

Review of *In this together: Teachers' experiences with transnational, telecollaborative language learning projects*

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In this together: Teachers' experiences with transnational, telecollaborative language learning projects

Dooly, M., & O'Dowd, R. (Eds.)

2018

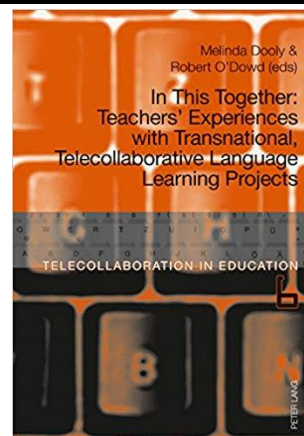
ISBN: 978-3034335010

US \$ 74.95

232 pp.

Peter Lang

Bern, Switzerland



Telecollaboration as an educational practice for language learning has been rapidly growing over the last decade as more and more educators across all levels, from preprimary to higher and further education, are taking part in virtual exchanges with their students (Cassells, Gilleran, Morvan, & Scimeca, 2015; O'Dowd, 2018). This is marked by an increasing number of theoretical and empirical studies in the field which aim both to create a theoretical framework related to the design and development of telecollaborative projects as well as support virtual exchange practitioners in their efforts to find, report, and discuss innovative practices. However, whereas telecollaborative practice flourishes in primary and secondary education levels (Cassells et al., 2015), the vast majority of the academic publications on telecollaboration are derived from university-level exchanges.

The sixth volume of the series *Telecollaboration in education*, titled *In this together: Teachers' experiences with transnational, telecollaborative language learning projects* and edited by Dooly and O'Dowd, outlines the theoretical and pedagogical underpinnings of telecollaboration and provides a collection of exemplars from telecollaborative projects between primary and early secondary education classes. Thereby, it attempts to reduce the gap between the pre-university and higher university academic publications in the field. The collection covers a variety of aspects and topics related to the pragmatics of designing and running a telecollaborative project—from underlying motivations to photo materials with the project outcomes. As such, it will be of use for language and foreign language educators, especially those working in primary and early secondary education, teachers and teacher trainers, graduate students, and classroom researchers. Overall, the chapters featuring the case studies are written in a more informal and friendly tone than what is the norm in academia, which might disconcert the reader. However, it allows authors to discuss their experiences in a more authentic and vivid way.

The volume begins with the series editors' preface that briefly sets the context and discusses the intention for compiling the book. The editors suggest that telecollaboration would have been more predominant in primary and secondary education had more examples and models of telecollaborative projects been available, therefore with this volume they "provide a space for teachers' voices in the nexus between research and practice through their narratives of their own experiences" (p. 8).

The introductory chapter, written by the book editors, covers contemporary theoretical and pedagogical issues in the area of telecollaboration. Both Dooly and O'Dowd have been involved in telecollaboration by designing and developing projects as well as by publishing research articles for more than a decade, and they are widely recognised leaders in the field. Their knowledge and experience enable them to provide a comprehensive history of telecollaboration; review a number of definitions related to the term; discuss whether telecollaboration can be considered a method, methodology, approach, or practice; analyse the evolution of language learning paradigms and how it influenced telecollaboration; and provide substantial reasoning for combining project-based learning with telecollaboration. Before the end of the chapter, the exemplars included in the volume, seven in total, are briefly introduced.

In the second chapter, García-Martínez and Gracia-Téllez explain their motivation behind their decision to develop a telecollaborative project during their internship. Next, they provide a detailed description accompanied with materials and photos of the six phases of their project. Finally, they report the challenges they encountered during the development of the project, from time needed for preparation to noise in the classroom while doing the activities, and reflect on how they constructively addressed them. Their account of how their studies in English as a foreign language and their dedication in the teaching profession guided the decision to carry out a telecollaborative project with third-grade pupils can be an excellent source of inspiration for both prospective and in-service language teachers interested in developing a telecollaboration. The description of the six phases of the project is rich in details and it is accompanied with materials and photos from pupils' work, making it extremely helpful for teachers who want to embark on telecollaboration. What is more, it presents a good example of an interdisciplinary project in telecollaboration as it combines English language teaching and a topic from biology.

The third chapter, written by Salas, reports a rather uncommon telecollaborative partnership in terms of age difference between participating classes (young adults and primary-school pupils) as well as in terms of the particular circumstances of one partner-class (refugees situated in a refugee camp). One of the primary aims of the project was to make the situation of refugees visible to the children across Europe as a way to break down stereotypes, which might eventually cultivate a more positive climate for the integration of refugees in hosting societies. The author eloquently describes the rationale and considerations underlying the project design as well as the numerous challenges she addressed during the design and implementation process. The complexity of the particular settings would have deterred even experienced teachers from organising a telecollaboration. Yet, her firm dedication to the project success despite all the hurdles is an inspiration for any teacher. The author also describes in rich detail the activities held between the two partner classes and provides useful materials, such as self-evaluation rubrics, that other teachers could adapt and use in their own projects.

The fourth chapter, written by Mont and Masats, differs from the rest, as it mainly focuses on providing a set of suggestions for implementing a telecollaboration rather than offering a detailed account of a telecollaborative project. The chapter begins with a brief description of the design and development of two telecollaborative projects that they carried out over two consecutive years with the same class but different partners. What might be also interesting for the reader is the very young age of the children (six to seven years old in the first year) and how the design of the telecollaboration required the use of a foreign language by the minors. Next, based on their experience, the authors provide a step-by-step guide with practical and realistic tips for the design and implementation of a telecollaboration in early primary education settings. The suggestions are in accordance with Dooly's (2008) guidebook on developing telecollaborations while valuable insights and fresh ideas that take into account the young age of the pupils are also added.

The fifth chapter, written by Pueyo, is one of the two chapters in the volume which describe a telecollaborative project between secondary school classes as well as one of the two projects which deal with a refugee crisis. The author begins by outlining the pedagogical and institutional considerations for deciding to carry out a telecollaboration, then proceeds to a comprehensive report of the planning and implementation phases of the project. Lastly, Pueyo reflects on the experience and gives six key points to bear in mind when undertaking a telecollaboration. The project is of particular interest from at least three

different aspects. First, it aims to raise students' and society's awareness of a critical and current topic. Second, in the majority of the activities, web 2.0 tools are integrated in a seamless way. Third, it views assessment of learning as something that students have a saying in too.

In the sixth chapter, Sánchez and Manrique describe a bilingual telecollaboration between two classes of pupils (Years 2–3) where the primary language of each was the target language of the other (this type of telecollaboration is often referred to as tandem language learning). The two schools, although located within the same region (Barcelona), gather pupils from different sociocultural backgrounds, since the one is a private international school with English as language of instruction while the other is a state school where Catalan is the primary language used. The authors discuss the rationale behind their decision to organise a telecollaboration and explain how they came up with the idea of the project's topic while analyzing the differences between the two schools. Next, they provide a detailed description, supplemented with materials, of the planning and the implementation phases of the project. They explain how they guided their pupils to become teachers of their peers and co-authors in the project by producing three videos for the partner class to watch. Lastly, since both authors were doing their internships, they reflect on the multiple challenges they faced and how they went on to address them.

In the seventh chapter, Ingelsson and Linder, though at their internship at that time, adapted their initial project idea and ultimately orchestrated an intercontinental telecollaboration between a school in New Zealand and two schools in Sweden involving nearly 200 pupils aged 9–13. The project aimed to help students build their writing skills and a better understanding of their own, as well as of their partners', culture through email exchanges. The authors provide a detailed analysis of the planning process, where they describe why the initial plan had to be adapted multiple times and the rationale behind each change. The increased complexity of the project generated multidimensional challenges that eventually had a serious impact on its implementation, as they managed to fully accomplish only two email exchanges between pupils. Nevertheless, the authors discuss the learning gains for themselves and their pupils and provide a few useful tips based on their experience.

The penultimate chapter, written by Bruun, reports a transdisciplinary telecollaborative project about sea pollution between two secondary school classes in Sweden and Tanzania. The author describes in detail how she met her partner through online social networks and how the project idea arose during an introductory synchronous meeting between the two classes. During the project implementation, a number of unanticipated obstacles related to Tanzania's inadequate internet infrastructure and students' low socioeconomic status emerged. Yet, the partner teachers managed to move on due to the excellent understanding between them and their dedication to the project. The chapter provides a detailed account of the implementation phases of the project, explaining how several digital tools were integrated to support the communication and collaboration between the students. What is more interesting, perhaps, is that during the project, students had the opportunity to explore and learn about several issues, from how to evaluate the validity of an internet source to the huge poverty problems that people in Tanzania face.

In the last chapter, Sadler seizes the opportunity to summarize the case studies as well as the lessons learned from them and, based on his vast experience in conducting research in the field, provides an annotated inventory of recommendations for prospective researchers and practitioners.

I would like to make two final comments before closing this review. First, although the case studies presented in the book are undeniably a valuable resource for researchers and practitioners interested in the field, previous studies that define the basics of a telecollaborative project, such as goal setting (Helm & Guth, 2010) and task design (O'Dowd & Ware, 2009), seem to be largely neglected, which cultivates a sense of incompleteness. Second, it is heartening to see that such important publications for the educational community are offered free open access.

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About the Author

Angelos Konstantinidis is a PhD researcher at the Open University of Catalonia and an associate online teacher at the Master's programme Digital Technologies for Language Teaching, University of Nottingham. He has been actively involved in numerous international school projects that foster the integration of digital technologies in learning activities. In collaboration with a few fellow educators, he started, in 2012, an initiative called **ICT4ALL** with the triple aim of supporting teachers in developing digital competences for lifelong learning, helping them strengthen their knowledge of how to use digital technologies in their daily teaching practice, and promoting openness of educational practices. His research interests lie in the areas of online course design, teacher professional development, teacher identity, and telecollaboration.

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