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# Chapter 7

# The Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence in Telecollaborative Partnerships

## JULIE A. BELZ

## Introduction

The hallmark of telecollaboration is the use of Internet communication tools (e.g. e-mail, chat, blogs, videoconferencing) to link linguistically and culturally disparate groups of language learners and teachers in institutionalised settings for the purposes of (bilingual) social interaction and project-based intercultural collaboration (Appel, 1999; Belz & Thorne, 2006; Carney, 2006; Fischer, 1998; Little & Brammerts, 1996; Tella, 1991; Warschauer, 1996; Warschauer & Kern, 2000). The anticipated goals of such learning arrangements are foreign language (L2) linguistic development and intercultural (communicative) competence (Byram, 1997; Zarate, 2003), i.e. the ability to situate and interpret L2 texts, artefacts, events, behaviours, storylines and interactions within contextually appropriate frames of reference. Intercultural competence further entails the ability to view the self through the eyes of the other, an act of psychological de-centring which may lead to a critical reassessment of one's taken-for-granted world (Byram, 1989, 2003).

A clear example of what it means to interpret L2 texts within culturally appropriate frames of reference can be seen in Maori writer Patricia Grace's (1987) short story *Butterflies* as discussed in Cazden (2001: 154). In this fictionalised account of a very young Maori girl's experiences at school with her *Pakeha* or white teacher, she is asked to write a story. Her story reads as follows: 'I killed all the butterflies ... This is me and this is all the butterflies' (Grace, 1987: 61). When the girl arrives home from school, her grandparents, who are hoeing around the cabbages and picking beans in the garden, ask her what her teacher said about her story. The young girl replies that her teacher said that butterflies are very beautiful creatures that fly in the sun and visit all the pretty flowers. According to the girl's teacher,

'you don't kill butterflies' (p. 61). When the girl's grandparents hear this report, they stand silently in their cabbage patch for a very long time. Finally, the grandfather says: 'because you see . . . your teacher, she buy [sic] all her cabbages from the supermarket and that's why' (p. 61). The teacher in this story negatively evaluates the killing of the butterflies and, consequently, the girl because she interprets the girl's behaviour, as reported in her story, within her own *Pakeha* frames of reference; she does not consider that 'killing all the butterflies' may mark the girl as helpful and even industrious within Maori frames of reference. If the teacher in this story had told the girl 'you must be a great help to your grandparents' instead of 'you don't kill butterflies', then she would have displayed a measure of intercultural competence.

The underlying rationale for telecollaboration with respect to the development of L2 linguistic competence is the familiar notion within foreign language education circles that exposure to L2 'input' will facilitate L2 development or change over time; nevertheless, relatively few studies report on the development of particular linguistic features in telecollaboration (e.g. Belz & Vyatkina, 2005; Dussias, 2006). The added dimension of social interaction with native-speaking *age peers* has been shown to broaden the range of available discourse options in comparison to traditional L2 classrooms, to alter and increase the (number of) epistemic roles that learners may assume, and to create conditions under which learners desire to present and maintain positive face, which, in turn, may result in enhanced L2 performance (Belz & Kinginger, 2003; Kinginger, 2000, 2004; Thorne, 2003). The rationale for the second goal, the development of intercultural competence, is rooted in the daily demands of our multilingual and globalised world, in the widely held belief that language and culture are inextricably bound together such that language is semiotic of culture, and in the humanistic assumption that intercultural understanding is of moral and ethical value (Corbett, 2003; Doyé, 1999; Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Nieto, 1999). In this latter vein, telecollaboration provides prolonged, cost-effective access to persons from other cultures for those learners who may have little opportunity to engage in intercultural communication and for whom residence abroad is not an option.

In a typical telecollaborative partnership, for example, Russian-speaking learners of English in Moscow might use e-mail and chat in order to interact with English-speaking learners of Russian in the USA on a variety of topics such as educational systems, discrimination, gender roles and the role of religion in everyday life (Bauer *et al.*, 2006). Over the course of the partnership, keypals collaborate electronically using their

native language (L1) and their L2 on a series of successively more complex projects under the guidance of competent teachers. To illustrate, learners on each end of an exchange might view a contemporary American film in English and a Russian film in Russian in order to examine how family life is variously constructed at both the linguistic and conceptual levels in the cultures under study as represented in the chosen films (Kinginger *et al.*, 1999). The instructional objectives in such a partnership are thus both linguistic and intercultural.

An alternative configuration is represented by the *Connect Program*, a new educational initiative funded, in part, by the *Ford Foundation*, which utilises web-based videoconferencing in order to connect small groups of college students in the USA and predominantly Muslim countries in the Middle East to 'collaboratively explore the relationship between the US and the Arab [and] Muslim World with the aim of improving intercultural awareness and understanding' (Soliya, 2007). A special emphasis of the *Connect Program* is an exploration of the profound role that the media play in shaping young adults' perceptions of other peoples and cultures. Participants have access to a wealth of online sources, including raw news and interview footage from *Al Jazeera, Reuters* and the *British Broadcasting Company*, in addition to academic and policy documents and lectures from relevant experts. These materials serve as prompts for synchronous and asynchronous discussions among participants and as resources for the production of project-culminating joint articles. Because the intercultural interactions supported by the *Connect Program* take place in English, the targeted instructional objectives are strictly intercultural in nature.

In the next section of this chapter, Byram's (1997) model of intercultural competence is examined in detail. The five principles of the model are introduced, concrete curricular objectives for each principle are discussed and learner behaviours that evidence the attainment of the stated curricular objectives are outlined. The third section is devoted to the pedagogy of telecollaboration (see also Avots, 1991; Belz, 2005a; Cononelos & Oliva, 1993; Kern, 1996; Thorne, 2006; Warschauer, 1995). A discussion of three activities that have been implemented in various telecollaborative partnerships and that have been shown to foster the development of intercultural competence is presented. In the fourth section, excerpts from previously conducted telecollaborative partnerships are analysed in order to give instructors an idea of what the (nascent) development of intercultural competence might look like in the electronic interactions and reflections of their students (see also Belz, 2003; Müller-Hartmann, 2006). The chapter concludes with a discussion of the extent to which

intercultural communicative competence may be developed in classroom-based instruction and pedagogical suggestions for future explorations.

## What Is Intercultural (Communicative) Competence?

The framework for intercultural (communicative) competence adopted here and in much of the recently published work on telecollaboration is that of Michael Byram as described in his 1997 book *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Byram, who bases his model on the work of van Ek (1986), sets up a dichotomy between the *tourist* and the *sojourner*. The tourist is a traveller to foreign lands who sets out to experience foreign peoples, cultures and artefacts with the hope that these encounters with otherness will enrich his or her current way of life, but not fundamentally alter it. The sojourner, on the other hand, 'produces effects on a society which challenge its unquestioned and unconscious beliefs, behaviours and meanings, and whose own beliefs, behaviours and meanings are in turn challenged and expected to change'. Byram (1997: 3) argues that it is the qualities of the sojourner that constitute intercultural competence, and that this, in turn, is an integral and definitive part of what it means to learn a foreign language:

> [Foreign language learning] is centrally concerned with communication in a foreign language. The significance of this is not only the practical question of linguistic competence for communication, central though that is, but also the relationship between the language and the cultural practices and beliefs of a group ... the acquisition of a foreign language is ... the relativisation of what seems to the learner to be the natural language of their own identities, and the realisation that these are cultural, and socially constructed.

Thus, the focus of Byram (1997) is on the ways in which foreign language education can contribute to the development of the qualities of the sojourner in the foreign language learner and how those qualities can be assessed in institutional settings.

Byram's framework consists of the following four aspects: (1) *abstract principles* that contribute to the processes of *decentring* (e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Byram, 1989; Kohlberg *et al.*, 1983), i.e. the ability to relate to and understand the other and to relativise one's own beliefs, practices, values and meanings when faced with those of the other; (2) *curricular objectives* for the institutionalised instruction of intercultural competence; (3) concrete examples of *learner behaviours* that might 'count as' evidence of the development of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997: 57); and

(4) *methods of assessment* for the development of intercultural competence in the institutionalised setting. It should be emphasised that Byram does not envision the teaching of intercultural competence as the simple conveyance of a fixed set of facts about dominant social groups in the foreign culture; instead, he places equal emphasis on equipping learners with the means to access, analyse, compare and evaluate whatever cultural artefacts, practices, values, beliefs or meanings they might encounter (e.g. elite as well as marginalised segments of societies). In effect, Byram stresses *method* as well as *essence* and *object* in the instruction of intercultural competence.

The model consists of five distinct but interdependent principles. These are: (1) *attitudes*, (2) *knowledge*, (3) *skills of discovery and interaction* and (4) *skills of interpreting and relating*. The interplay of the first four principles ideally should lead to the fifth, namely, *critical cultural awareness* or an *evaluative orientation* (Byram, 1997: 43) toward the examination of difference, where learners' evaluative points of reference are made explicit and where the new evaluative orientation toward difference fosters a readiness for political engagement (p. 44). The choice of the word *skills* to designate components of intercultural competence is unfortunate, however, because it carries with it the negative connotation that these components might be 'learnt by a simple technology and transferred unproblematically' from one context to another (Ivanic, 1998: 168), when, in point of fact, intercultural interpretation, relation, discovery and interaction are complex human activities that shape and are shaped by an intimate interface of macro- and microsociological factors, including both history and power (Belz, 2002; Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003; Kern, 2000: 249-56; Ware & Kramsch, 2005). In the following paragraphs, each principle of intercultural competence is examined more fully.

### Attitudes

Byram states that attitudes of *curiosity* and *openness* are both necessary preconditions as well as outcomes of intercultural learning, as the success of intercultural communication depends on establishing and maintaining good social relationships. The intercultural speaker, i.e. the speaker who is interculturally competent, must exhibit a 'readiness to suspend disbelief and judgment with respect to others' meanings, beliefs and behaviours' and a 'willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviors, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging' (Byram, 1997: 34; see also Kramsch, 1998). For example, English-speaking American learners in an exchange with Arabic-speaking Qatari learners must suspend their belief in the meanings that they might

attribute to Islamic dress within their own dominant cultural frames of reference and learn, instead, to interpret its value and significance within Qatari frames of reference. From the first perspective, Islamic dress might be interpreted as a sign of oppression and backwardness, while from the second perspective it signifies modesty, dignity, self-respect, freedom from sexual objectification and a desire to be evaluated on the basis of one's behaviour rather than one's appearance (Esposito, 2002: 96–98).

Concrete curricular objectives for the principle of attitudes include developing in the learner: (1) a willingness to seek out interaction with the other in a relationship of equality; (2) a genuine interest in the other's point of view on phenomena in one's own culture and in the other's culture; (3) a readiness to interrogate the value systems and assumptions behind one's own cultural practices; and (4) a readiness to examine one's own affective reactions to the experience of otherness and to cope with these reactions. In general, the interest of the intercultural speaker in the other is distinct from the interests of those whose interaction with the other is motivated by economic profit or by a fascination with the 'exotic'.

Byram's (1997) conceptualisation of the intercultural speaker with respect to *attitudes* seems reminiscent of linguistic anthropologist Michael Agar's (1994: 22–26) discussion of 'number 1 types'. Agar (1994: 23) writes:

> There are two ways of looking at differences between you and somebody else. One way is to figure out that the differences are the tip of the iceberg, the signal that two different *systems* are at work. Another way is to notice all the things that the other person lacks when compared to you, the so-called *deficit theory* approach. Number-one types – American or any other – use the deficit theory. They're the best, anything else is less than the best, and anyone who would call into question who they are when they're already the best is a fool or a masochist or even, as they used to say in America before *perestroika*, a Communist. (italics in the original)

At the risk of suggesting a 'deficit' definition, the intercultural speaker is *not* a 'number-one type' with respect to his or her attitudes about foreign cultures and peoples.

## Relational knowledge

Byram (1997: 35) states that individuals bring both *declarative* and *procedural* knowledge to the fore in interactions with members of other cultures. *Declarative knowledge* is factual in nature and refers to information about social groups and their cultures in one's own country and in the foreign country (e.g. many Amish live in Pennsylvania; some African–Americans speak Ebonics). *Procedural knowledge* encompasses information about the appropriate processes of interaction at both the individual and societal levels. All knowledge, however, is relational because it is contingent upon one's own socialisation processes; in other words, meaning is relative to context. A concise and eloquent illustration of the relational nature of knowledge is provided in the single-sentence poem *Hijab Scene #2* by Muslim-American poet and academician Mohja Kahf in her collection *E-mails from Scheherazad:*

> 'You people have such restrictive dress for women,' she said, hobbling away in three-inch heels and panty hose to finish out another pink-collar temp pool day. (Kahf, 2003: 42)

In this example, the speaker's 'knowledge' that the *hijab* or headscarf constitutes a restrictive form of dress is juxtaposed with the veiled addressee's 'knowledge' that it is three-inch heels and panty hose that constitute restrictive forms of dress. Both pieces of 'knowledge', however, are contingent upon and relative to the socialisation processes (e.g. schooling, family and community belief systems, regular and selective media portrayals) to which the speaker and the addressee in the poem have been exposed and in which they have participated.

The intercultural speaker is aware of the contingent nature of knowledge and this awareness may afford appropriate intercultural interaction. In Byram's model, the learner not only 'gathers facts' about the foreign culture, but is able to put this information into dialogue with information about his or her own country in similar topical domains. So, for example, an American learner of German would not only learn about the restriction of Jewish civil liberties in early 20th-century Germany in a German course, but he or she would be able to put that information into dialogue with the restriction of Japanese–American civil liberties in the USA in the 1940s as portrayed, for example, in the juvenile novels *Damals war es Friedrich* (Richter, 2001) and *Farewell to Manzanar* (Houston & Houston, 1983), respectively. It should be emphasised that this type of factual juxtaposition and the subsequent learning that may result from it requires extensive factual knowledge of *one's own culture* as well as that of the other; instructors should not necessarily assume that learners possess the requisite factual knowledge of their own cultures.

Important curricular objectives for this component of intercultural competence include knowledge of: (1) social institutions and their impact

on daily life; social and class distinctions and their markers; the processes of social interaction; (2) historical and contemporary relationships between the two countries in question including major events and people; stories about these relationships from both sides and from diverse groups within each country; (3) the national memories of each country, including icons, symbols, trends, myths, landmarks, artefacts of popular culture, regional distinctions, their markers and their meanings; and (4) the types of misunderstandings that may occur between members of the two countries in question and the origins of these misunderstandings such as culturally-contingent interpretations of psychological constructs like *patriotism* and *democracy* or social behaviour such as *public displays of affection* or *flying the national flag*.

In Byram's (1997: 90) vision of intercultural competence, it is not sufficient for an intercultural speaker to rattle off a list of facts and figures about the foreign culture or even their own culture, a type of learning that he designates as 'shallow'; instead, intercultural competence (in the domain of knowledge) should be identified with 'underlying understanding, metacognition, and the ability to reflect on one's own thinking and respond to experience'. This type of learning is known as 'deep learning' (Entwistle cited in Gipps, 1994: 24) and cannot be assessed in terms of psychometric objective tests, the hallmark of which is the multiple-choice question. Deep learning of intercultural knowledge may be assessed through: (1) comparative essay writing; (2) the ability to identify sources of intercultural misunderstanding in interaction; or (3) critical commentaries on intercultural phenomena (e.g. collegiate school spirit in the USA versus professional soccer fanaticism in Germany) *and* intracultural inconsistencies (e.g. the separation of church and state as articulated in the US constitution and the common practice of incorporating elements of the Christian holiday of Christmas into the art and music curricula of US public schools).

## Skills of discovery and interaction

Byram (1997: 38) defines the *skills of discovery* as 'the ability to recognise significant phenomena in a foreign environment and to elicit their meanings and connotations, and their relationship to other phenomena'. Unlike the *skills of interpreting and relating*, which draw on the learner's existing knowledge, the *skills of discovery* are needed in situations where individuals have little prior knowledge of the foreign culture or when interlocutors are unable to explain what is obvious for them in their 'taken-for-granted reality' (Byram, 1997: 99).

One important mode of discovery is social interaction. Byram (1997: 61) characterises the *skills of interaction* as the 'ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real time communication ... ' In telecollaboration, the following of Byram's (1997: 61–63) many curricular objectives appear to be the most relevant for the *skills of discovery and interaction*: (1) the ability to employ a variety of questioning techniques in order to elicit from members of the foreign culture the 'allusions, connotations and presuppositions' inherent in any kind of text, including official documents, films, TV shows, press releases, service encounters and newspaper articles; (2) the ability to identify and interpret the underlying cultural ideology of contemporary and historical foreign texts and to relate the inherent ideology to similar or dissimilar ideologies in the learner's own culture; and (3) the ability to use various conventions of communicative practice in both the learner's and the other's culture in order to establish and maintain functional social relationships with members of the foreign culture over time.

The attainment of this latter objective is exemplified by Mrs. Andrea Curtin, a white American character in *Tears of the Giraffe* (McCall Smith, 2000), the second instalment in a best-selling mystery series that chronicles the life and times of Precious Ramotswe, the traditionally built proprietor of the only ladies' detective agency in Botswana. In the scene in question, Mma Ramotswe is about to close her office for a well deserved lunch one hot and dusty afternoon, when Mrs. Curtin, a white woman in khaki pants, arrives unannounced outside her agency in a large car. Despite her untimely appearance, Mrs. Curtin is able to establish a positive social relationship with Mma Ramotswe via her appropriate use of communicative conventions, which secures her admittance into the inner offices of the agency:

> The woman took her hand, correctly, Mma Ramotswe noticed, in the proper Botswana way, placing her left hand on her right forearm as a mark of respect. Most white people shook hands very rudely, snatching just one hand and leaving their other hand free to perform all sorts of mischief. This woman had at least learned something about how to behave. (McCall Smith, 2000: 24)

Above all, the *skills of discovery* are linked linguistically to the ability to pose and to respond to 'deep learning' questions, but also to intercultural understandings of phatic communion, politeness phenomena, face work (e.g. Scollon & Scollon, 2001), and the ability to access appropriate data sources, when necessary, through the social institutions of the foreign culture.

## Skills of interpreting and relating

Byram (1997: 52) defines the *skills of interpreting and relating* as the 'ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own'. Unlike the *skills of discovery and interaction*, the *skills of interpreting and relation* may draw on pre-existing knowledge gained through formal or other types of education and they do not necessarily involve real-time interaction with an interlocutor. It is important to note that the outcome of the application of these skills is not necessarily a 'balance of opposites, or a moderate pluralism of opinions'; instead, relating phenomena in one culture to those in another may result in 'paradoxical, irreducible confrontation that may change one in the process' (Kramsch, 1993: 231). Curricular objectives (Byram, 1997: 61) for this component of the model include: (1) identification of socioculturally contingent (as opposed to absolute) perspectives; (2) the identification of intercultural misunderstanding and dysfunction; and (3) the ability to mediate between inconsistent or conflicting interpretations of phenomena. In a telecollaborative partnership one might assess these skills by asking learners to comment on and analyse in retrospect contentious, questionable or unclear points in their previous telecollaborative interactions. This assessment methodology assumes that learners have been examining telecollaborative 'langua-cultural ruptures' (Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003: 85) under the guidance of their instructor over the course of their partnership.

## Discussion of Byram's (1997) model

Byram is one of very few scholars, as Bredella (2000: 146) notes, who extensively operationalises the notion of intercultural competence in instructed foreign language learning. This detailed explication is no doubt valuable for curriculum planners, teacher educators, teachers and learners alike because it enables the establishment of concrete instructional objectives, which some language educators find to be indispensable for syllabus design and learner assessment (see Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005: 89). This same level of specificity, however, lays bare several aspects of the model that require further critical reflection.

First, the initial dichotomisation of the language learner into the tourist and the sojourner might downplay the important fact that not all language learners are in the privileged position of travellers to foreign lands. Much second language learning takes place under conditions of occupation, invasion, colonisation, slavery, economic and social marginalisation, and, more recently, cultural imperialism via telecommunications technologies,

without the privilege of volitional travel. As language learning is eminently context-dependent, as Byram (1997) repeatedly notes, these configurations will influence the development of intercultural competence, the methods by which it is assessed, and, indeed, its societal and individual valuation. For example, an Arabic-speaking Palestinian who travels daily to Israel for work may have a very different understanding of both the meaning and function of intercultural communicative competence with respect to Hebrew than a Russian-speaking Jewish immigrant to the same country (see, for example, Ben-Rafael *et al.*, 2006). In the first case, a measure of intercultural competence in Hebrew may be a matter of economic survival; in the second case, intercultural competence may serve as a means of social assimilation and acceptance. In other words, the relatively comfortable and positive tones of tourism may not be associated with all situations in which intercultural competence is fostered or required. Thus, teachers will need to be aware that students will react differently to intercultural competence as an instructional objective.

In my own German–American partnerships over the years, bilingual native speakers of English on the US side (e.g. heritage learners of German, English–Spanish bilinguals) have not consistently invested in the classroom-based development of intercultural competence in the same way as monolingual native speakers of English, perhaps because they had already developed some of these skills by virtue of their life experiences and were not in need of 'learning' them in the institutionalised setting. They may wish, instead, to focus solely on linguistic instructional objectives.

Second, Byram (1997: 20, 32, 36, 39–40) appears to equate the concept of 'culture' with that of 'nation'. Such a position does not adequately recognise or value nation-internal diversity (e.g. Germans of Turkish extraction or Frenchmen of North-African origin) or the existence of ideologically or ethnically bound groups that span national borders (e.g. the Muslim *ummah* or community) or who have no national borders (the Sinti-Roma people; the Kurds). O'Dowd (2003: 126–128) discusses the possible consequences of a lack of recognition of nation-internal differences in telecollaborative partnerships. Juan, a learner in an exchange between Spain and England, presents León (not Spain) as his 'nation' in his very first e-mail to his partner, Alice, and further explains that 'the Spanish identity' is 'an invention'. Alice, however, appears to ignore or not adequately value Juan's differentiation of León and Spain and, as a result, the partnership does not function well for the remainder of the semester.

Third, the language-based distinction between *intercultural competence* and *intercultural communicative competence* is a problematic one because it

downplays again internal diversity among members of the same speech community. For instance, the ability to switch registers and dialects within one's own speech community is, in my opinion, a matter of *communicative* competence which requires linguistic talents not less than those of bi- or multilingual codeswitchers. The development of intercultural competence is, in essence, cognitive development as it requires a 'shift in perspective' (Byram, 1997: 108) and a 'leap in insight' (p. 105).

Fourth, the establishment of an assessable threshold of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997: 43, 76–78) is, to my mind, a blow to the validity of cultural relativity because the notion of a threshold assumes a standard or reference point that is inevitably value-laden and culture-specific. If the assessment of a threshold is to take place in the context of a particular institution, as Byram suggests, then the point of reference will typically be formulated in terms of the dominant cultural values and again downplay the presence and importance of institution-internal diversity.

Finally, the suggestion that international human rights agendas should form the 'moral orientation' by means of which learners evaluate varying belief systems is questionable because, as Byram (1997: 46) rightly notes, international human rights doctrines have been developed within chiefly Western ideological frameworks, and, therefore, implicitly value these belief systems over non-Western traditions.

## How Do I Teach Intercultural Communicative Competence?

Telecollaborative pedagogy is commonly characterised as ethno-graphic, dialogic and critical. Learners in telecollaboration can be viewed as *ethnographers* because they are engaged in the ethnographic processes of observing, participating, describing, analysing and interpreting the language behaviours of their keypals in relevant and authentic situations (Carel, 2001; Holliday, 1996; O'Dowd, 2006; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996). Telecollaboration is *dialogic* because the utterances produced and examined in the course of an exchange arise out of interactions with multiple others (Morgan & Cain, 2000). The plurality of the responses provided by these multiple others highlights the fact that meanings are not universal and unitary but rather local, diverse, and frequently the site of struggle and conflict (Schneider & von der Emde, 2006). Finally, telecollaboration is *critical* in the sense that learners are not passive receptacles of received knowledge (i.e. a facts-and-figures approach to culture learning), but rather active participants in a dynamic process of knowledge construction based on the juxtaposition of various texts

(e.g. e-mails from numerous keypals) in the particular context of the given learning exchange.

In many telecollaborative partnerships learners engage in a series of carefully negotiated and successively more complex teacher-guided tasks and/or projects that typically involve the following three kinds of activities: (1) personal relationship building; (2) the exploration of linguistic and cultural rich points; and (3) product-oriented intercultural collaboration.

### Personal relationship building

One of the biggest draws of telecollaboration for secondary and university-level learners is the opportunity to communicate one-on-one with a native-speaking age peer for a prolonged period of time. Such interaction usually involves personal introductions, the disclosure of biographical information, various types of identity display in visual and/or textual forms and the exchange of information regarding personal or work-related experiences, all of which may lead to the establishment of personal relationships. Valued personal relationships have been found to be facilitative of rich telecollaborative encounters (Belz, 2002; O'Dowd, 2003).

A common means of personal introduction in telecollaboration is the construction of websites. Individual students prepare a personal website containing a 'web-biography' in order to introduce themselves to their foreign keypals. Participants may also work in groups to construct additional websites that introduce aspects of their university experiences such as living arrangements or degree requirements to their foreign partners. At the outset of the web project, teachers should practice vocabulary and idioms that will enable learners to share personal information. Typically, American students require assistance with vocabulary used to convey information about high school activities and educational/social experiences particular to the US context (e.g. 'I was a member of the swim team/played varsity basketball/was the president of the Spanish club'; 'I did an internship at Lockheed Martin Corporation/joined the ROTC'; 'I got a scholarship for my undergraduate studies/pledged a fraternity').

Vocabulary work goes hand-in-hand with the acquisition of declarative knowledge about both the local and target cultures. As learners prepare to introduce themselves to their keypals in the foreign language, they will not only need the words and phrases to express their own experiences and identities, but also declarative knowledge about the

specificity and/or universality of those experiences in order to get their meanings across to their partners, to answer eventual questions about them, and to ask informed questions about their partners' experiences. As Kern (2000: 232) points out, he had to 'consistently remind [his American] students to think about how to represent [themselves and their experiences] to a group of French peers who did not necessarily share a good deal of cultural common ground with them'. To illustrate, an American learner who does not know that European universities, by and large, do not charge tuition will not necessarily realise that she may have to note the prohibitive tuition costs at US universities in order for her keypal to appreciate the significance of her disclosure that she received a scholarship. In the case of a European–American exchange, declarative knowledge about university life might include information about the absence of sports teams, cheerleaders, the Greek system and tuition at the majority of European institutions, compulsory military and/or social service for young people in some European countries, the concept of the 'college town', the relative size and format of university courses, the nature of student–professor interactions, and the technological outfitting of institutions.

When constructing 'web-biographies', learners will need to prepare multiple drafts of their texts and receive extensive feedback from their instructors on the cultural situatedness of their experiences as well as on the target language vocabulary and grammar used to convey that information. Teachers will also need to lead students in reflective examination of the images that they choose to include in their websites and how these images contribute to the identities that they construct and present to their keypals. For example, what type of identity will American learners construct for themselves in the eyes of their keypals if they choose a picture of a cowboy, or the American flag, or Mickey Mouse as the primary image on their website? Will a given image be recognisable to their foreign partners? Will it have the same meaning for the foreign keypals as it does for the American students? Could it potentially (and perhaps unwittingly) cast them in a negative light in the eyes of their keypals? One relevant example comes from a partnership I conducted between the USA and Germany in 2000. The American students chose a large photograph of their football mascot, the Nittany Lion, as the main image on their introductory website. Many were surprised and some were clearly upset when their German partners asked them why they have a picture of a child's stuffed bear on their homepage. Learning to manage affective responses in intercultural interactions is an important aspect of intercultural competence.

In an effort to address the issue of managing affective responses to unexpected or unfamiliar keypal behaviour· or disclosures, teachers might share excerpts from previous keypal correspondence with their students, if available, prior to students' first electronically mediated intercultural interactions. Learners might need to become sensitised not only to the types of questions their keypals might ask but also to the varying conversational styles that exist in different cultures (e.g. taboo topics, directness versus indirectness, politeness, positive and negative face, methods of topic management). The following three examples are excerpts from e-mail correspondence written by Germans (translated into English), which I have used to prepare American college students in rural Pennsylvania for the types of interactions that they may have with their German keypals:

(1) You guys asked me whether I experienced any prejudice in Louisiana. At the beginning [of my stay there] I honestly didn't pay any attention to it. But one day I was driving with an American friend of mine and we got lost. We found ourselves in a small town called Pitkin. As we were approaching the town, we saw a sign that really shocked me. It read: 'Blacks are not welcome here!' We were actually going to stop in the town to ask directions. But we didn't do it because my friend Cora was black.

(2) We have a couple of questions. Is it really against the law to let a child run around naked on a public beach? Or is it just a moral thing to you, rooted in your Puritanical history? Somebody told us that if you are topless on the beach that people come up to you and ask you to cover yourself up … Were you allowed to bring your friends (male or female) to your room, just to hang around when you were a teenager? Or did your parents consider your room only as bedroom? In Germany it's normal to bring friends into your bedroom even if they are boys. When I (Anna) was in Rhode Island, I wasn't even allowed to bring my boyfriends into my bedroom. We had to hang out in the family room.

(3) It occurred to us that there's a big difference between American and German families. In Germany, it's common in most families to talk about sex and birth control. In addition, many 16-year-olds are allowed to spend the night with their boyfriend or girlfriend. Why do you think that it's different in the US? Maybe it has something to do with religion?

In addition to preparing students for the potential discussion of issues that they might find to be taboo, exposure to such excerpts serves a

number of other functions as well. First, they provide learners with an advance opportunity to 'try out' their affective responses to such questions in a relatively low stakes environment (i.e. discussion with their instructor rather than their keypals). Second, they provide them with a taste of an outsider's perspective on aspects of their own culture. Third, they can discover in advance and prepare for the eventuality that their partners have more information about their culture than they have about their partners' culture. Fourth, learners gain insight ahead of time into the ways in which local behaviours might be interpreted and valued by members of another culture. Finally, exposure to the content of previous telecollaborative interactions allows students to compare their own lived experiences with the experiences recounted by foreign partners; this, in turn, may encourage them to begin to relativise their own taken-for-granted reality prior to the onset of telecollaborative interaction.

Once learners have exchanged initial messages with their keypals, teachers should organise a non-telecollaborative class session (i.e. no correspondence with partners during the session) in which they introduce their foreign keypals to their classmates at the home location. This activity will not only give students a chance to practise vocabulary and idioms relating to personal introductions (and to check with an instructor if they have understood the partners' e-mails), but it will also give them the opportunity to become familiar with a broader range of foreign keypals, to look for differences and similarities between the life experiences of the keypals and the ways in which they introduce themselves, and to make comparisons between their own lives and those of their partners. In order to prepare for this session, learners can fill out a worksheet containing the following prompts: (1) My partner(s) is (are) called . . . ; (2) She/he (they) is (are) from . . . ; (3) In the first e-mail my partner(s) . . . ; (4) I was surprised because . . . ; (5) In my response to my partner's/partners' first e-mail . . . ; and (6) In my opinion . . .

Teachers might want to bring in a map of the partners' country and mark each keypal's hometown as they are introduced by the members of the local group. Students are also typically interested in the perceived 'foreignness' of their partners' names and may not be able to tell if they are men or women based on their names alone. As the telecollaborative partnership progresses, teachers should consistently schedule non-telecollaborative sessions in which learners at the home location share and discuss with their classmates excerpts from their on-going tele-collaborative correspondence.

Personal relationship building in telecollaboration is supported, first and foremost, by regular correspondence between keypals. Participants

should be required to send a specified number of messages to their partners each week. Teachers should schedule their courses in technology classrooms containing individual terminals for each learner as much as possible and these sessions should be devoted to message composition in order to facilitate regular correspondence with keypals. Furthermore, class periods on each end of the partnership (e.g. in the USA and Europe) should overlap in real time at least once a week so that learners may participate in synchronous interactions if they choose to do so. Collaborating instructors may also find simultaneous sessions to be of use for 'housekeeping' and organisational purposes.

Personal relationship building is also facilitated when partners ask each other many questions. Therefore, teachers should ensure that learners know how to pose appropriate questions from both linguistic and sociocultural perspectives. In general, there are three types of questions: (1) rhetorical; (2) confirmation-seeking; and (3) information-seeking. The latter type is further divided into *either/or*, *yes/no*, *what/how/where/when* (e.g. what is the capital of Maine?), opinion (e.g. what do you think about the presidential election?) and *why*-questions. While rhetorical questions do not typically require an answer and information-confirming questions are designed to confirm or disconfirm the questioner's perceptions, information-seeking questions are used when the questioner wants to elicit knowledge from the hearer.

The subcategories of the information-seeking question differ with respect to the ways in which they position the respondent as an intercultural informant. For example, *why*-questions allow respondents a relatively wide berth for the presentation of their own point of view, whereas *either/or*-questions offer much less space for personal expression because they compel the respondent to select from among proffered alternatives. Thus, frequent use of *why*-questions may position the hearer as a languacultural expert, whereas a preponderance of *either/or*-questions may position her as 'an arbiter of the questioner's perceptions' (Belz, 2005b: 14). For example, Anke, a German learner in a 2000 German–American partnership uses an *either/or*-question with her American partner, Eric, when discussing a previous experience that she had as an exchange student in Canada. In contradistinction to her own parents' practices in Germany, her host parents in Canada did not allow her Canadian boyfriend to sleep over. Anke, in search of relational knowledge, asks Eric about his own parents' rules with respect to mixed gender sleepovers: 'Are your parents cool with these kinds of things or scared?' Belz (2005b: 21) explains that the phrasing of this question 'may preclude intercultural discussion of this topic because [the German partners] rule

out and simultaneously devalue alternative possibilities, such as Eric's parents disallowing not only mixed-sex "sleepovers", but dating in general'.

Chronological patterning of question types over the course of a telecollaborative partnership is also an important point. On the whole, learners should not begin their partnerships with a high frequency of rhetorical or confirmation-checking questions because the latter generally entail assumptions and partners in intercultural exchanges should be in the process of suspending their beliefs and judgements about their keypals' culture. Instead, *what/how/when/where*-questions lend themselves better to the elicitation of personal information, while *why*-questions help to clarify and elaborate on shared information. *What/how*-questions and, in particular, opinion and *why*-questions should cluster during those segments of partnerships where learners are exploring culturally situated texts such as newspaper articles, short stories, contemporary films, and interesting e-mails and chat excerpts.

Finally, it should be stressed that *answering* questions is equally important for the establishment of personal relationships in telecollaboration. A general finding in the literature to date is that successful telecollaborative partnerships are characterised by consistent responses to posed questions. In sum, teachers should show learners how to ask questions; they should model appropriate questions for them; they should encourage learners to ask more opinion, *what/how* and *why*-questions than *yes/no* or *either/or*-questions; and they should peruse telecollaborative discourse to make sure that learners are both asking and answering questions.

## The exploration of linguistic and cultural rich points

Agar (1994) coins the term *languaculture* to index the reflexivity between language and culture. In other words, language is shaped by culture and culture, in turn, is shaped by language use:

> Language, in all its varieties, in all the ways it appears in everyday life, builds a world of meanings. When you run into different meanings, when you become aware of your own and work to build a bridge to the others, 'culture' is what you're up to. Language fills the spaces between us with sound; culture forges the human connection through them. Culture is in language, and language is loaded with culture ... whenever you hear the word *language* or the word *culture*, you might wonder about the missing half ...

'Languaculture' is a reminder, I hope, of the necessary connection between its two parts ... (Agar, 1994: 28, 60)

*Rich points* are pieces of discourse that indicate that two *languacultures* or conceptual systems have come into contact. Agar (1994: 99–100) explains the concept in the following way: 'When two languacultures come into contact, *yours* and *theirs*, the most interesting problems, the ones that attract your attention, are the vertical cliffs. These cliffs are difficult because ... the problematic bit of language is puttied thickly into far-reaching networks of association and many situations of use' (italics in the original).

One example of a rich point is *los toros* or bullfighting. O'Dowd (2003: 128) explains that for some 'bullfighting is a cruel sport where animals are toyed with, tortured and then slaughtered in the name of culture and tradition, while for others, *los toros* represents tradition and bravery and is seen as a fair combat between man and beast'. Other examples of rich points include abortion (a woman's right to choose versus the murder of an innocent child), hunting (a space for (parent–child) bonding versus animal murder) and female clergy (gender equity versus the violation of tradition/divine law). An excellent example of a linguistic rich point is provided by educational linguist James Gee (2005) in his discussion of 'Indian' and 'non-Indian' viewpoints on the appropriate behaviours of students and teachers in the classroom:

> Although many 'non-Indians' find it proper to ask questions of someone who is instructing them, 'Indians' regard questions in such a situation as being inattentive, rude, insolent ... The person who has taken the role of 'student' shows attentiveness by avoiding eye contact and by being silent. The teaching situation, then, as a witnessed monolog, lacks the dialogical features that characterise some Western instruction. (Gee, 2005: 25)

When members of one languaculture encounter a rich point in a second languaculture, lack of understanding is often the result. This inability to understand the rich point typically is not based on deficient lexical knowledge, but rather on insufficient factual knowledge of the specific network of culturally relative associations and meanings in which the rich point makes sense to members of the second languaculture. In short, a rich point is a reflex of culture-specific ideas, beliefs or constructs as manifested in language or other types of communicative patterns.

The exploration of linguistic and cultural rich points is a key activity in telecollaborative exchanges. One way in which learners can explore rich

points is through the use of cultural surveys. Such surveys generally consist of two versions (one in L1 and one in L2) of a list of 10–20 teacher-formulated questions, which are designed to throw various rich points between the two participating groups into sharp relief. The surveys should be posted online so that learners may respond to them easily and conveniently. In addition, all answers to the given questions should be available online. If the responses to each question are displayed in a table where the left-hand column represents answers from Group A and the right-hand column represents answers from Group B, then learners may look for similarities and differences both within and across groups. In partnerships where linguistic competence constitutes an instructional goal, learners should answer the survey in their L1 in order to provide their keypals with an accurate model of the target language (e.g. Version A in German is answered by native speakers of German in German, while Version B in English is answered by native speakers of English in English in a German–American exchange). Learners will then read their netpals' answers in L2, and, in a subsequent exercise, they can use their L2 in order to summarise or reflect on their partners' or classmates' responses in preparation for online intercultural discussion of survey results.

Nader Morkus (personal communication, 2006) designed a cultural survey for an exchange between students at the *University of South Florida* in the USA and the *Arab Academy for Science, Technology, and Maritime Transport* in Alexandria, Egypt. Questions included: (1) Is it absolutely necessary for you to obtain your family's approval of the person you want to marry? Explain; (2) What do you think about wearing shorts to class?; (3) Do you think women should have the right to have an abortion? Explain; (4) Do you think it is ok for one to marry one's cousin? Explain; (5) Do you think elderly people should be sent to nursing homes or live with their families? Explain; and (6) What do you think about people who have sex before marriage? Representative responses to the final question are given in Table 7.1. Because this partnership did not focus on the development of linguistic competence, all responses were provided in English, the *lingua franca* of the exchange.

Reading the responses to the surveys will provide learners with factual knowledge about the beliefs, practices, meanings and values of their keypals as well as their fellow classmates on the home side. While the availability of such local knowledge is generally motivating to learners, teachers should caution them to check apparent tendencies in the data with more macro-level demographic statistics. Opinion polls such as *Gallup, Zogby* and the *Pew Charitable Trust* and national surveys such as those

**Table 7.1** Egyptian and American responses to a cultural survey

| What do you think about people who have sex before marriage? | |
|---|---|
| *Egyptian responses* | *American responses* |
| I don't think it's right … you're losing part of yourself when you do so and afterwards you regret it. | Nothing wrong with it. |
| This is something totally forbidden and unacceptable. We were brought up learning that girls should not be touched by anyone unless it's her husband … It makes girls more precious. | I tend to think they are smart. I consider sexual compatibility to be an important part of a happy marriage … The choice of a marriage partner is very important and should be made with as much information … as possible. |
| According to our religion (Islam), it's considered a sin to have pre-marriage sex. But socially speaking, I think people who have pre-marriage sex are spoiling the whole idea of 'marriage'. Sex is a way to get to know your life partner more intimately and is not to be taken as casually as it is nowadays. | It's probably a good idea. When else are they going to have sex? After the marriage? There is an old saying … Put a penny in a jar for every time you have sex before you are married. Take two pennies out for every time you have sex after you are married. By the time you die/separate, you will still have pennies in the jar. |
| They are like the bottle of water that u finish and throw in the garbage: 'CHEAP' | I think they should be able to do whatever they want as long as it is safe and a consensual, educated decision. |
| They're either not raised well, or they have psychological problems, and most of these problems come from their parents. | I believe in staying pure before marriage in the sense that your husband or wife should be the first ones to be with you in such an intimate sense since they are the ones that will cherish you for the rest of your lives. |
| Well for me as a Christian guy I believe it's a sin. | No big deal. |

**Table 7.1** (*Continued*)

| What do you think about people who have sex before marriage? | |
| --- | --- |
| *Egyptian responses* | *American responses* |
| It's a personal freedom, as long as both sides agree, but it's against religion and it's against ethics, I think. | If they are in love then I think it's a beautiful part of life. I don't approve of people who engage in casual sex. But sex with someone you love is an act of love. Something like that should never be repressed. |
| I disapprove with anyone that has sex before marriage because if you get pregnant you would be throwing your life away, and I think that it's not something that people should rush into with some random person, it is more special when you are married to that person. | I think around 50–60% of Americans today are having sex before marriage. It's a pretty common thing, so I don't think badly on people who do it. Truthfully, I will probably have sex before marriage. I am not very religious. |

maintained by the *US Census Bureau* are good sources. For example, students should be encouraged to check statements like '50–60% of Americans today are having sex before marriage' against available databases thereby facilitating the development of skills of discovery. Examination of differences in response between the two groups can provide learners with relational knowledge. For example, all Egyptians sampled here (Muslims and Christians alike) disapprove of sex before marriage, while only a minority of Americans shares the same opinion. Investigations of group-internal diversity facilitate the development of skills of relating by encouraging the ability to mediate between inconsistent or conflicting interpretations of phenomena. For example, how can one relate and/or reconcile the contradictory American responses such as 'I believe in staying pure before marriage' and '[sex before marriage] is probably a good idea'? Finally, skills of interpretation are fostered by discussing potential relationships between given responses and socio-cultural factors.

Another common activity for the investigation of cultural rich points is the reading and electronic discussion of parallel texts, linguistically different renditions of the same theme or topic. While any type of text can be used, contemporary films and juvenile literature are common choices (Burwitz-Melzer, 2001; Kinginger *et al*., 1999; Müller-Hartmann, 2000). My partner instructor, Andreas Müller-Hartmann, and I have frequently used the children's novel *Ben liebt Anna* by award-winning German author Peter Härtling and the juvenile novel *If You Come Softly* by African–American novelist Jacquelyn Woodson as the first set of parallel texts in our exchanges. Both books deal with first love and intercultural relationships but the stories, of course, are written in different languages and are the products of different cultures. The learners' task in reading these parallel novels is not only the discovery of rich points, but the comparison of culturally contingent beliefs, practices, values and constructs. Once these are elucidated and examined during class-internal discussions, learners should summarise their findings and formulate discussion points for Internet-mediated intercultural examination with their keypals. Teachers can prepare worksheets on which important rich points and/or cultural differences are highlighted to aid learners in their preparation for intercultural exchanges based on the parallel texts. In this segment of an exchange it is also important for teachers to ensure that learners know how to express opinions and make comparisons and that they are familiar with literary vocabulary (e.g. plot, character, setting). A sample worksheet with some of the relevant details filled in is given in Figure 7.1.

Depending on the length of a given telecollaborative partnership, participants may not have time to read parallel novels. Shorter texts may serve the same purpose. For example, students can read simple articles from the field of comparative education to explore varying educational systems (see Noack, 1999, for a German–American comparison). Students could peruse the websites of their own and partner institutions in order to gather declarative knowledge, prepare questions for their keypals concerning differences or unclear aspects, and to critically examine the ways in which the institutions present themselves to the rest of the world. Foreign language travel brochures or tourist guide-books are often rich and jarringly surprising sources of information about a foreign culture's perception of one's own culture. Students can read excerpts from these documents and compare the foreign portrayal of their culture with domestic or personal portrayals. For example, in preparation for a German–American telecollaborative exchange I ask students to bring in images that they would use for the cover of a German-language travel brochure for German tourists to the USA. Typical images include the Statue of Liberty, the Golden Gate Bridge and the Grand Canyon. Students were shocked to learn that the actual image on the cover of an authentic German tour book for German travellers to the USA was that of a truck driver inside the cab of a semi. The juxtaposition of these varying icons for US culture can serve as a first step toward processes of decentring that should be encouraged to unfold over the course of telecollaboration. Finally, students could view documentaries or Hollywood films about secondary school and/or university life (*American High*, *Mona Lisa Smile*, *Animal House*, *Drumline*) and then follow-up with keypals during electronic interactions on the relative gap between the filmic portrayal of these institutions and their own lived experiences.

## Product-oriented intercultural collaboration

In the final segment of many telecollaborative partnerships, learners work together in transatlantic (or transpacific, etc.) groups in order to produce a bilingual website in which they explore a theme or construct that arises in the course of their semester-long intercultural explorations. It is crucial in the Internet-mediated collaborative execution of such projects that clear product guidelines are given by instructors. These include formal, content and linguistic criteria as well as specifications for features of electronic literacy (Warschauer, 1999) such as images, video clips and hyperlinks for the expansion and elaboration of the stated

Task: Compare and contrast the main characters in *Ben liebt Anna* by Peter Härtling and in *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson.

Who is an outsider? From what perspective? For what reason?

| Feature | Ben | Anna | Ellie | Miah |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 9 | 9 | 15 | 15 |
| Place of birth | Germany | Poland | USA | USA |
| Native language | | | | |
| Other languages | | | | African-American Vernacular English |
| Citizenship | Gemany | Poland | USA | USA |
| Religion | Christian | Christian | Jew | Christian |
| Race/Ethnicity | white/German | white/German descent | white | African-American |
| Family Life | | | | |
| Parents' Occupation | civil engineer / physician's assistant | unemployed coal miner / housewife | doctor / housewife | film director / author |
| Living situation | | | | |
| Socioeconomic Status | | | | |

In my opinion _____ is an outsider with respect to _____, because...

**Figure 7.1** Prediscussion worksheet for parallel texts

argument. An example of an assessment rubric for the final product in a German–American exchange in which both linguistic and intercultural competences are targeted is given in Appendix 1. In addition, participants must be given adequate time to complete a final project. Bilingual websites require at least a month for topic negotiation, task delegation, research, collection of images, graphics, clips and links, essay drafting, instructor and peer feedback, revisions, web design and web publication. The misalignment of academic calendars may represent an added pressure during collaborative group work at the end of telecollaborative partnerships. In most European–US exchanges, learners are completing

final projects during the end of the US semester but near the middle of the European semester. As a result, the American learners may be under pressure to complete larger projects in other courses as well. Understanding and successfully negotiating the various institutional affordances and constraints at play in any given exchange is also an aspect of intercultural competence not to be overlooked or underestimated.

In partnerships that I have conducted over the years, final projects have dealt with the following topics: German and American perspectives on censorship; filmic and TV portrayals of middle class family life; reality and appearance in particular texts; cross-cultural perspectives on racism; images of success in German and American films; a comparison of German and American mothers; family relationships in contemporary films; patriotism and national identity; cross-cultural perspectives on sexuality; and cross-cultural explorations of friendship and beauty.

## How do I know if my students are developing intercultural communicative competence?

The most obvious way in which to ascertain whether or not learners are developing intercultural competence is to examine the content of their keypal correspondence. This is not as simplistic as it seems however because one must be careful to avoid equating positive comments about the other as unequivocal signs of intercultural competence. If an American learner tells her Spanish partner that siestas are 'so cool', this comment alone does not mean that the American has developed intercultural competence. Similarly, a participant in a telecollaborative partnership is not necessarily an intercultural speaker because she has told a researcher in a post-project interview that she 'really liked her partner and learned so much from him'. Furthermore, teachers and learners must resist the pull to equate the adoption of the other's point of view with the attainment of intercultural competence. Becoming an intercultural speaker does not mean agreeing with your partner's point of view or convincing your partner of the validity of your own point of view.

In order to better understand how the content of an electronic interaction might index intercultural competence, consider Example (4) below, an excerpt from a synchronous chat that took place on 16 November 2004, between American Carolyn and German Emma (both names are pseudonyms). In this example, Carolyn and Emma are discussing a cultural rich point that they discovered in their reading and subsequent discussion of Härtling (1997), namely, public nudity. There is a scene in the novel where the two 9-year-old protagonists, Ben

and Anna, swim together naked in a lake during an outing with Ben's family. Ben's mother is aware of the swim and she seems to take this behaviour in stride. Invariably, the German and American students have different opinions with regard to the social/moral acceptability of this behaviour. In a classroom exercise in which the learners compare the published English translation of this well known novel, they discover that the main characters swim in their clothes; in effect, the keypals discover that the English version of the text has been censored. One reason why discussions surrounding this text are so rich is because the operation of the skills of relating and interpreting required to execute the comparison of the German and English versions of the text lead some of the American students to a 'paradoxical, irreducible confrontation' (Kramsch, 1993: 231). They understand that censorship is the 'suppression or attempted suppression of something regarded as objectionable'; nevertheless, they are unwilling or unable to see the deletion of this scene in the English translation as an act of censorship. In the excerpt below, Emma is questioning Carolyn about the deletion:

(4)

**Emma:** Warum glaubt ihr sind Ben und Anna in der englischen 1
Übersetzung nicht nackt? *(Why do you think that Ben and Anna* 2
*are not naked in the English translation?)* 3
**Carolyn:** It seems really weird for people to do that, not something you'd 4
usually talk about in a children's book 5
**Emma:** Wir hatten schon in der zweiten Klasse Aufklärungsunterricht! 6
*(We had sex education in second grade!)* 7
**Carolyn:** Ja, ich hatte in der dritte Klasse Aufklaerungsunterricht, aber es 8
war nicht etwas, dass wir probieren sollten ... nur machen 9
Erwachsene das. *(Yes, I had sex education in third grade, but it was* 10
*not something that we should try ... only adults do it.)* 11
**Emma:** They didn't tell us to try it either. 12
**Carolyn:** Wenn ich es lese, sehe ich etwas sexuelles ... wie ihr gesagt 13
habt, ist es einen anderen Kultur. *(When I read it, I see something* 14
*sexual ... like you said it is a different culture.)* 15
**Emma:** But they are nine years old. They don't think about sex when 16
they are naked! 17
**Emma:** So do you have problems that they hugged each other when 18
they were swimming naked? 19
**Carolyn:** Yeah, pretty much ... it seems inappropriate in an American 20
context. 21

**Emma:** But they hugged each other like fish do! And what is less sexual 22
than fish?                                                      23
**Carolyn:** Good point, but it still seems weird to me ... aber ich glaube 24
meine groesste Problem ist, dass sie einander umarmen ( ... *but* 25
*I believe that my biggest problem is that they hug one another).*    26
**Emma:** But they are friends. Friends hug each other. And a bathing suit 27
is not much cloth, is it? ...                                   28

In this excerpt, Emma displays her ability to operate the skills of discovery and relating with regard to Carolyn's opinion via the various questioning techniques and counter-arguments she employs. She opens in Lines 1–3 with a *why*-question designed to elicit Carolyn's opinion about the deletion. When Carolyn states in Lines 4–5 that nudity is not something that one typically finds in a children's book, Emma counters that she had sex education in the school in second grade. Carolyn holds her ground in Lines 8–11 stating that she also had sex ed in school at an early age, but she further refines her position by noting the difference between theory and praxis. By swimming naked, Härtling's protagonists cross the line between theory and praxis, which Carolyn finds unacceptable. Emma however counters by stating that her sex education courses were also theory-oriented. Carolyn takes a different tact in Lines 14–15 by stating that she sees something more than innocent skinny-dipping in the scene in question; instead, she believes the children's behaviour to be sexual in nature and this is why she thinks the English version was changed. Emma forces Carolyn to refine her position further in Lines 18–19 when she asks her if it is the hugging that leads Carolyn to believe that the scene is sexual. Carolyn confirms this interpretation in Lines 20–21 and Emma immediately counters by suggesting that the hug was asexual and fishlike. In Line 24 Carolyn admits that Emma has a good point but she still maintains her position that a naked hug in the water between a boy and a girl to be sexual in nature and therefore subject to censorship. In Line 27 Emma further interrogates Carolyn's position by suggesting that it's normal for friends to hug and that the nudity really doesn't make a difference because there's not much difference between wearing a bathing suit and being naked anyway. ·

Carolyn, for her part, displays intercultural competence because she is able to suspend her belief that public nudity is an absolute wrong. This is seen in Lines 13–15 when she states that the incident in question occurs 'in another culture'. It's important to note that Carolyn maintains her position that the scene conveys something sexual, but she is able to relativise her interpretation to her own particular frames of reference. She again

relativises her viewpoint in Line 20 when she labels Ben and Anna's behaviour as inappropriate in an American context. Of note, too, is the fact that she mitigates this assertion through the use of the verb 'seems' and the adverb 'pretty much'. Finally, Carolyn displays a degree of intercultural competence because she demonstrates an ability to reflect on her own thinking processes with regard to the issue at hand. This reflective process is seen when she says 'I think my biggest problem is ... ' Though in different ways, both Carolyn and Emma demonstrate in this excerpt that they are at least beginning to acquire the means by which to access, analyse, compare and evaluate artefacts, practices, values, beliefs and meanings in other cultures and in their own taken-for-granted realities.

In addition to the content of keypal interactions, teachers can look to the presence (or absence) of specific linguistic features in the transcripts of telecollaborative interactions as signposts of intercultural competence. Questions, addressed in detail in the previous section, are the only linguistic feature that Byram (1997: 62) mentions as an index of the operation of skills of discovery. Additional linguistic features such as appraisal may function as markers of intercultural development.

Martin (2000: 144) defines appraisal as 'the semantic resources [interlocutors use] to negotiate emotions, judgments, and valuations, alongside resources for amplifying and engaging with these evaluations'. The appraisal system is divided into several subsystems, the most important of which for our purposes are attitude and graduation. Attitude refers to the linguistic resources speakers use to convey emotional responses, construe moral evaluations of human behaviour, and express the aesthetic quality of natural phenomena and the products of human behaviour, while the subsystem of graduation comprises those linguistic resources that speakers use in order to raise or lower the intensity of a wide range of semantic categories. Because intercultural competence entails modifying or re-evaluating one's evaluations of other societies, cultures and individuals as well as re-analysing one's evaluations of the self and one's own culture, the subsystem of attitude provides a concrete linguistic procedure for revealing how speakers engage in such re-evaluation in the empirical details of their talk. Several examples of the linguistic resources used to convey attitude and graduation in telecollaborative interactions are given in (5)–(9) below:

(5) negative affect: 'We *don't like* it when you don't answer our emails.'

(6) positive affect: 'I am *glad* you liked our homepage!'

(7) negative judgement: 'We cannot believe you actually like the movie American Beauty.'

(8) positive judgement: 'Your English is very impressive.'

(9) negative appreciation: 'We are not very impressed with your work!'

(10) positive appreciation: 'Well, back to Ben liebt Anna, really cute, but thinking back I have never experienced anything like this in my childhood.'

For the assessment of all aspects of intercultural competence, Byram (1997: 104–105) suggests criterion-referenced performance in particular situations as opposed to norm-referenced exhibition of facts; qualitative progression in contrast to quantitative display; and leaps in insight (p. 105) as compared to incremental increases in knowledge. Furthermore, progress is defined in terms of frequency of occurrence of particular 'intercultural behaviours' rather than as an all-or-nothing phenomenon. This is an important point because it encourages teachers not to look for definitive evidence of intercultural competence in a single piece of data such as Carolyn and Emma's discussion of public nudity given in Example (4) above, but rather to look for patterns of changes over time.

Byram (1997: 108) suggests that the key factor to consider in assessing the *attitudes* component of intercultural competence is 'the existence or absence of a perspective shift'. One potential way to track such a perspective shift would be to look for a decrease in the use of negative judgement over the course of a partnership. Another linguistic indicator of intercultural competence might be a tempering of one's emotional response to keypals' statements (e.g. no longer becoming upset when keypals mistake the Nittany Lion for a bear because you now realise that American football is a local rather than universal pastime and that sports' teams are not an integral part of most European universities). A third marker might be a gradual softening of the way in which one positions herself with respect to the 'absolute' truth of utterances (e.g. France is the best! → France is one of the best countries in the world. → Like most things, France has both positive and negative qualities.)

A final point concerns the scope of application of intercultural competence. For example, can an individual be considered to be an intercultural speaker if she exhibits a readiness to suspend disbelief and judgement with respect to the meanings, beliefs and behaviours of one group, but not with regard to a second group? I have noticed over the years that learners in my German–American exchanges have begun to express measures of intercultural competence with respect to one

another, but that they still hold rather absolute and unrelativised views of other groups. A clear example comes in the form of responses to one of the questions on the cultural survey: Would you marry someone from another culture? The same learners who begin to understand the significance of football for Americans in general, who begin to relativise their evaluations of public nudity and who start to question their whole hearted belief in the positive virtues of patriotism, state that they would marry anyone but a Muslim because of the way that they treat their women, a perception which may have been nursed along, in part, by the powerful media influences that the *Connect Program* seeks to interrogate. Kern (2000: 256) wisely reminds us that 'intolerance must be acknowledged as a cultural fact and explored through discussion that frames opposing perspectives critically'. Critical framing, however, involves the metalingual component of 'stepping back and looking at the 'then and there' of communication' (Kern, 2000: 133). 'Through critical framing,' the New London Group (1996) explains, 'learners can gain the necessary personal and theoretical distance from what they have learned, constructively critique it, account for its cultural location, creatively extend and apply it, and eventually innovate on their own, within old communities and in new ones.'

## Conclusion

Proponents as well as opponents of intercultural competence in foreign language education have suggested that the classroom is an insufficiently rich learning environment with regard to opportunities for apprenticeship into the diverse and complex forms of linguistic behaviour that both index and constitute intercultural competence (e.g. House, 1997: 17). Some scholars even have claimed that intercultural competence is 'unattainable through any kind of teaching' (Harden, 2000: 120) and that it can only be developed and put into practice in the context of first-hand experiences in 'real life'. Harden (2000: 120), for example, makes the following statement:

> ... it is hard to imagine how [intercultural competence] could be put into practice other than by life, by first hand experience and it is doubtful if such issues make sense within the narrow confines of institutionalised language-learning. The central question here seems to be one that lies beyond the realm of classroom and textbook as it deals with the formation of experience and the construction of identity.

House (1997: 18) appears to support this viewpoint when she states: 'Es ist ja auch nicht das Ziel von Unterricht, dem Alltagsleben und der Alltagskultur Konkurrenz zu machen' (It is also not the goal of instruction to compete with daily life and daily culture). Byram (1997: 64–69), however, maintains that intercultural competence can and should be developed in three configurations: (a) in the classroom; (b) via field work outside the classroom; and (3) by means of independent learning. The classroom, Byram (1997: 66–67) points out, provides opportunities for the teaching of relational knowledge and the skills of interpreting and relating documents or events. 'What the classroom cannot usually offer', Byram (1997: 68) continues, 'is the opportunity to develop the skills of interaction in real time.'

In a more recent review of language and culture learning, Byram and Feng (2004: 152) note that advances in communication technologies have begun to address any perceived deficiencies in classroom-based culture learning by enabling intercultural interaction in real time on a broad scale. Just as psychologist Sherry Turkle (1997) has shown that 'life on the screen' can be as real and as intense as off-screen life, leading to online romance and even marriage, and as communication theorist Joseph Walther (1996) has argued that mediated relationships may be *hyper-personal*, i.e. better and more consuming, than unmediated relationships, the research on telecollaboration indicates that intercultural competence can develop in institutionalised settings under the careful guidance of languacultural experts or teachers. Learners who have not yet begun to decentre are generally unable to interpret foreign peoples and cultures from any other point of view but their own. This state of affairs is seen in the opening lines of Mrs. Curtin's explanation of what a white woman is doing in Mma Ramotswe's detective agency:

> I came to Africa twelve years ago. I was forty-three and Africa meant nothing to me. I suppose I had the usual ideas about [Africa] – a hotchpotch of images of big game and savannah and Kilimanjaro rising out of the clouds. I also thought of famines and civil wars and potbellied, half-naked children staring at the camera, sunk in hopelessness. (McCall Smith, 2000: 27)

In this excerpt, Mrs. Curtin clearly lacks declarative knowledge of Africa; her evaluations of Africa are shaped by her own culturally contingent frames of reference and they smack of a 'number 1 type' theory of otherness. But as time goes on, Mrs. Curtin begins to display the qualities of the sojourner:

> We had found a country where the people treated one another well, with respect, and where there were values other than grab, grab, grab which prevails back home. I felt humbled, in a way. Everything in my own country seemed so shoddy and superficial when held up against what I saw in Africa. People suffered here, and many of them had very little, but they had this wonderful feeling for others. When I first heard African people calling others – complete strangers – their brother or their sister, it sounded odd to my ears. But after a while I knew exactly what it meant and I started to think the same way … I was learning lessons. I had come to Africa and I was learning lessons. (McCall Smith, 2000: 29–30)

Through travel to Africa, Mrs. Curtin's own cultural values and beliefs began to be challenged. Her first encounters with otherness 'sounded odd' to her ears, but because she exhibited a readiness to interrogate the value systems behind her own cultural practices and to investigate those behind others, her meanings began to change. Mrs. Curtin was learning lessons.

**Appendix A** Final Product assessment rubric

| Kriterien | super | sehr gut | gut | befried-igend | nicht befried-igend | Kommentar |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Formale Kriterien | | | | | | |
| Länge des Essays | | | | | | |
| Titel des Essays | | | | | | |
| Strategischer Gebrauch beider Sprachen | | | | | | Beispiele: |
| Inhaltliche Kriterien: | | | | | | |
| Deutlicher Vergleich verschiedener Texte/Figuren/Themen | | | | | | Beispiele: |
| Unterschiedliche kulturelle Perspektiven | | | | | | Beispiele: |
| Kreativität | | | | | | |
| Sprachliche Kriterien: | | | | | | |
| Wortfolge: Das Verb im Hauptsatz Das Verb im Nebensatz | | | | | | |
| Nebensätze/unterordnende Konjunktionen | | | | | | Gebrauchte Konjunktionen hier auflisten: |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Relativsätze | | | | | | Ein Beispiel hier angeben: |
| Idiomatische Phrasen | | | | | | Beispiele: |
| Die Auflistung/das Hinzufügen der Argumente (erstens, zweitens, drittens, außerdem, weiter, usw) | | | | | | Beispiele: |
| Hyperlinkstruktur | | | | | | |
| Links<br><br>• zusätzliche, relevante Informationen<br>• Vertiefung des Arguments durch Links<br>• Auseinandersetzung mit anderen Perspektiven durch Links | | | | | | |
| Images | | | | | | |
| Extra Punkte | | | | | | |
| Gebrauch des Passivs | | | | | | |
| Sound | | | | | | Beispiel: |
| Clips | | | | | | |
| Infinitivsätze | | | | | | Beispiel: |

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## Chapter 8

# *Teacher Role in Telecollaboration: Setting up and Managing Exchanges*

ANDREAS MÜLLER-HARTMANN

### Introduction: Historical Perspective – The Teacher's Role(s) in Telecollaboration

> ... two teachers in distant schools were matched to form a 'twinned' or 'sister-class' partnership according to their own common teaching interests and the grade level of their students. [...] Partner classes engaged in two kinds of exchanges: monthly cultural packages [...] and joint projects, which may be best described as identical long-distance team-teaching units. (Cummins & Sayers 1995: 124–140)

> [...] it is important to stress that the use of new techniques and instruments in the context of interscholastic exchanges was not conceived as a way to 'teacher-proof' the curriculum. Just as these new approaches and correspondence networks benefit students [...] they can also forge links among instructors, vitally supporting teachers during the demanding professional-development process of learning to use new techniques and classroom technologies. (Sayers, 1994: 81)

This is a description of the intercultural exchange projects that Célestin Freinet began to set up in the Modern School Movement in the 1920s, eventually comprising team-teaching partnerships among 10,000 schools worldwide. The idea of team-teaching in 'twinned' or 'sister-class' projects already highlighted the role of the teacher as an organiser, but also as a learner and as a 'teacher-as-researcher', as teachers experimented with and changed new teaching approaches through observation in their classrooms and in cooperation with their partner teachers (Cummins & Sayers, 1995: 126, 137). Consequently, the teacher[1] and his various roles were considered decisive for the success of those projects. Since then, the idea of correspondence projects has been clearly established in the foreign