

Chapter 8

Intercultural telecollaboration for teacher education across three continents

Insights from experience journals

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Introduction

Tensions and conflicts pervading *mondialité* (Glissant, 1997) bring about the need to increase awareness about the growing complexity of the offline and online world and about extreme inequalities in access to education. The notions of new governance, new standards, and competition on an educational market are challenged by the core values of education from a social and cultural perspective. Language educators need to address these issues for younger generations. Therefore, we need to combine learning, teaching, and research in one core, conceptual framework in order to deal with language, cultural, and intercultural challenges.

As educators in the field of languages and teacher education, we are situated in *mondialité*, which acknowledges the diversity of languages and cultures and the diversity of teaching and learning in order to sustain social cohesion and communication. Through exchange and cooperation initiatives, individuals in dialogic interaction frame their own identity and their own understanding of selves and others. Our intercultural telecollaboration project aims at co-constructing a learning/teaching/researching environment that has been designed across three continents to support collaborative activities for students in the field of education from Brazil, Spain, France, and Taiwan. Groups of pre-service and in-service teachers in education from four different languages and cultures work together through the medium of English. Their level of English ranged from B1 to C1. At the same time, their four teacher-researchers collaboratively develop the learning environment and do research from the data collected.

This experience started as a semester-long project in 2017 and has been repeated and refined ever since. For the purpose of this chapter, the focus will be on the experience journals kept by the students participating in the first Three Continents Intercultural Telecollaboration (3CIT). In order to better understand this complex environment, the experience journal serves as a reflective narrative to enhance the learning process and to provide insights

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about the intercultural dimension of this context. How are our students going to be better equipped to face the complexity of this *mondialité* through intercultural communication?

Intercultural telecollaboration vs virtual exchanges

In the 1990s, the emphasis in education shifted towards technologically mediated environments, representing new learning paradigms in the conceptions of learning and pedagogy. According to O'Dowd (2007), the first online telecollaborative projects started when the internet became more accessible to teachers and students. Learning environments were extended beyond the classroom walls, and there was an emphasis on collaboration and group project-oriented activities (Tella, 1996). More recently, studies confirm the educational potential of telecollaboration (Belz, 2003; Castro & Derivry-Plard, 2016; Guth & Helm, 2010; O'Dowd, 2007; Salomão, 2019). Nowadays, activities aiming at promoting interaction between groups of students in distant places have spread in primary and secondary educational contexts, as well as in higher education.

O'Dowd (2018) discusses the different terminology currently used for this kind of activity: online intercultural exchange, virtual exchange, COIL (Collaborative Online International Learning), internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education, globally networked learning environments, e-tandem, and teletandem. For the author, the practices denoted by these names are similar initiatives that are sometimes unknown to members of the academic community from different or related areas, which may represent a challenge to the promotion and dissemination of this kind of activity among educators and administrators who are not familiar with such concepts.

O'Dowd (2018) explains that the term “telecollaboration” originated in foreign language teaching and is the most used by researchers in this area; however, the term “virtual exchange” has gained ground in several different contexts, such as business and marketing, among others. The author suggests that virtual exchange be used as an umbrella term in order to constitute an academic field of practice. We recognise the importance of merging similar interests and negotiating differences to combat the “lack of awareness of the educational value of the activity by educational decision makers and funding organisations” (p. 18). However, we choose to call our project telecollaboration to maintain the origin and the specificity of language and culture learning within these “virtual exchanges.”

Our conception of intercultural telecollaboration is based on a pedagogical proposition that encourages intercultural awareness and critical reflection on language and cultural relations among students with the guidance of teachers. Telecollaboration is more than a virtual exchange; it is a way of engaging learners to complete tasks and reflect on them collaboratively with the scaffolding provided by teachers.

The intercultural dimension of telecollaboration

The intercultural dimension of telecollaboration has become a key issue in the field of education as it opens a path to intercultural communication environments. One of the primary focuses of research and study in this field has been understanding how to communicate effectively and how participants can develop meaningful relationships with one another and negotiate meaning (Castro & Derivry-Plard, 2016; Kramsch, 2009; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; O'Dowd, 2007). Research on intercultural communication has been developed in fields such as cultural anthropology, sociology, psychology, communication studies, among others, that is, fields of study with attention to the role culture plays in people's behaviours and attitudes and how culture manifests itself in communication.

In intercultural communication contexts where the mother tongue is not a *lingua franca*, language plays a crucial role in mediating intercultural encounters. The relationship between language and culture has been widely debated (Phipps & Guilherme, 2004). From a linguistic perspective, Risager (2016) focuses on transnational linguistic and cultural flows and draws attention to the cultural dimension of language, developing the concept of *linguaculture*. For this author, language is never culturally neutral but "a system for the production and reproduction of meaning in human society" (Risager, 2016, p. 39). Likewise, Kramsch adopts the perspective that language embodies cultural reality, "a large part of what we call culture is a social construct, the product of self and other perceptions" (1993, p. 205). For her, the new ways of looking at the teaching of language and culture include the establishment of a "sphere of interculturality" (1993, p. 205), where meaning is relational and emerges through social interaction. Interculturality includes a reflection both on the target and native culture and is therefore seen as "an eminently educational process" (1993, p. 205). In her conception, the approach adopted involves dialogue. The culture that emerges through this dialogue takes place on a "cultural fault line" (1993, p. 205) in which linguistic and cultural practices and products occupy a "third place" (1993, p. 233), further defined as "the unbounded point of intersection where interactants from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds meet and communicate successfully" (Lo Bianco, Liddicoat, & Crozet, 1999, p. 1). These perspectives put culture at the core of transformative learning, giving it a more dynamic position.

Knowledge of the relationships between language, culture, and communication is considered essential for language learners, as is their ability to apply this knowledge to diverse situations (Baker, 2011). The knowledge, attitudes, and skills associated with successful intercultural communication have given rise to an intercultural dimension in language education (Byram, 1997; 2008; Kramsch, 2009). As Byram (1997) stated, successful interaction implies not only an effective interchange of information,

as was the goal of communicative language teaching, but also “the ability to decentre and take up the other’s perspective on their own culture, anticipating, and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behaviour” (p. 42). From this perspective, he coins the notion of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) (Byram, 1997) that was further developed by Guilherme (2002) with a more critical and post-modernist approach. She emphasises the intercultural speaker’s critical role as a mediator who is “aware of the multiple, ambivalent, resourceful, and elastic nature of cultural identities in an intercultural encounter” (Guilherme, 2002, p. 125). More recent conceptions of ICC include the idea of intercultural citizenship (Byram, 2008) and Kramsch’s “symbolic competence” (2009, p. 200) which is viewed as a dynamic competence that enables learners to negotiate the complex symbolism of discursive events. It has been further defined as “the potential to become aware of and critically reflect on and act on the crossing of multiple borders between linguistic codes and cultural meanings” (Vinall, 2016, p. 5).

Drawing on the dynamic notions of languages and cultures in intercultural communication, the notion of intercultural awareness (ICA) is developed by Baker (2011), who is concerned with “the type of attitudes towards cultures and knowledge of cultures needed to be able to successfully engage in intercultural communication and the ability to articulate these attitudes and knowledge” (Baker, 2011, p. 201). The recognition of ICC and ICA for successful intercultural communication and meaning construction in institutional contexts is at the heart of various ideas of telecollaboration. Belz’s definition of telecollaboration (2003) highlights that intercultural communication is institutionally and electronically mediated under the guidance of a linguacultural expert (a teacher) for the development of intercultural competence. In fact, the gains in developing intercultural communicative competence realised through telecollaboration in foreign language education are widely recognised (Helm, 2015). Intercultural competences are related to our capacity to identify our own cultural patterns, contrast them with others, and adapt flexibly to unfamiliar ways of being, developing an emotional and cognitive movement towards the other.

Experience journals as tool for reflection and reflexivity

In education, tools such as learning logs, diaries, and journals have been used to help the learning process and foster learners’ autonomy through writing and reflecting on what they have produced and drawn from their activities (Litzler & Bakieva, 2017). The common purpose of these learning logs or journals has been reflexivity. Learners reflect on certain notions or knowledge provided by the learning activities, and they are able to add reflexivity to the whole learning process (Altet, Perrenoud, & Etienne, 2013; Schön, 1983).

Reflexivity works as meta-learning or metacognitive awareness and engages students in thinking about their learning process and their deeper experience as learners. Language learning is enhanced by raising awareness of communication in its social and cultural dimensions, and learning logs, diaries, and journals are suitable spaces for reflection on these assumptions. The Council of Europe at the turn of the millennium developed tools such as language autobiographies and e-portfolios to raise awareness of speakers' plurilingual and pluricultural competences, signifying a paradigm shift from a monolingual/monocultural to a plurilingual/pluricultural perspective (Derivry-Plard, 2020). Multiple language autobiographies have been published showing the interwoven relationships between languages and cultures (Molinié, 2019), investigating the third places of mobile or non-mobile language learners.

The context and participants

The participants in the project were 45 students and four teacher-researchers from the four countries, who worked together through digital technologies. In this project, intercultural telecollaboration was used as a tool that allowed interaction and joint collaboration among the participants. From the perspective of the teachers, the context was defined by the joint decisions that went into designing the learning environment to meet specific teaching aims and local conditions (schedules, time zones, group setting, tasks, technology). From the perspective of the learners, the learning environment was based on collaboration with students from four countries working together online (through BigBlueButton – BBB, Moodle, Skype, Google Drive). They discussed topics concerning their professional field, that is, education and/or language teaching, to complete three tasks in a period of five weeks, interacting and using English as a *lingua franca*. From the perspective of the teacher-researchers, the telecollaboration afforded a pedagogical opportunity to investigate the potentialities of the intercultural experience through interactions.

The learning environment was co-designed, taking into consideration the complexity of each local context, whether it was possible to include the activities in a class or not, and the need to work across different time zones. Each working group consisted of four students (one from each country). Synchronous sessions were held between Spain and Brazil, Spain and France, and France and Taiwan during class time. For working group interactions, students had to schedule meetings by negotiating across the different time zones and engage in regular contact in order to meet the deadlines. The idea was that the teacher-researchers would supervise the first meetings and then students would complete the tasks outside class.

In the 3CIT project, intercultural communication was the main objective, and the pedagogical question was how to set up a learning environment

that offers students from different cultures and languages the opportunity to experience intercultural communication through the medium of English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF). English learning could be seen as a secondary objective of the learning environment, although this may be grossly underestimating the interrelatedness of content and language, given that no content is ever co-constructed without language (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). With 3CIT, content viewed as meaning-making is co-constructed in communication using ELF, and communication is also co-constructed through the participants' different cultural and language repertoires. Communication through the process of meaning-making is the core objective of the three tasks designed following a careful, step-by-step, intercultural process.

The 3CIT project creates a virtual setting. When designing the tasks, the objective was twofold. One purpose was to develop students' competence in intercultural communication. Another was to enhance their confidence and competence in English as a *Lingua Franca*. Three tasks were designed and carried out over a semester. Two of them involved a multicultural group of students working collaboratively and one was an individual experience journal. In the first task, students introduce themselves to their group mates using an object. The second task consists of writing a collaborative text relating the outcomes of their discussions on broad topics relating to education. In the experience journal, the third task, students keep track of their personal reflections on the many exchanges and interactions.

A new generation of telecollaborative activities has been created (Guth & Helm, 2010) because of the innovative nature of the Web 2.0. This Telecollaboration 2.0 reflects, in many ways, a more flexible and adaptable interpretation of how online intercultural interaction and exchange can take place in foreign language education (O'Dowd, 2018). As claimed by Hauck (2010), Guth, and Helm (2010), Telecollaboration 2.0 focuses not only on the development of learners' linguistic and intercultural competence but also on the skills of "new literacy" in the Web. 2.0 (Knobel & Lankshear, 2007), necessary to learn and work in today's information society. The distinguishing features of Telecollaboration 2.0 are also apparent in the following aspects of this project:

- 1 Multilateral: participants were engaged in a more complex multilateral group setting with language learners from four different countries (Brazil, France, Spain, and Taiwan).
- 2 Multilingual: language use in 3CIT involves the use of a *lingua franca* (English).
- 3 Multimodal: the participants of 3CIT communicated through combinations of text, voice, photos, videos, and other formats of the Web. 2.0.
- 4 Undoing native-speakerism (Houghton & Hashimoto, 2018): native-speakerism is challenged in this project, since none of the group members was a native speaker of English.

It is important to highlight the intertwining of the fields involved in this telecollaborative context, as we hope to foster a view of education through language teaching and of language teaching through education. Education is understood as treating topics related to the field of education, the learners' core subject. Further, it is also viewed as an intercultural process of learning about self and others. Language teaching is understood as fostering communication and the intercultural dimension of any human interaction.

The experience journals

The first two tasks are group work and are carried out at the same time as an individual task, the experience journal. Each learner is invited to reflect on his or her experiences of the two tasks in the telecollaboration: first through synchronous oral discussions and then through joint writing to report on each task. From the outset, the focus of 3CIT to be explored and experienced through the tasks was its intercultural dimension. The individual experience journal helps learners to reflect on the tasks and their understanding of the intercultural dimensions of the telecollaboration. Even though the goal is intercultural, it is the specific experience of the multicultural and multilingual group that is to be highlighted within this telecollaboration, hence the term chosen, experience journal.

The experience journal cannot be separated from the intercultural telecollaboration process. It is based on the ethical principles that otherness cannot be fully separated from self, that humans are “similar-different” (*semblables-différents*) beings (Alaoui, 2018). Furthermore, the experience journal is a reflexive space for the emergence of multidimensional identities expressed in the dialogic feature of communication (Bakhtin, 1930/1981) and intercultural communication (Byram, 2008; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013).

The experience journal is an individual task written in English and organised in three parts:

- An introduction to present the learner's understanding of intercultural telecollaboration and his/her expectations.
- The body of the text, a week-by-week description, a personal account of how the group met, worked, organised themselves online, in- and outside of class, how they completed the two tasks and what they learned critically from the two joint tasks.
- A conclusion to reflect on the whole process, what they learned about themselves and others and what they learned about cultural and intercultural aspects.

As the first two tasks aim to reveal what is common and different in the group, learners are led to reflect and take a step back from their own lifestyle and opinions. The first task focuses on their lives, what they like and dislike

and how they are similar and different as students from different countries. The second task is about opinions concerning education in their respective countries, how they react similarly or differently to a video dealing with school and social disparities, inclusion, and authority and how they relate these issues with their educational systems. The impact of the discussions is enhanced through the dialogic, reflexive, and critical aspects of the experience journal.

Being read by the teachers only, these experience journals also help learners use the writing process to answer questions or even regulate tensions that might go unresolved during the short period of the telecollaboration. It helps them progress from simple description to a deeper narrative that compares viewpoints, contexts, and reflections. In that sense, the experience journal is essential in intercultural telecollaboration given that the core goal is to deal with the complexity of interculturality or the complexity of selves and others (similar-different selves), meaning-making as an intricate and sophisticated construction of content, language, and cultural repertoires. What the experience journal adds to the intercultural dimension of the first two tasks is another layer of learning to increase metacognitive awareness, reflexivity, and criticality of these complexities: intercultural communication, similar-different selves, and meaning-making negotiation.

The dynamics of the experience journal underpin awareness of an intercultural learning process: the learners pursue knowledge from personal experience and from a collaborative experience with multicultural others, an autonomous, transformative, educational moment both infinite and unfinished. Our main goal in researching the experience journals was to provide evidence of the different dimensions that emerged from students' experiences and to identify if there was a change of perspective among students through their narratives.

Methodology

As teachers and researchers, it seemed possible to us to combine educational purposes with research objectives in this 3CIT project. Thus, the experience journals assigned as pedagogical tasks also served as data to be analysed collaboratively by the researchers. This entailed many collaborative discussions for preparing and analysing the data. We processed the data jointly and followed the same, agreed, step-by-step procedures to organise a thematic content analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012).

Even though we came with our diverse, pre-conceived ideas about intercultural telecollaboration based on our readings and teaching experiences, we chose not to set up a predefined framework of analysis, but use our understanding of Grounded Theory (Hadley, 2017), which seems relevant for this research based on the writings of multicultural students who participated in this learning experience. We used MAXQDA online software to share

the texts and created common coding identifying the key points of the data gathered. This stage allowed us to group a collection of codes of similar content. Our method was inductive from the data we collected together and was treated from multicultural epistemologies.

The methodology was combined with thematic content analysis in the way we treated the narratives through themes, by counting occurrences. The co-coding construction required us to constantly clarify amongst ourselves to ensure we named and coded the occurrences similarly. This phase helped us to reduce subjectivity and increase trustworthiness in our coding by creating a research microculture, which may have its own bias and limitations. However, doing research collaboratively with people in the same epistemological domain but with different cultural perspectives is certainly beneficial and particularly relevant for intercultural telecollaboration projects: this is not simple addition or juxtaposition of research but an intercultural endeavour to do research multiculturally (Liddicoat & Derivry-Plard, forthcoming).

The qualitative and interpretative analysis was carried out jointly. We read the journals of all students, defined categories from the meanings expressed, re-read all the categories and occurrences together, and merged or created new categories. Finally, four broad categories expressed the full content of the texts based on a corpus of 34,122 words with a roughly equal share of 25% for each country. Of the 13 groups of four students from the four countries, eight were complete groups of four students and five were incomplete groups, comprising 45 students in total. We decided to treat the whole corpus to get the full thematic content of these experience journals. Number of words per group ranged from 1,477 (the lowest group, the only one with two missing students) up to 5,388 words (the highest among the complete groups).

A total of 1,143 codes emerged from the analyses of the data under four categories: Telecollaboration, Communication, Learning, and Interculturality (Figure 8.1).

In each category, we gathered statements that addressed a specific dimension of the intercultural experience. The analysis is presented according to assertions generated from each category considering the most prominent features in the subcategories and their relation to the students' experience in the 3CIT. The excerpts used to illustrate the discussions in the next section are coded according to the category they belong to, followed by the student's group number and country he/she is from. Thus, the code T-1-B stands for the category Telecollaboration, from a Brazilian student in group 1. Every mention of students' names has been replaced by (student + a capital letter) to comply with confidentiality requirements. It is important to acknowledge that the excerpts used have not been corrected for English mistakes as we consider the students' interlanguage part of their learning process.

▲ ☒ Telecollaboration	0	▲ ☒ Learning	0
☒ notion of time	10	☒ Digital learning	2
☒ Expectations on the telecollaboration	26	☒ Learning English	15
☒ Learning gains through telecollaboration	18	☒ Learning strategy	7
☒ Understanding of TC	37	☒ Gaining confidence	36
☒ Positive attitudes	115	☒ Engagement in tasks	96
☒ Solving technical problems	30	▲ ☒ Learning collaboratively	17
☒ Adding new tools to communicate	36	☒ about education	61
☒ Technical problems	80	☒ about language learning in other countries	10
☒ Frustrations	30	☒ about each other's culture	29
▲ ☒ Communication	0	▲ ☒ Interculturality	0
☒ providing/receiving support	6	☒ Cultural / intercultural awareness	34
☒ Expectations towards communication	17	☒ differences between cultures	26
☒ Communication with non native speakers/foreign...	15	☒ Building a bond	83
☒ Engagement in communication	57	☒ Suspending judgements	14
☒ Verbal and visual communication	5	☒ similarities between cultures	37
☒ Exchanging opinion	24		
☒ Exchanging information	30		
☒ Dynamics of group interaction	85		
☒ Realising communication is possible	22		
☒ Fear to communicate	33		

Figure 8.1 Four categories

Source: Maxqda

Students' experience in the telecollaboration

Under the category Telecollaboration, we grouped the instances in the journals covering students' understanding of and attitudes towards the experience. A total of 115 codes were related to students' positive attitudes to the experience. Some students were already familiar with telecollaboration, which appeared to be an important factor for positive expectations:

I had already had experiences of telecollaboration with Teletandem – which is a project held at our University, so I was feeling very excited and comfortable to have this new experience.

(T-1-B)

The possibility of talking to someone from a different country whose professional interests were similar also appeared to be an element that generated positivity:

As for me, Intercultural Telecollaboration not only provides a precious and safe chance to make more foreign friends but also becomes a very great opportunity to learn education from other countries. It is very rare to have students from four countries being involved in one specific international project and especially all of us have background of studying education or being a teacher teaching presently. It is also a very special project because we are “far” enough (three continents) and we surely see things from different points of view. I personally really enjoy this project and it has surely become one of my highlight of May.

(T-5-T)

I'm happy to have participate at this experience. It's new for me to speak English with other persons. It's a good experience for my future job.
(T-2-F)

When she appeared in the screen, all my nerves disappeared and we started talking very fluently.
(T-7-S)

This conversation took 2 hours and was very interesting.
(T-13-B)

As seen in the previous excerpts, students mention the experience as an opportunity to discuss issues related to their field of studies, to practice their English language skills, especially connected with the fact that they worked with synchronous tools. Even though they reported problems with the technology (80 codes), especially related to Internet connection, it seems that students found solutions on their own to deal with them.

We can consider that dealing with these technical inconveniences is also part of consolidating online skills for future professionals. In the subcategory solving technical problems (30 codes), they report resorting to Facebook videoconference when the BBB did not work, or using the chat when oral communication was not possible due to lack of equipment or unstable connections. Students also mentioned adding new tools to communicate (36 codes) besides the ones proposed for the telecollaboration, such as Facebook groups, WhatsApp, Skype, and Messenger.

The coding also made explicit that there were gains and frustrations concerning the experience. Students reported feeling disappointed when their partners took longer than they expected to reply, when they realised they had different expectations, involvement in or understanding of the tasks, and when they struggled with their own communicative competence in English. The time difference also represented a challenge as group meetings had to be scheduled for morning in Brazil, early afternoon in Europe and evening in Taiwan. On the other hand, several students reflected on the learning gains provided by the telecollaboration experience, especially related to confidence in speaking English:

I have learn with this experience that it is possible for me to talk with foreign people, in English, during two hours.
(T-1-F)

I have learned that the collaboration between people from different countries can be a very useful tool for teaching foreign languages.
(T-10-S)

The telecollaboration experience gave me a lot of opportunities to develop my comprehension and learning of English. I got the chance to meet some really nice people around the world and make a connection with them somehow.

(T-5-B)

After this experience, I learned how necessary I need to work on it more. I just need to read more education-related English articles and get improved. Of course, my passion of learning and teaching English is still increasing, not even a sign of decreasing. It is just the truth of being insufficient motivates me to learn more.

(T-5-T)

Students claim not only to have learned English but they have also seen the 3CIT as an opportunity to reflect on telecollaboration as part of education. As professionals in the field of education, learning from experience how these tools can be used is an important element for the (re)construction and transformation of their teaching practices. According to Freeman (2009), teacher education has adopted different perspectives over the years, from a view of training in knowledge and skills to one that placed emphasis on the professional development of teachers. This complex activity has been redefined lately to include a broader sense of the influences of research-based and conceptualisation arguments as well as issues concerning identity, socialisation, and situations of practice, which can be addressed by projects such as the 3CIT. In this sense, students also referred to the experience as a way of creating bonds with people from different cultures and opening their horizons in relation to education and citizenship, as seen in the following excerpts:

And I know that now I have friends in Brazil, France and Taiwan. These three girls will be always in my heart.

(T-9-S)

During this half year, each one of us has had the chance to work with international students from Taiwan, Spain and Brezil. An educating and rewarding experience, which has allowed to learn differently.

(T-10-F)

Thus, this cultural learning and this overcoming of fears was only possible through technology, proving to us so that education should provide itself with all possible tools.

(T-14-B)

Also, I found that they pay attention on politics because we talked about politics and people's work. I am not interest in politics so I didn't know

what can I say when we talked about this. I think I need to care about my country more and that I can share more things to others.

(T-7-T)

Students seem to have understood the experience in 3CIT from a perspective that involves their individual views combined with the development of a sense of group provided by the technological tools and tasks proposed.

Students' experience of intercultural awareness

The students involved in the 3CIT project were acutely aware of the fact that their telecollaboration experience allowed them to engage in intercultural communication. Throughout their experience journals, one of the recurring themes we identified is their *cultural and intercultural awareness*. Students' reflections reveal that they understand the existence of *differences and similarities between cultures*. For them, this diversity of cultures is viewed as personally enriching and a motivation for learning; that is, it is linked to a positive disposition towards the other. They are even aware that the contact with people from other cultural backgrounds further enhances their intercultural competence:

It helps to develop the intercultural competence, as it is a great tool to know deeper the human diversity, leave behind stereotypes related to different cultures and get to know people who are different than you, and whom you can learn from.

(I-11-S)

It was great to get to know other lives, other cultures and really realize just how wide the world is.

(I-14-B)

They can improve their level but also develop social skills like empathy, solidarity it will be a real citizen exercise.

(I-9-F)

Because in our study we were interested in the intercultural dimension of the 3CIT project, we wondered how students define themselves when interacting with members of different cultures. From their experience journals, we observed that the most common theme was *Building a bond*. In their intercultural engagement through telecollaboration, the students' reflections in the learning journals reveal their interest in defining their own identity as a group, and that is the reason why they try to acknowledge a shared perception. Research on Social Psychology suggests that groups form when people perceive themselves as "us" in contrast to a "them." The "us" perception

relates to members of in-groups, whereas the “them” perception relates to members of out-groups (Gudykunst, 1998). In addition, the more familiar people are with a social group, the more likely they are to see the diversity within the group. This perception of the *diversity within the group* is found in statements from the learning journals of students, which clarifies that an intercultural dimension emerges in our learning environment. Data showed that the students are aware that the stronger the group identity, the easier communication between them is likely to be:

We got to talk about our families in a “deep” way and about different feelings... that we definitely share; and probably are those shared emotion that make me feel more linked to her, in spite of belonging to very different cultures.

(I-5-S)

We found things in common and achieving these common points probably boosted our “connection feeling.”

(I-5-S)

She lives in the city with two roommates (like me again). (...) Her object is a photo which shows a woman who is running. In fact, (student M) likes run, she run every day except the weekend. We were laughing because is again a common point. (...) We talked about travels because this is another a common thing.

(I-1-F)

According to Singer (1998) and his theory of perceptual identity, a group forms when “two or more individuals communicate the fact that they share a common identity or view of something. Once they do communicate that similarity, verbally or nonverbally, they have become an identity group” (p. 59). When forming a social identity, people need to compare themselves to others and find there are similarities between them. In fact, he considers that communication between people is more intercultural than interpersonal.

In this regard, and related to the theme of building a bond, it is interesting to highlight the role *emotions* play in the interactions. The recurrence of expressions, for example, “confident,” “comfortable,” “shared emotion,” and “curiosity” showed how students valued the need to get to know each other and establish trust in the relationship with these new acquaintances. As Coleman’s (2015) findings demonstrated, meeting people represents the basis for learning interculturality.

Curiosity: this is what moved us to talk, we were asking questions about culture, lifestyle in the unknown country all the time.

(I-11-B)

We all chose a different object to present ourselves with (...), which I thought was a good idea to make us bond a little bit better without getting our personal space too crowded.

(I-1-B)

These talks make us to know each other better, and we feel confident on ourselves and our level of English. I think we have created a group where we all feel comfortable.

(I-1-S)

We got to talk about our families in a “deep” way and about different feelings... that we definitely share; and probably are those shared emotion that make me feel more linked to her, in spite of belonging to very different cultures.

(I-5-S)

Although we find statements that focus solely on topics about daily life, hobbies, etc., that may lead to shallow interactions (Kramsch, 2014) and to the “assumption of similarity” (Ware & Kramsch, 2005, p. 66), it is interesting to notice that the students go deeper and don’t remain at the superficial level:

...our principles and values have more in common that what we expected (for example we share the same worries for the future of education, for how our societies sees our future profession, and so on).

(I-13-S)

Today only (student C) and me chatted online, we shared our opinions towards education, we both shared the ideas that education does play an important role in our daily lives, and that teachers always need to be the bridge that brings children a lot of diverse knowledge and make students to learn with their curiosity and have the motivation to learn.

(I-14-T)

In our intercultural learning environment, students develop an awareness that cultural differences exist, and this perception of the Other constitutes the essence of cultural understanding. Their perception of the Other goes beyond generalisations and includes other values, such as suspending judgments, which is found in our data:

I think I have in mind a more stereotyped image of Brazilian culture and people that does not correspond with the reality I have experienced.

(I-13-S)

During this experience, I have learnt many things: once more, that you cannot use an adjective for all the “Brazilians” or for all the “French

people,” that you have also to try to understand their situation (...) that having a successful communication with people from another country not only depends on the differences or similarities between cultures, but on the person itself and on the attitude of the person and the willingness to make the communication worth and work.

(I-5-S)

These examples demonstrate how students perceive their intercultural engagement in a telecollaboration experience. For students, being engaged in meaning-making helps develop a deeper appreciation of diversity and a willingness to engage with others. The intercultural telecollaboration contributed to the development of their intercultural awareness, that is, “the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures” (Wiseman, 2002, p. 208) and their perception of similar-different.

Students’ experience of communication

As communication accounts for an essential dimension of human activity and as it was the core objective of the project (to allow learners from different cultures and languages to communicate), the category *Communication* was the largest one with 294 codes.

The variety and span of sub-themes of *Communication* is to be understood within the narratives of students’ experiences, thoughts, and reflections. Students’ comments concerning successful communication are gathered under dynamics of group interaction (85 codes) and engagement (57 codes). Both are linked, as participants need some engagement in the project to communicate with three other students from three different countries, and to create and maintain group dynamics through the entire project.

Even though engagement shows an inherent positive attitude (students are eager to meet and communicate), the groups, which also demonstrated basically positive dynamics, had to accommodate different schedules, time zones, levels of English, and technical tools. Students had to find their own specific ways to work around these uncertainties of 3CIT dialogues to sustain them for completing the tasks requiring intensive communication:

Their full participation has encouraged me as well. I found it interesting that in the chatting room, as we all have something to say...

(C-5-T)

After the first week, we got pretty consistent schedules – we talked on Facebook to decide if we were going to meet on Saturday or Sunday and we reminded each other of the topics of the week and the task we had to

do (student S) talked to us on Facebook to say she wasn't able to join us in every weekend.

(C-1-B)

At the time we didn't have news about (student A), the Taiwanese girl, so (student E) sent her an email. We decided also to create a group on skype to discuss when some was connected.

(C-9-F)

At last we can talk the four girls of the group! Although it was in the last day of telecollaboration... We have just finished this project, and I miss the girls already. I loved knowing them very much.

(C-9-S)

Even though students may idealise communication within that multicultural group when no one knows anything about the others, they do demonstrate some awareness of this idealisation, but also a renewed interest in communication, learning more about turn-taking while listening to the others finish what they have to say.

... whenever talking with them, I can feel the harmonious atmosphere within us. Though we never meet each other in the real life; however, I can still vividly feel their kindness. I can clearly remember that they are good at caring how others think about, though we are not so familiar with each other, but their enthusiasm made us quickly perform in front of each other at the first time.

(C-14-T)

However, idealizing situations is not the best way to face things in life. I expected to have great partners, engaged and eager to talk about their lives and the educational system in their countries; a subject that I love talking about. It was not quite like this but I had some interesting interactions with almost all of my partners. I could talk to the Spanish girl, (student A), twice: one through the chat and one through video. And also I talked to the Taiwanese girl, (student S), one through video. The French girl, (student H), did not interacted with us through video, we just exchanged some messages.

(C-15-B)

I found it interesting that in the chatting room, as we all have something to say, we're all trying to grab the best chance to talk by taking turns. We all try not to interrupt or cut in the middle of a talk.

C-5-T)

When we interact the four of us, the interaction is very good because we respect the turn taking.

(C-7-S)

However, some students also expressed a fear of speaking (33 codes):

I am very afraid and panic with this tasks because I am phobic with English oral. Talk of this project make me stressed.

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Both of us have felt nervous while speaking but it was successful because now I know more things about (student R).

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Since I had never tried to communicate with someone in English orally (apart from my classmates), I was terrified at the thought of trying to express myself in a foreign language.

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At the very beginning, I was quit nervous I was worried if I would be misunderstood because of some offensive actions or words I did without knowing.

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Being in close contacts with our students, we were able to encourage them and support them throughout the project. What we learned from the experience was that not only is it important to take time to explain the project and give clear and precise instructions from the very beginning, but also to be physically there with our students for the first meetings they have with their partners online. We noted that they do not like us to listen too long to their conversations, but they like the fact that we are there to provide any help they may need (technical, language, communication, task, etc.) to alleviate any concerns.

As language teachers, we were also interested to see if communicating with other non-native speakers of English would help them feel more confident speaking English and if this confidence would support learning. This topic constituted only 15 codes in our corpus and is clearly not an important dimension of the students' narratives in their experience journals. However, the mentions of this fact were positive and they underlined three major aspects:

- a Realising that communication is hard with people with limited resources, but at the same time, realising that communication is possible and rewarding:

For me, the difficulties are the accent problems. I didn't have many chances to talk with other country's people. This is a precious experience

to me. Hope next time I can conquer the accent problem and share more about myself.

(C-7-T)

I realise that I can talk with people with other mother tongues, therefore with other accents, in one common language, English.

(C-9-S)

Through telecolaboration, this fear began to subside, although I am still very tense. Anyway, now I see that there is hope for my fears in speaking English. Now I realize that I can communicate in English, even with great difficulty. And because of these difficulties, I realized that I need to train more and dedicate more to the language.

(C-14-B)

I have learn with this experience that it is possible for me to talk with foreign people, in English, during two hours. But it is very exhausting and difficult because my partner doesn't understand me sometimes even if I repeated. The level difference between my partners and me was difficult to manage. I think the experience would be even more beneficial if it was over one year.

(C-1-F)

- b Realising the importance of a shared language to communicate among non-native speakers and to expand communication possibilities to include more people:

It was great to have a real way to practice English with someone who only understood you by this language (because your language and her language are completely different)... What I mean is that if we have English as the only way to communicate, between people from different cultures in which English is not the mother tongue...

(C-13-S)

I have realized how amazing is communicating with other people of other countries so far of you with a common language, in this case, English... It is incredibly how can you communicate with other person who has not the same language as you, in English... It's amazing how a language like English can join us with very different people and how they can be similar to us.

(C-9-S)

English it's not our maternal language and the others are in the same position as me.

(C-7-F)

- c Realising the interest of learning English with other non-native speakers who do not share the same native language.

With this experience I learn to understand other English speakers. Since I learn English language, I only speak with French people. I think it's more pertinent like this, because other people have got other syntaxes that we learn in France.

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I am surprised that we could communicate very well, besides each other's accents. It was very similar to when we do the Teletandem in here with native speakers.

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These comments are in line with research results in ELF (Kohn, 2018; Seidlhofer, 2011; Sifakis, 2019) showing the emancipatory dimension of an ELF perspective for many learners of English: equal status of speakers as learners, expansion of potential intercultural communication with others, managing communication with speakers with different accents and language resources, gaining confidence in using a language for meaning-making, whatever the circumstances. These narratives show the importance of communicating with others using whatever language resources people have and making the most of them to exchange information, share opinions, and learn about one another. Communication in this learning environment is definitely understood as a challenge to meet others through a language that no one is fully comfortable with. However, the challenge becomes an opportunity for the students, and they made the most of it, as illustrated in their narratives.

To solve this communication problem, we used the chat because her main problem was with the oral language, not with the written language. We also explained her that she doesn't have to worry and if she needs time to look for words, that was not a problem.

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She speaks good English and has had enough patience to speak with me, who did not speak it as well!

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Communication was the focus of their experience, and their engagement in the discussion topics was necessary for them to overcome fears or idealised expectations, to gain confidence, trust, and respect in others trying, just like them, to express themselves. They realised that group dynamics do not progress linearly nor regularly, and practicing patience and goodwill are essential skills to sustain intercultural communication and complete the tasks.

Students' learning outcomes

This 3CIT has all the characteristics of Telecollaboration 2.0: it is multilateral, multimodal, and uses English as a lingua franca. The learning outcomes of this project happen in the online environment. "Learning" in 3CIT refers to students' self-awareness of progress thanks to the telecollaborative activities and especially what is shown in their experience journals. Learning in this project occurred in the process of intercultural collaborations instead of in language only. As previously mentioned, reflexivity on learning focuses on students' learning how to communicate in the online multicultural context, rather than on metacognitive strategies of learning languages. A total of nine categories and subcategories are listed under the category of learning. The three categories with the highest numbers of coded statements are gaining confidence, engagement in task, and learning collaboratively/about education. Although the total number of coded statements listed under this category is not as high as others, students' learning outcomes concern aspects of interculturality and communication, and this achieves the aim of the project as originally designed. Data from the learning section displayed below demonstrates this.

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I definitely feel more comfortable after this experience – specifically with talking to other people's whose first language is not English.

(L-1-B)

I think I feel more confident in English.

(L-1-F)

... we feel confident.

(L-1-S)

I feel I have improved in some way by our weekly meetings.

(L-5-T)

For three groups (Brazil, France, Spain), the telecollaborative activities of the 3CIT project were an integral part of formal courses, while one group (Taiwan) invited voluntary students. Most students demonstrated their eagerness to do extra work, e.g. opening a collaborative document before the video-conferencing, sharing responsibilities, and exploring their partners' cultures beforehand. Even though the instructors were not present for the videoconference every time, students seemed to have increased their capacity to self-regulate and autonomy of learning. A large number (96) of coded segments are listed under the category of engagement in task. This is significant evidence of learning in telecollaboration.

We couldn't talk all the group this week but we have a video conference on next Sunday all together. So, we uploaded a paragraph on a Google drive document each other and we made a conclusion with my Spanish partner on Thursday.

(L-1-F)

Our tasks were easy to complete because everyone did their part;

(L-1-S)

... and did a lot of research about how to talk with Spanish, French, and Brazil people...

(L-5-T)

I felt like because we had already worked with the video and had the opportunity to reflect upon the topic of discussion before the telecollaboration started, it was easier for me to talk about its topic than for (student M) and (student B).

(L-1-B)

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2006), self-regulation and autonomous learning play an important role in acquiring foreign languages. The open, multicultural, and online environment of the 3CIT project seems to create a learning space that will boost students' self-regulation and learning autonomy.

When students collaboratively worked on the second task of discussing educational issues, their reflections in the experience journals were quite profound. Not only did they realise that there are differences among educational systems, but they also accepted the unfamiliarity and learnt from it. In addition, through further communication, they started to realise that there were similarities in all four educational systems. They gained an understanding of the fact that educational systems in different cultures

might look unfamiliar outwardly, but at their core there are many similarities. Becoming familiar with “otherness” is also one learning gain that comes out of the telecollaborative process. These excerpts demonstrate that:

At the end, we talked about ways to learn English in Spain and in France. She explained me Spanish pupils started to learn English at 5 years old. I said her, France should improve about that. I explained I think the languages teacher should be stop to talk French with student. I told her I take Spanish for the “Baccalaureat” and she doesn’t know what it is. So I explained to her and she told me, for the Spanish students there is the “PAU: prueba de acceso a la Universidad.”

(L-1-F)

From my partners, I learned different teaching ideas and many different views which I never thought of.

(L-5-T)

Students gradually realised there were indeed similarities among their different cultures:

We found that our educative systems have a lot of things in common.

(L-1-S)

I learnt some really cool things about the Taiwanese system and found out that France and Spain systems are pretty much like Brazil’s.

(L-1-B)

In the telecollaborative process, students broadened their understanding of other cultures by examining the differences in the beginning. The students at first sensed the “strangeness” of the other educational systems. However, they gradually developed an accepting attitude when they realised the existence of similarities and developed a perception of what it means to be similar-different.

Conclusion

Our results show that participating in the 3CIT project had two outcomes for students: advancing individual perceptions of the use of telecollaboration for education and developing a sense of group built by the bonds established through group dynamics. Communication was seen both as a challenge to meet others through a foreign language and also a meaning-making situation of practice that helped students gain confidence and explore the emancipatory dimensions of ELF. Above all, it seems that the intercultural experience

of the telecollaboration provided by the technological tools and tasks proposed contributed to the development of students' intercultural awareness, their appreciation of diversity, and their openness to engage with others. By focusing on similarities and differences, participants were able to sense strangeness and familiarity in aspects of diverse cultures and issues relating to their educational systems, which lead to an overall positive attitude and eagerness to overcome fears and idealised expectations.

The writing process in the experience journal played a key role in helping students regulate their own learning and take a step back from the experience. In this regard, the experience journal is viewed as essential in intercultural telecollaboration as it increases metacognitive awareness, reflexivity, and criticality. Through their writing, we were able to identify the main features of their experience: curiosity driven by their intercultural engagement, bonds forged through group interaction, an emerging perception of being similar-different, bolstered self-awareness of learning gains (cultural, intercultural, or language). Their understanding of the proposed learning environment strengthened their autonomy in making the process their own.

Students need to be better equipped to face the complexity of this *mondialité*. Our research shows that the sophisticated intercultural learning environment we offered them sowed the seeds for coping with intercultural communication and dialogue in challenging circumstances: working together across different time zones; diverse cultural and educational references; multiple languages and varied levels of ELF; many communicative tools and modalities – synchronous/asynchronous, spoken and written interaction; different deadlines and contexts for sharing out the collaborative tasks. However, to design such a learning environment combining research and teaching, we also need to equip pre-service and in-service teachers to face the ever-increasing complexities of their profession.

As language teachers and educators in the post-Covid-19 world, we call for training that will prepare pre- and in-service teachers to develop language and culture dialogues among their students. To foster these skills in their students, teachers should be trained first and foremost using these very intercultural professional practices, thus gaining confidence in the use of the target language, learning to co-teach across different educational contexts, and continuously improving their intercultural communicative observations regarding their colleagues and students. There is a global interest in virtual exchanges and intercultural telecollaborative practices while nations dealing with Covid-19 keep closing their borders to protect their citizens. Disseminating this kind of intercultural telecollaboration rises above this contradiction and helps to sow the seeds for future intercultural citizens in *mondialité*.

Acknowledgement

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(C-5-T)

Being in close contacts with our students, we were able to encourage them and support them throughout the project. What we learned from the experience was that not only is it important to take time to explain the project and give clear and precise instructions from the very beginning, but also to be physically there with our students for the first meetings they have with their partners online. We noted that they do not like us to listen too long to their conversations, but they like the fact that we are there to provide any help they may need (technical, language, communication, task, etc.) to alleviate any concerns.

As language teachers, we were also interested to see if communicating with other non-native speakers of English would help them feel more confident speaking English and if this confidence would support learning. This topic constituted only 15 codes in our corpus and is clearly not an important dimension of the students' narratives in their experience journals. However, the mentions of this fact were positive and they underlined three major aspects:

- a Realising that communication is hard with people with limited resources, but at the same time, realising that communication is possible and rewarding:

For me, the difficulties are the accent problems. I didn't have many chances to talk with other country's people. This is a precious experience

to me. Hope next time I can conquer the accent problem and share more about myself.

(C-7-T)

I realise that I can talk with people with other mother tongues, therefore with other accents, in one common language, English.

(C-9-S)

Through telecolaboration, this fear began to subside, although I am still very tense. Anyway, now I see that there is hope for my fears in speaking English. Now I realize that I can communicate in English, even with great difficulty. And because of these difficulties, I realized that I need to train more and dedicate more to the language.

(C-14-B)

I have learn with this experience that it is possible for me to talk with foreign people, in English, during two hours. But it is very exhausting and difficult because my partner doesn't understand me sometimes even if I repeated. The level difference between my partners and me was difficult to manage. I think the experience would be even more beneficial if it was over one year.

(C-1-F)

- b Realising the importance of a shared language to communicate among non-native speakers and to expand communication possibilities to include more people:

It was great to have a real way to practice English with someone who only understood you by this language (because your language and her language are completely different)... What I mean is that if we have English as the only way to communicate, between people from different cultures in which English is not the mother tongue...

(C-13-S)

I have realized how amazing is communicating with other people of other countries so far of you with a common language, in this case, English... It is incredibly how can you communicate with other person who has not the same language as you, in English... It's amazing how a language like English can join us with very different people and how they can be similar to us.

(C-9-S)

English it's not our maternal language and the others are in the same position as me.

(C-7-F)

do (student S) talked to us on Facebook to say she wasn't able to join us in every weekend.

(C-1-B)

At the time we didn't have news about (student A), the Taiwanese girl, so (student E) sent her an email. We decided also to create a group on skype to discuss when some was connected.

(C-9-F)

At last we can talk the four girls of the group! Although it was in the last day of telecollaboration... We have just finished this project, and I miss the girls already. I loved knowing them very much.

(C-9-S)

Even though students may idealise communication within that multicultural group when no one knows anything about the others, they do demonstrate some awareness of this idealisation, but also a renewed interest in communication, learning more about turn-taking while listening to the others finish what they have to say.

... whenever talking with them, I can feel the harmonious atmosphere within us. Though we never meet each other in the real life; however, I can still vividly feel their kindness. I can clearly remember that they are good at caring how others think about, though we are not so familiar with each other, but their enthusiasm made us quickly perform in front of each other at the first time.

(C-14-T)

However, idealizing situations is not the best way to face things in life. I expected to have great partners, engaged and eager to talk about their lives and the educational system in their countries; a subject that I love talking about. It was not quite like this but I had some interesting interactions with almost all of my partners. I could talk to the Spanish girl, (student A), twice: one through the chat and one through video. And also I talked to the Taiwanese girl, (student S), one through video. The French girl, (student H), did not interacted with us through video, we just exchanged some messages.

(C-15-B)

I found it interesting that in the chatting room, as we all have something to say, we're all trying to grab the best chance to talk by taking turns. We all try not to interrupt or cut in the middle of a talk.

C-5-T)

people,” that you have also to try to understand their situation (...) that having a successful communication with people from another country not only depends on the differences or similarities between cultures, but on the person itself and on the attitude of the person and the willingness to make the communication worth and work.

(I-5-S)

These examples demonstrate how students perceive their intercultural engagement in a telecollaboration experience. For students, being engaged in meaning-making helps develop a deeper appreciation of diversity and a willingness to engage with others. The intercultural telecollaboration contributed to the development of their intercultural awareness, that is, “the knowledge, motivation, and skills to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures” (Wiseman, 2002, p. 208) and their perception of similar-different.

Students’ experience of communication

As communication accounts for an essential dimension of human activity and as it was the core objective of the project (to allow learners from different cultures and languages to communicate), the category *Communication* was the largest one with 294 codes.

The variety and span of sub-themes of *Communication* is to be understood within the narratives of students’ experiences, thoughts, and reflections. Students’ comments concerning successful communication are gathered under dynamics of group interaction (85 codes) and engagement (57 codes). Both are linked, as participants need some engagement in the project to communicate with three other students from three different countries, and to create and maintain group dynamics through the entire project.

Even though engagement shows an inherent positive attitude (students are eager to meet and communicate), the groups, which also demonstrated basically positive dynamics, had to accommodate different schedules, time zones, levels of English, and technical tools. Students had to find their own specific ways to work around these uncertainties of 3CIT dialogues to sustain them for completing the tasks requiring intensive communication:

Their full participation has encouraged me as well. I found it interesting that in the chatting room, as we all have something to say...

(C-5-T)

After the first week, we got pretty consistent schedules – we talked on Facebook to decide if we were going to meet on Saturday or Sunday and we reminded each other of the topics of the week and the task we had to

We all chose a different object to present ourselves with (...), which I thought was a good idea to make us bond a little bit better without getting our personal space too crowded.

(I-1-B)

These talks make us to know each other better, and we feel confident on ourselves and our level of English. I think we have created a group where we all feel comfortable.

(I-1-S)

We got to talk about our families in a “deep” way and about different feelings... that we definitely share; and probably are those shared emotion that make me feel more linked to her, in spite of belonging to very different cultures.

(I-5-S)

Although we find statements that focus solely on topics about daily life, hobbies, etc., that may lead to shallow interactions (Kramsch, 2014) and to the “assumption of similarity” (Ware & Kramsch, 2005, p. 66), it is interesting to notice that the students go deeper and don’t remain at the superficial level:

...our principles and values have more in common than what we expected (for example we share the same worries for the future of education, for how our societies see our future profession, and so on).

(I-13-S)

Today only (student C) and me chatted online, we shared our opinions towards education, we both shared the ideas that education does play an important role in our daily lives, and that teachers always need to be the bridge that brings children a lot of diverse knowledge and make students to learn with their curiosity and have the motivation to learn.

(I-14-T)

In our intercultural learning environment, students develop an awareness that cultural differences exist, and this perception of the Other constitutes the essence of cultural understanding. Their perception of the Other goes beyond generalisations and includes other values, such as suspending judgments, which is found in our data:

I think I have in mind a more stereotyped image of Brazilian culture and people that does not correspond with the reality I have experienced.

(I-13-S)

During this experience, I have learnt many things: once more, that you cannot use an adjective for all the “Brazilians” or for all the “French