

## 7 Developing teachers' competencies through intercultural telecollaboration

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### Introduction

Teacher competencies need to be reconceptualized to respond to the complexities and demands of an increasingly globalized educational scenario. Intercultural telecollaboration has brought a new dimension to teaching and learning for the past two decades, and especially during the COVID pandemic, it has been a way to maintain and work on social and intercultural links across countries when mobility and face-to-face interaction are limited and borders are closed. It is essential to prepare teachers to support intercultural communication in this global context, by building competencies through which they learn to co-teach and establish the conditions of possible communication across borders as well as develop inward-looking attitudes for openness toward others and their human rights.

This chapter aims at describing and discussing a virtual intercultural exchange environment over three continents designed to support the learning and collaborative activities of student-teachers from Brazil, Spain, France, and Taiwan with the ultimate goal of developing teachers' competencies. Students from four different languages and cultures work together using the medium of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) to exchange their views on education through collaborative tasks.

This three-continent environment also helps build emerging core educational cultures among future teachers of English or teachers of other disciplines using ELF. In the context of competency-based teacher education, intercultural telecollaboration is viewed as a challenge and as an opportunity for the development of teachers' repertoires in intercultural communication.

### Internationalization of teacher education

Over the last couple of decades, higher education has been deeply affected by globalization (Altbach et al., 2016). The ways in which higher education has responded to globalization have tended to be identified under the themes of "internationalization" and the development of "international strategies" (Altbach & Knight, 2007, p. 290). As Knight (2007) notes, globalization is a

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phenomenon impacting internationalization, which she describes as “a process of change through integrating an international, intercultural and global dimension in the goals, functions, and delivery of higher education” (Knight, 2013, p. 81).

Indeed, internationalization has become a key issue for higher education institutions that try to contribute meaningfully to the world and society by responding to the challenges and opportunities of our time. And by critically rethinking their policies and missions as a first step, higher education institutions try to address the question of the role they play in the contemporary world (Castro et al., 2020).

The discourse on internationalization has undergone a transformation in recent years. Stier (2006) has identified three discernible ideological discourses, which in turn lead to different practices. These are: “idealism,” “instrumentalism,” and “educationalism.” The last of these recognizes the personal and societal value of learning itself. Analyzing the actions and perspectives of oneself and others contributes to a person’s self-understanding and stimulates meta-reflection. In a recent edited book, Lundgren et al. (2020) adopt the educationalist discourse to internationalization by examining the concept of internationalization from an educational perspective and by giving voice to practitioners to offer accounts to research and practice which address intercultural dialog as an educational approach to the process of internationalization. In their concluding chapter, they state that:

If universities truly wish to create global-ready graduates who are able to cope with, work with, and change for the better the challenges of our times, then we argue there is no other option than to embrace an educationalist approach in the spirit of intercultural dialogue – however it may be understood in local contexts – through our internationalization policies, operations, teaching and learning, and most fundamentally in our people.

(Woodin et al., 2020, p. 223)

Through internationalizing practices in higher education, there is hope that students will come to develop their “capacity to critique the world they live in, see problems and issues from a range of perspectives, and take action to address them” (Leask, 2015, p. 17). The phenomenon of globalization recognizes the importance of education in understanding and solving global issues. In this regard, it has raised questions about what constitutes meaningful global citizenship. For UNESCO (2015), global citizenship refers to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity. It entails three core conceptual dimensions that serve as the basis for defining goals, learning objectives, competencies, and assessment criteria:

- 1 Cognitive: To acquire knowledge, understanding and critical thinking about global, regional, national, and local issues and the interconnectedness and interdependency of different countries and populations.

- 2 Socio-emotional: To have a sense of belonging to a common humanity, to share values and responsibilities, and to nurture empathy, solidarity and respect for differences and diversity.
- 3 Behavioral: To act effectively and responsibly at local, national, and global levels for a more peaceful and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2015, p. 15).

The role of education is moving toward transformative aims, building on knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that learners need in order to contribute to a more peaceful and sustainable world.

The content of such education must be relevant, with a focus on both cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of learning. The knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required by citizens to lead productive lives, make informed decisions and assume active roles locally and globally in facing and resolving global challenges can be acquired through education for sustainable development (ESD) and global citizenship education (GCED), which includes peace and human rights education as well as intercultural education and education for international understanding.

(UNESCO, 2016, p. 49)

UNESCO has stressed the importance of education for international, intercultural, and inter-religious understanding through programs that encourage dialog and make a meaningful contribution to sustainable and tolerant societies.

The discourse on the role of the professional educator is also changing and the importance of teacher competencies has been increasing in the past years (Wiseman & Anderson, 2014). For the European Commission (2013), teacher quality is high on the agenda. High-quality teachers are among the most important factors for achieving high-quality education. According to this document (European Commission, 2013, p. 17), “teaching staff nowadays also need the competences to constantly innovate and adapt; this includes having critical, evidence-based attitudes, enabling them to respond to student’s outcomes, new evidence from inside and outside the classroom, and professional dialogue, in order to adapt their own practices.”

Teacher education and professional training are crucial to the successful implementation of global competencies in education. Pre-service teachers and teachers need to be prepared to respond to the complexities and demands within an increasingly globalized educational scenario.

### **Competency-based language teaching in the international context**

Competency-based education (CBE) has been defined in several various ways and translated differently across disciplines. Le et al. (2014) explain that CBE “is an evolving field with no universally shared definition of what makes a model

competency-based” (p. 4). However, Gervais (2016) tried to provide it with an operational definition:

CBE is defined as an outcome-based approach to education that incorporates modes of instructional delivery and assessment efforts designed to evaluate mastery of learning by students through their demonstration of the knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, and behaviors required for the degree sought. (p. 99)

The theoretical roots of CBE can be traced back to several learning theories: behaviorist, functionalist, and humanistic learning theories (Gervais, 2016). Most CBE theorists advocate that education needs to focus less on a traditional classroom-based learning environment; instead, it should be more student-centered and prepare students for their social roles in the future as already mentioned by Riesman (1979). Besides, the curriculum theorist, Tyler (1976) emphasizes the importance for students to learn how to best apply the theories learned to practice. This essential pedagogical reasoning of CBE has been adopted in different disciplines to build practical teaching models.

Generally speaking, applications of CBE in language teaching started to be commonly accepted by educators worldwide in the 1990s. Competency-based language teaching (CBLT) gained its popularity in the United States in the 1990s due to its effectiveness of helping immigrants to acquire survival English (Paul, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Wong, 2008). The CBLT reasoning has also been adopted in the multilingual European Union (EU) in the 1990s because of the search for an effective language program to connect the private sectors, academics and employers from different European countries (Tudor, 2013). Furthermore, CBLT gradually caught the attention of foreign language educators in East Asia from the beginning of the 21st century because of their awareness of the negative results brought by traditional credentialism (Jang & Kim, 2004) in language teaching, and some countries, such as Taiwan, would like to replace it with CBLT.

### *Competency-based language teaching in the United States and in Europe*

CBE started in the United States around the beginning of the post-industrial years (1960s) but took off in popularity in the 1990s. Its earliest applications in language teaching were in adult survival-language programs for immigrants and refugees to learn necessary language skills to function (Paul, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Wong, 2008). There are several notions emphasized in the CBLT teaching models developed in the United States: (1) a student-centered approach, (2) task-learning for real life, (3) a mastery of learning, (4) self-paced or self-directed learning, and (5) competency of applying theories to practice (Gervais, 2016).

The EU comprises 26 countries with 23 official languages. This makes Europe an intensely multilingual and multicultural area. This situation implies the

significant role which a common language and language learning should play. Hence, since 1991, the Council of Europe has actively promoted a competency-based approach for language teaching and learning: the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR). The CEFR is one of the most widely adopted instruments of the Council of Europe in the field of languages. It clearly manifests the “can do” statements of learning a language and its common reference levels (A1 to C2) have been employed by worldwide educational institutions, private sectors as well as testing organizations as a criterion reference of defining language learning outcomes. The prevailing use of the CEFR makes it possible to assess the language competencies of learners in different countries on the same scale (Tudor, 2013).

### *Traditional and vernacular Confucianism in Asia*

Confucianism has undergone a two-thousand-year evolutionary process and its current characteristics have been reshaped and transformed for many times. Its two key characteristics are the method of instruction and examinations (Guthrie, 2011). The original teaching method of Confucius was non-formal and personal in character (Wu, 2011). According to the classical Chinese texts, Analects, Confucius preferred inducing students’ reflection and contemplation by answering students with another question. Thus, Confucius actually provided students with student-centered teaching and adaptive learning (Ho, 2018).

Throughout time, more political powers influenced the educational systems and more formalistic and bureaucratic examinations evolved. Gradually, teachers became authoritative, and learning of students was achieved through repetition and imitation. As the imperial examination system (credentialism) became the only possible way for social advancement regardless of birth, it refocused the purpose of Confucian education from inducing students’ reflections to passing the examinations through repetitive and imitative learning methods (Guthrie, 2011). These current educational practices in Confucianism have been labeled as “vernacular Confucianism” (Chang, 2000, p. 137).

Many educational phenomena in East Asia, including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, have been attributed to their common heritage, Confucianism and credentialism. Its over-emphasis on rote learning and high-stakes standardized tests has been criticized by many Asian educational scholars (Ho, 2018). The drawbacks of this Confucian educational practice and credentialism might have shaken beliefs of some Asian educators who would like to look for an alternative teaching method, such as the western competency-based teaching (Jang & Kim, 2004). According to Jang and Kim (2004), the criticisms of vernacular Confucianism education and credentialism are listed as follows:

- (1) high private tutoring spending
- (2) severe competition on the entrance exam for university or more selective universities,
- (3) mechanical learning, memorization, perfunctory instruction, and lack of creativity, flexibility and self-directed learning;
- (4) the demise of the classroom. (p. 692)

These criticisms are combined with the emerging problems found by Yi (2001): “(5) weakened teachers’ authority, and (6) low academic ability of college students.” These drawbacks might have resulted in the East Asian students’ inefficiency in applying knowledge in the workplace.

There seems to be a shared reason why CBLT has become popular or been on the rise in the United States, Europe, and East Asia. The policymakers, language teachers and researchers hope that classroom-based teaching should equip students with the competency of applying knowledge in practice. In terms of foreign language education, it means that learners should be able to utilize the learned language in real-life tasks. In the current intensively inter-connected global village, how to communicate well with people from different cultural backgrounds with a common language becomes the major task that a foreign language learner should be equipped with. Accomplishing these intercultural communication tasks requires not only linguistic but also intercultural competencies. Hence, for foreign language teacher training, intercultural communication competencies are essential and should not be neglected.

### **Intercultural telecollaboration for international teacher education**

New contexts of telecollaboration have generated the need for teacher education to review its knowledge base and rethink the role and competencies necessary for teachers to co-teach in intercultural online contexts. Some of the new challenges to be addressed include working together with partners in different places and time zones through the use of communicative tools that enable spoken and written modalities, accommodating diversity in relation to cultural and educational references, dealing with different languages and varied levels of English, as well as engaging in intercultural interaction and learning to co-teach within different educational contexts. We are thus facing a challenge for (language) teacher education with regard to the components of this new role as mediator in digital collaborative spaces, as well as the development of guidelines for initial and continuing training to prepare teachers to understand and negotiate local needs in order to collaboratively plan the activities and co-teach in such contexts.

Our experience in the development of the 3 Continents Intercultural Telecollaboration (3CIT) stems from our understanding of teacher education as a dynamic process of (re)-construction and transformation of practices, which must focus on the development of competencies through action and reflection. The 3CIT started in 2017 aiming at co-constructing a learning/teaching/researching environment designed to support telecollaborative activities of students in the field of teacher education from Brazil, France, Spain, and Taiwan. This learning environment was co-designed by the professors/researchers who jointly made decisions to accommodate specific teaching aims and local conditions, such as schedules, time zones, communication tools, types of tasks, and group settings.

The main objective of the 3CIT is to give students the opportunity to experience intercultural communication through the medium of ELF, by co-constructing the context through their different cultural and language repertoires and by reflecting on their experience. Three tasks to be performed in a period of five weeks were designed to elicit the intercultural process step by step. Two of them involve collaborative group work and one is an individual experience journal. The first collaborative task aims to be the starting point to create a shared and safe space where students will experience intercultural communication. It sets the perspective for students to speak about themselves within an academic context (not something usual in certain cultures) and to reflect on who they are and how similar and different they are from other people. In the second task, students must collaboratively write a text addressing the outcomes of their discussions on educational issues. These discussions are usually guided by input provided in the form of videos and reflective prompts. In the experience journal, each student must write his/her personal reflections on the interactions and exchanges throughout the telecollaboration period.

The groups are planned to have at least one student from each country, but accommodations have to be made taking into consideration the complexity of each local context. For example, decisions have to be made concerning whether or not to integrate the activities in a class, how to schedule synchronous sessions considering the different time zones, as well as strategies to guide students to engage in regular contact to perform the collaborative tasks and comply with the deadlines.

The 3CIT is also a common research environment for the professors/researchers to investigate the intercultural dimension of telecollaborative teaching and learning in order to improve the proposed pedagogy and to explore the potential of interculturality through online interactions in teacher education. In Salomão et al. (in press), we reported on the research we conducted together on the experience journals in order to understand “the different dimensions that emerged from students’ experience and to identify if there was a change of perspectives among students through their narratives.” The findings show that:

(...) the experience in the 3CIT project has combined students’ individual perceptions on the use of telecollaboration for education with the development of a sense of group built by the bonds established through group dynamics. Communication was both seen as a challenge to meet others through a foreign language but also a meaning-making situation of practice that helped students to gain confidence and explore the emancipatory dimensions of ELF. Above all, it seems that the intercultural experience in the telecollaboration provided by the technological tools and tasks proposed has contributed to the development of students’ intercultural awareness, appreciation of diversity and openness to engage with others. By focusing on similarities and differences, participants were able to sense strangeness and familiarity among aspects of their cultures and issues related to their educational systems, which lead to an overall positive attitude and eagerness to overcome fears and idealised expectations.



The experience has helped students to regulate their own learning and develop competencies in relation to metacognitive awareness, reflexivity, and criticality that may aid them to be better equipped to cope with intercultural communication within complex contexts.

### **An international course for teachers to learn intercultural telecollaboration design**

Based on our multilateral experience in intercultural telecollaboration, the notion of third place or space developed by Kramsch as far back as 1994 to characterize the language classroom was definitely the ground on which we reflect and develop our practices:

Because learning a language is learning to exercise both a social and personal voice, it is both a process of socialization into a given speech community and the acquisition of literacy as a means of expressing personal meanings that may put in question those of the speech community.

(Kramsch, 1994, p. 233)

If the traditional language classroom was limited to the walls of the room in a given time session, and under specific circumstances cast aside linguistic study abroad opportunities, the intercultural experience of the third space was nonetheless dependent on the sole language teacher creating the bridge to another language and culture. With the hyper-connectedness of the world, technology not only enhances and changes our relationship to reading, writing and knowledge but above all allows the language classroom to become a truly balanced third space where at least two language teachers and their learners from different languages and cultures meet and occupy the third space to its full potential.

If virtual online exchanges were not always successful and sometimes counter-productive in terms of language and intercultural competencies (Kern & Develotte, 2020; O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016), it seems that the monolingual paradigm in which generations of language teachers have been brought up and trained is still at work: too much focus on language per se, too much enchantment and fear of Information and Communication Technology, and very little concern of the cultural and intercultural dimension of communication.

In line with the process of internationalization, the language curriculum needs to be expanded taking into account the incredible potential offered by the Internet of linking language teachers and learners from the whole world, and allowing them for the first time in human history to meet the objectives of communication in a second language. The change of scale, from the traditional language classroom within a school located in a country to the updated language classroom of the global age in which language teachers and learners meet equally and co-build their own communicative third space, needs to be fully realized and highlighted by language teachers and language stakeholders.

This unprecedented situation for language teachers means they need to shift from the monolingual/monocultural paradigm they were educated in and in



which they brought “otherness” to the margin, to the plurilingual/pluricultural paradigm (Derivry-Plard, 2018, 2019, 2020) in which they need to co-build the intercultural interstices of the specific online exchange. There are therefore with the change of scale, more demands to the language teachers’ competencies in order to mitigate power relations that will always resist any co-teaching settings. These new competencies should be addressed with the global agenda of internationalization of higher education and of teachers training. Language teachers should be at the forefront of the global teachers’ objectives of a sustainable planet embracing the issues of human beings in relation with all other living bodies and with all other non-animated bodies such as robots and learning machines. Indeed, the traditional role of language teachers has been to offer a bridge to broader world views and perceptions from other learners through a new common language and different cultures. The bridge extension of the traditional language teacher is now a bridge co-designed by language teachers within the context of their educational institutions and co-built by them and their learners in the third space they will work in to develop their intercultural experiences.

What lived and created in the updated third space is:

The realization of difference, not only between oneself and others, but between one’s personal and one’s social self, indeed between different perceptions of oneself can be at once an elating and a deeply troubling experience.

(Kramsch, 1994, p. 234)

This is exactly the nexus of competencies from which a common course on intercultural telecollaboration for language teachers and teachers of other disciplines has to delve into. The contexts of teachers and learners need to be first acknowledged, embracing at the same time the specificities of the teachers and their learners in their diverse plurilingual/pluricultural competencies and trajectories (Kramsch, 2009; Kramsch & Zhang, 2018; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013; Zarate et al., 2011) and then to link them with research in intercultural communication (Zhu, 2016).

Thanks to sociolinguistics, we know the world is multilingual as the majority of speakers are plurilingual. Even among monolinguals, it is quite unlikely not to observe some language variety, hence the notion of language repertoires to better exemplify the language competencies of speakers. These realities have also been put forward by language teachers and researchers who have worked on plurilingualism/pluriculturalism, and interculturality in and outside the classroom, and how the multilingual learner and instructor find their own ways through surrounding monolingual perceptions and settings. Among these monolingual perceptions, the native/non-native divide resists as this is deeply ingrained in either transhistorical or transgeographical discourses and narratives (Derivry-Plard, 2015). Language learners and teachers share the common schemata of allowing different competencies to speakers and teachers. Learners often confuse the speaker of a language to the language teacher. Language teachers

often allow different professional competencies to native and non-native language speaker teachers based on the same views as the learners of the native/non-native speaker. These perceptions reifying the speaker and the language teacher to nativism has been coined as nativespeakerism (Holliday, 2006), a form of racism applied to the irreducibility of language. These latent views are deeply rooted in the monolingual/monocultural paradigm in societies, particularly in education and even in international education replicating to a certain extent global geopolitics. However multilingual education (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015; Garcia & Wei, 2014) is emerging and struggling with such rampant monolingual/cultural views<sup>1</sup>.

Taking into consideration the digital age and its potential multilingual and multicultural stance for the developments of a democratic and humanist approach to global education, it is necessary to develop an international course for teachers to learn intercultural telecollaboration design that addresses the following competencies (can do):

- Work telecollaboratively with language teachers or teachers from other disciplines and from different countries and languages,
- Design specific intercultural telecollaborations for language or discipline learning in line with the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach,
- Set the intercultural dimension of communication at the core of educational practice, human understanding and democratic principles,
- Approach language and cultural diversity as an inescapable reality worth being nurtured to better understand how similar and different people are from one another,
- Shift from a monolingual/cultural view to a plurilingual/cultural one not as opposing the former but as including it,
- Look at the traditional native/non-native divide as two final or extreme points on a very wide continuum,
- Identify nativespeakerism in discourse,
- Envisage languages and cultures as repertoires as well as pedagogical practices,
- Engage in knowledge and skills as two sides of the same coin and accept the coin to be flawed, repaired or changed when it is no longer useful,
- Trust in human goodwill, empathy, and in suspending judgments and beliefs when not proven,
- Be positively kind, alert and critical of yourself and others to develop curiosity, creativity and imagination.

## Conclusion

The global call for teachers is to equip learners not only with linguistic and communicative competencies, but also with an intercultural citizenship agenda within the internationalization of education. The educational milieu for foreign

language teaching nowadays has evolved under the use of technology, enabling more cultures to be in contact and create their own third spaces. Foreign language teachers face the challenge to add more competencies on how to perform online intercultural telecollaboration as well as how to design and deliver effective projects and tasks in these complex cultural environments. As exemplified with the CEFR, there is tension between the humanistic approach and the pragmatic operational model. At the same time, if the model of CBE or CBLT is inflated, the educational purpose can be restricted to “market/commodification of qualifications.”

Therefore, teacher education plays a key role in preparing language teachers and teachers of other disciplines to enhance the support given to learners in intercultural communication. The philosophical educational purpose of a global curriculum could be developed through intercultural telecollaboration and courses for teachers to develop competencies for successful implementation. In fact, the humanistic, holistic approach of a global curriculum is based both in the original Confucian and Socratic methods for smaller groups of learners and the great philosophers of education such as John Dewey and Paulo Freire, who added the vital dimensions of reflection and democracy in education. The agenda is to develop intercultural citizen’s competencies in its broad sense to acknowledge global diversity and communication through languages and cultures within a multicultural world.


## Note

- 1 Bordeaux English/French bilingual Master’s program in International Teaching and Training enables English/French-speaking students to deal with such issues. <http://pi-learning.inspe-bordeaux.fr/formation-de-formateurs-a-linternational/>

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