressing dissatisfaction with the design of telecollaborative exchange *per se*, Kramsch's work reflects more a generalized concern with the widespread misconception by teachers and students that the discourse of online interaction is somehow governed by universal rules and that the computer medium does not play a role in how meanings are expressed and understood in online intercultural interaction.

In their work, Kramsch and her colleagues use various case studies of French-American and German-American university telecollaborative exchanges to explore how online communication breaks down and intercultural misunderstandings arise due to the use of different genres by interlocutors and by the assumption by the two groups of learners that they were doing the same thing in their telecollaborative exchange. Kramsch and Thorne (2002), for example, found that the reasons for on-line 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, of the existence of which both groups appeared to be unaware. While the French had approached the exchange as an academic exercise and used factual, impersonal, restrained genres of writing, the American group regarded the exchange 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. An exchange which involved two such different approaches to the interaction was bound to end in frustration for both sides.

Ware & Kramsch (2005) also found this confusion of genres and the lack of clarity about the appropriate rules of interaction in a German-American exchange and how one particular American student reacted to this ambiguity. They conclude:

"the electronic medium tends to blur genres that are usually kept separate in face to face interaction. The type of exchange in which the students were engaged was fundamentally ambiguous: It was a private dialogue between two students but it was also a dialogue on which an unknown numbers of others eavesdropped; it was a classroom assignment, but Rob had changed the assignment into a chatty get-to-know-each-other conversation; it was a written exchange but in the form of a spoken chat…What students perceive as appropriate uses of the Internet can differ interculturally" (2005, p. 199).

In her 2009 monograph, Kramsch returns to this theme and warns of the misconception that students in different cultures engaged in the same activity (online intercultural exchange) and using the same medium (e.g. email, or videoconferencing) are somehow doing the same thing as they interact together. On the contrary, Kramsch and her co-authors believe that the numerous examples of communication breakdown and frustration on the behalf of students engaged in OIE serve as evidence that each student brings with them to an exchange their own understanding of the tasks, their own goals and their own personal assumptions about what is appropriate online communicative behaviour. She explains:

"Because the genre boundaries that constrain face-to-face or eye-to-paper language have disappeared behind the universal frame of the computer screen, the foreign language Other is erroneously assumed to be doing the same thing as the Self only in another language" (2009, p. 178).

Kramsch and her colleagues call for a move away from assumptions of universality and propose greater awareness raising of the cultural and historical differences which students in different cultures bring to their online exchange. Instead of allowing students to fall back on assumptions that everyone is deep down the same and that everyone communicates online in the same way, the challenge for telecollaborative practitioners is to push their students to "imagine another person as different from oneself, to recognize the other in his or her historicity and subjectivity, to see ourselves through the eyes of others" (Ware and Kramsch, 2005, p. 202).

Kramsch's most recent work on telecollaborative exchange (Kramsch and Malinowski; 2014) also highlights the important impact of the technological medium itself on online intercultural encounters. Basing their work on videoconferencing exchanges between French and American students, the authors suggest that the computer interface and the common technical problems of echo, frame-freeze etc. play a major role in how students communicate online and this can often hinder intercultural learning. They warn that the issue of technical problems "forces them [the students] to devote all their attention to the technology itself at the expense of deeper negotiation of social and cultural meanings, let alone worldviews" (2014, p. 21). Kramsch and Malinowski are not the only ones to identify the important impact which the medium has on computer mediated intercultural communication. Kern (2014) warns that "what one sees on the computer screen is a highly mediated, filtered, and designed version of the world" (2014, p.341) and he argues that telecollaborative learning needs to draw learners' attention to how the online medium influences how communication takes place and brings with it its own ideas about what communication actually is.

The proposals by Kramsch and her colleagues and by Kern are very useful propositions for the design of future online exchanges as they urge practitioners to make

explicit to students the assumptions and genres which they bring to online interaction and they also serve to raise awareness of the impact of the computer medium on our communicative activity. Their suggestions and those of others outlined already in this chapter allow us to present then following overview of strong and weak approaches to telecollaborative task design:

Table 17.1 Stong and weak approaches to telecollaborative task design

Strong Approaches to Telecollaborative Task Design	Weak Approaches to Telecollaborative Task Design
Tasks reflect themes of social justice and intercultural citizenship	Tasks focus on superficial communicative themes
Tasks engage students in active collaboration together	Tasks only require learners to present and report information
Tasks include reflection on the role of the medium in online communication	The role of the technology in the communication is taken for granted
Tasks include stages of cultural self-reflection and critical evaluation	No critical self-reflection is involved
Task avoid stereotyping and forced culture clash	Tasks often involve a focus on stereotyping and forced culture clash

OIE and the danger of two-tier student mobility

It was seen in chapter two of this volume that there is a considerable amount of research to suggest that telecollaborative exchange projects can contribute significantly to learners' foreign language skills, intercultural awareness and, although a great deal more research is still necessary in this area, digital skills – all of which are among the skills which the Agenda for Modernization of Europe's Higher Education Systems stresses are often lacking in current graduates (2011, p. 4).

However, OIE also has the potential to respond to other important challenges currently facing university education. For example, recent studies (High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, 2014) indicate that many parts of Europe higher education are still predominantly lecture-based with the transmission of knowledge being the main pedagogic paradigm. It would be interesting to explore whether a greater use of collaborative learning activities such as telecollaboration could help to move university education to more student-centred learning. Furthermore, studies confirm that numbers participating in physical mobility programmes in university education remain generally very low. Currently only 4% of students in the European Union have engaged in international study or work experience, despite ambitious aims to have 20% of students with international experience by 2020 (Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Ministerial Conference, 2009, p.15). In the case of the US, less than 3% of students spend part of their studies in other countries (Kinginger, 2010). In this context, OIE should at least be explored as a tool for preparing and motivating students for physical mobility, or for providing an alternative for those students unwilling or unable to travel abroad.

However, there is a concern in certain areas that the widespread use of OIE (or *Virtual Exchange* as it is commonly referred to in European policy documentation) may be used to create a *first* and *second division* of student mobility in which physical mobility is reserved exclusively for wealthier students, while the remainder are granted the second-best option of virtual mobility. Lawton expresses this fear in the following way:

"But it can also be argued that the institutionalisation of virtual exchange institutionalises a two-tier system of mobility: one for the elite few and another for the 80-90 % who cannot afford it. Looked at this way, 'internationalisation at home' (the core element of which refers to developments in curricula consistent with the international aspirations of institutions) can be seen as a consolation prize for non-mobile non-elites" (2015, p. 80).

Of course, it should not be our intention to propose OIE as an alternative (be it second-best or otherwise) to physical mobility. Instead, proponents of OIE should strive to find a role for this activity as an integral part of preparing and supporting physical mobility programmes and also in enhancing other aspects of university education which would benefit from integrating online intercultural interaction into their activities.

It is perhaps surprising to find that OIE's potential as a tool to support and enhance physical mobility in university education has yet to be fully explored. In her review of language learning and study abroad, Kinginger calls for those involved in student mobility "to establish telecollaborative courses linking students at home to their in-country peers in the precise locations where they will study abroad and thereby to establish contacts through prior, institutionally sanctioned interaction" (2009: 111). However, using telecollaboration as a form of pre-mobility or as a manner of connecting internationally mobile students with students in their home institutions remains in its infancy and very few examples have been reported in the literature to date. Some exceptions include Elola and Oskoz (2008) who report on US students reporting and reflecting on their experiences via blogs while studying in Spain with partners in another American institution, and Jeanneau and Giralts (in press) who present an exchange which connected Spanish students planning to study in Ireland and the UK with Irish students preparing to leave for study in Spain.

The idea of introducing telecollaboration as a tool in subject areas outside of foreign language education also appears to be quite new, however isolated examples of virtual exchange initiatives are also beginning to appear outside the field of foreign language education as educators working in subject areas such as Law, Economics etc. look for ways to integrate both collaborative and international elements into their courses and to give students' first-hand experience in online intercultural teamwork. This is particularly the case in many European and Asian countries where content and language integrated approaches to university education such as English Medium Instruction (Coleman, 2006) are growing in importance. Telecollaboration offers educators working in this area an opportunity to engage their learners in foreign language communication about their subject area with international collaborators.

One of the first practitioners to put such an approach into action was Ruth Vilmi with the "International Robot Activity" (Thalman and Vilmi 1995), and the "International Environment Activity" (Vilmi 1995). The first of these projects involved international teams of engineering students from three different countries taking part in online collaboration to develop a robot to solve a real-world problem, while the "International Environment Activity" engaged students in online collaboration to find solutions to real-world environmental problems. More recently, Guth, Helm and O'Dowd (2012) reported various case studies of universities who were developing telecollaborative projects in disciplines such as Business Studies and Engineering and the volume by Schultheis Moore and Simon (2015)

provided a fascinating overview of examples of online exchange initiatives in the Humanities which have stemmed from the work of the COIL Center (see Rubin, this volume). Contributions to this volume provide examples of how online intercultural collaboration can be integrated effectively into the study of subject areas as diverse as Jazz music, feminism, the diaspora, gender roles and human rights.

An innovative approach to integrating online exchange into other subject areas has been pioneered by the *Sharing Perspectives Foundation* which is a non-profit organisation dedicated to providing students and academics with opportunities to collaboratively study contemporary themes related to the subjects of political science, law, economics, and social science. Their model of online exchange works in the following way:

- Providing academic content: Participating universities construct a shared curriculum which is presented through video lectures by the participating educators.
- Online discussion: After watching the video-lectures, students come together in sub-groups – of one student per participating university – in a web-based video-conference room. Here, they discuss the lectures of that week. These discussions are hosted by professionally trained facilitators.
- Engaging in collaborative research: Students are then required to collaboratively design, conduct and share survey research about the topic in their own communities in order to learn about the broader societal impact of the topic (Sharing Perspectives, 2015).

However, these remain isolated examples of OIE activity outside of foreign language learning and my own experiences to date of presenting telecollaboration in a series of workshops and presentations to university educators outside of foreign language education has proven to be chastening. Educators often struggle to see the value of the activity or are unable to conceptualise how such student-centred online collaboration could contribute to their coursework. Written feedback from these workshops has included comments such as the following:

"Time is already short in the classes anyway. I just don't know how I could add this activity as well."

"I really don't think my subject area is suited to this type of learning. I just can't imagine what the two groups would write about."

In general, my experience has been that the main challenge is to justify the value of an activity which is based on the principles of intercultural learning and the collaborative construction of knowledge to educators who are often more accustomed to educational approaches which are teacher-centred and based on transmission models of education.

In conclusion, while the examples of telecollaborative practice in other disciplines and in international mobility programmes highlight the clear potential which virtual exchange can offer students across university education, it is clear that there is still much to be done in raising educators' awareness of its benefits and in changing the perception that OIE forms part of a second-best option for non-mobile students.

CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to explore how OIE should continue to develop and grow in the coming years based on the criticisms and observations of those who have come into contact with this

activity. I looked at ways to make telecollaboration more accessible to educators and a more effective tool by improving telecollaborative task design, promoting models based on the goals of global citizenship and exploring new emerging models which can be applied to different subject areas and to support physical mobility. I also proposed expanding the research on telecollaboration by looking in greater detail at the off-line stages of OIE, and by paying more attention to research methods and techniques including longitudinal studies.

In one of the first publications to look at telecollaboration over 20 years ago, Warschauer presented a collection of over 100 examples of telecollaborative practice so that practitioners would, in his words, "not have to reinvent the wheel" (1995, p. 14). Twenty years on, it is important for telecollaborative researchers and practitioners to continue to innovate in our work, exploring new ways of improving the learning experience of online intercultural contact and providing fresh research which will provide new insights into how virtual exchange can contribute to the goals of university education. It was seen in this chapter that OIE has received a substantial amount of constructive criticism in recent years by authors who have pointed out telecollaboration's weaknesses and limitations. These criticisms should be taken on board and used to improve this activity and to make it a more viable option not only in foreign language education but also across university education.

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