Review Article

Emerging Trends and New Directions in Telecollaborative Learning

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Abstract

This article provides an overview of the most significant emerging trends and tendencies in telecollaborative practice. In order to achieve this, I review the recent literature in the area and I identify recurring themes from the Telecollaboration in Higher Education conference which took place in Trinity College Dublin, Ireland from 21 to 23 April 2016. The main trends identified include the diversification of telecollaborative partnerships and networks, the rise of critical and cross-disciplinary approaches to telecollaboration, the combination and integration of telecollaboration with other modes of education, and, finally, the emergence of videoconferencing as an important tool for online intercultural interaction.

KEYWORDS: TELECOLLABORATION; VIRTUAL EXCHANGE; ONLINE LEARNING

Introduction

In today's networked and globalized world, the ability to collaborate and communicate online across cultural, national and regional divides is becoming an increasingly important aspect of the global workplace (Diamond, Walkley, Forbes, Hughes, & Sheen, 2011; Grandin & Hedderich, 2009). A scalable and durable way to give students first-hand experience of such virtual collaborative learning is through telecollaboration or "Online Intercultural Exchange." This form of online learning involves engaging learners in interaction and collaboration with classes in distant locations through online communication technologies under the guidance of teachers or trained facilitators (Lewis

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& O'Dowd, 2016). In contrast to many forms of online learning which are based on the transfer of information through video lectures and shared files, intercultural dialogue is at the center of learning in telecollaboration, which is based on student-centered, collaborative approaches to learning where knowledge and understanding are constructed through interaction and negotiation. It is also considered in some quarters as a valid option for providing an international experience for those students who are unwilling or unable to engage in physical mobility programs (Kinginger, 2009; O'Dowd, 2016).

Telecollaboration is well known in the *CALICO* community, and it has now been employed and researched in university foreign language education for more than 20 years (see early reports in Cummins & Sayers, 1995; Warschauer, 1995). During this period, we have seen the activity play an increasingly important role in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) research and practice (see overviews by Thorne, 2006; Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016), and recent years have also witnessed a growing awareness of telecollaboration in mainstream foreign language education—particularly at the university level (see Corbett, 2010; Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). With this in mind, it is appropriate to review briefly the recent past and the "state of the art" in telecollaborative research and practice, before moving on to explore new directions in telecollaborative learning initiatives and new trends in research studies in this area.

Twenty Years of Telecollaborative Practice

Telecollaboration has gone by different names depending on the educational context and the pedagogical focus of its practitioners. Over the past number of years, the activity has been referred to as Online Intercultural Exchange (O'Dowd, 2007), Virtual Exchange (Helm, 2016), Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) (Rubin, 2016); Internet-mediated Intercultural Foreign Language Education (Belz & Thorne, 2006), and e-tandem (O'Rourke, 2007) or Teletandem (Telles & Leone, 2016). In preuniversity education, specific providers of telecollaborative networks have led to the terms eTwinning and ePals being applied to the activity in general.

This wide variety of terminology reflects the heterogeneous nature of the activity and the many attempts to reflect its complexity. However, it has also been suggested that this has led to confusion and has hindered the impact of the activity. Rubin (2016) suggests that "[o]ne of the problematics of this format is that it is called by so many different names, thereby making it harder for the practice to be more commonly understood and implemented" (p. 263). Although the term "telecollaboration" has the drawback that it has been used elsewhere to refer to online collaboration that is not necessarily intercultural

or educational in nature, it will be used here due to its widespread recognition in the CALL community.

Telecollaboration has traditionally taken the form of one of two models—each one reflecting the principal learning approaches prevalent in foreign language education at the time. The first well-known model was e-tandem, which focused on fostering learner autonomy and learners' ability to continue their language learning outside of the language classroom. The second model is usually referred to as intercultural telecollaboration and reflects the emphasis in the late 1990s and early 2000s on intercultural and sociocultural aspects of foreign language education.

In the e-tandem model (O'Rourke, 2007), two native speakers of different languages communicate together with the aim of learning the other's language, and messages are typically written 50% in the target and 50% in the native language, thereby providing each partner with an opportunity to practice their target language and, at the same time, provide their partner with authentic input. These exchanges are based on the principles of autonomy and reciprocity, and the responsibility for a successful exchange rests mainly with the learners, who are expected to provide feedback on their partners' content and/or on their foreign language performance. In this sense, tandem partners take on the role of peer tutors who correct their partners' errors and propose alternative formulations in the target language. The role of the tutor or class teacher in the e-tandem model is usually minimal. For example, learners are often encouraged to take on responsibility for finding their own themes for discussion, correcting their partners' errors, and keeping a learner diary or portfolio to reflect on their own learning progress.

The second model differs to e-tandem in the greater importance it attributes to classroom activity and in the shift of focus from language learning to culture-and-language learning. The intercultural model of telecollaboration strives to integrate the online interaction more comprehensively into the students' language programs and involves international class-to-class partnerships in which projects and tasks are developed by the partner teachers in the collaborating institutions. For example, students' contact classes are where online interaction and publications are prepared, analyzed, and reflected upon with the guidance of the teacher. Telecollaboration also places the emphasis of the exchanges on developing cultural awareness and other aspects of intercultural communicative competence, in addition to developing linguistic competence. For this reason, common activities include collaborative research projects comparing both cultures and the analysis of "parallel cultural texts." For example, Furstenberg, Levet, English, and Maillet (2001) had French and American students engage in comparative studies of the film *Three men and a baby* with the French original, while O'Dowd

(2006) had students carry out ethnographic interviews on their partners in the United States via videoconference and then write reflective essays on the cultural differences which had emerged during the interviews.

The end of the 2010s saw telecollaboration diverge in two paths. The first of these paths leads telecollaborative exchanges away from formal learning and engages learners in language and cultural learning experiences by immersing them in specialized online interest communities or environments that focus on specific hobbies or interests. Thorne, Black, and Sykes (2009), for example, describe the potential for intercultural contact and learning in online fan communities, where learners can establish relationships with like-minded fans of music groups or authors and can even use Web 2.0 technologies to remix and create new artistic creations based on existing books, motion pictures, and music. Learners also have increasing opportunities to use their foreign language skills and hone their intercultural communicative competence through participating in online multicultural communities such as multiplayer online games and public discussion forums (Hanna & de Nooy, 2009).

Models of online intercultural exchange (OIE) which function at this level of integration require learners to assume greater responsibility for how their linguistic and intercultural learning progresses online as they are given greater freedom in their choice of potential intercultural learning partners and environments—many of which, as has been shown, may be completely independent of organized classroom activity. Thorne (2010) describes this form of telecollaborative learning as "intercultural communication in the wild" (p. 144) and speculates that it may be "situated in arenas of social activity that are less controllable than classroom or organized online intercultural exchanges might be, but which present interesting, and perhaps even compelling, opportunities for intercultural exchange, agentive action and meaning making" (p. 144).

The second, alternative path in telecollaborative development involves attempts to integrate telecollaborative networks more comprehensively in formal education. The argument here is that if telecollaboration is such a valuable learning experience, then it should not be used as an "add-on" activity but rather as a recognized, credit-carrying activity which is valued and supported by university management. Based on this belief, reports have emerged of how universities are integrating telecollaboration into their study programs (O'Dowd, 2013), the use of alternative credit systems for students' telecollaborative work (Hauck & MacKinnon, 2016), and the development of models of competences for telecollaborative learning (Dooly, 2016) and for teachers engaged in telecollaborative exchanges (O'Dowd, 2015). Between 2011 and 2014 the INTENT project was financed by the European Commission to achieve greater awareness of telecollaboration around the academic world and to look for ways for its

integration into university education. One of the main outcomes of this project was the UNICollaboration platform (www.unicollaboration.eu) where university educators and mobility coordinators can establish partnerships and find the resources necessary to set up telecollaborative exchanges.

New Trends in Telecollaborative Practice

As interest in online technologies and innovative forms of collaborative learning continue to grow, recent years have seen some interesting new trends in telecollaborative learning emerge from university education. It is clear that while traditional approaches to telecollaboration, such as e-tandem learning, continue to be very popular, there is increasing diversity in the way telecollaboration is being integrated into higher education and also in the objectives of these initiatives. This diversity becomes evident by reviewing recent reports and publications of online intercultural exchange projects. It is also clear from the reports which were presented at the recent Second International Conference on Telecollaboration in Higher Education–New Directions in Telecollaborative Research and Practice which took place in Trinity College Dublin, Ireland from 21 to 23 April 2016. Some of these emerging trends will now be outlined.

Diversification of Telecollaborative Partnerships and Networks

We have seen that telecollaborative practice has been dominated to date by constellations and models which are based on bilingual-bicultural exchange between groups of native speakers. In other words, online exchanges have traditionally involved language learners from one languaculture communicating and collaborating with partners of another languaculture. These exchanges involve, for example, Spanish students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) collaborating online with American students of Spanish. Reviews of telecollaborative practice (O'Dowd, 2013; Guth, Helm, & O'Dowd, 2012) and of telecollaborative research studies (Guth & Helm, 2010; Lewis & O'Dowd, 2016) have shown that these bilingual-bicultural exchanges still remain the norm of telecollaborative activity at the university level; however, recent reports would suggest that this is beginning to change.

Bilingual set-ups are undoubtedly valuable tools for foreign language learning and may be suitable for foreign language educators in English-speaking countries such as the USA and the British Isles, and also for their EFL counterparts in France, Germany, and Spain. However, there are various arguments which are leading practitioners to question the long-term value of bilingual exchanges to this area of education, especially if our aims are to prepare our students for a globalized world and also to have telecollaboration mainstreamed across university education.

First, from a practical standpoint, it is evident that bilingual-bicultural models of telecollaboration have little to offer to the many language educators working in countries where their national languages are less in demand for bilingual exchanges. EFL and French educators in countries in Eastern Europe, for example, are likely to struggle to find partner classes learning their language in the USA or in Western Europe. The reality is that, as telecollaboration continues to grow in popularity, there will simply not be enough classes of "native speakers" in France, Germany, and English-speaking countries to provide sufficient partnerships for classes based in countries of less commonly spoken languages (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2015).

Second, from an educational perspective, it is also worth considering that today's university graduates are more likely to use a language such as English not with native speakers, but rather with other non-native speakers as a lingua franca in their future employment (Graddol, 2006). In the global workplace, engineers, computer scientists, and other professionals will need intercultural and linguistic skills to use English for online collaborative work with other non-native speakers just as much if not more than with native speakers. Dooly (2015) recently observed that "research in this area appears to be moving away from the notion that 'intercultural' is limited to one specific target language focus towards more studies that hold a 'global' notion of the intercultural" (p. 176). Similarly, Kramsch (2006) has argued that "[i]t is no longer appropriate to give students a tourist-like competence to exchange information with native speakers of national languages within well-defined national cultures. They need a much more sophisticated competence in the manipulation of symbolic systems" (p. 251). For these reasons, a growing number of educators appear to be engaging their students in telecollaborative exchanges with other non-native speakers in universities around the world in order to give them first-hand experience of using English, French, Spanish, or other languages in lingua franca contexts to help students develop their intercultural competence.

In the Telecollaboration in Higher Education conference in Dublin, 32 of the 96 presentations were explicitly based on the e-tandem or Teletandem model of exchange, while 8 of the presentations reported using English or Spanish as a lingua franca for exchanges between students in different countries, which demonstrates a growth in this approach. Guillen (2016) spoke about a lingua franca exchange between students in Colombia, Japan, and Taiwan, while Olmo (2016) reflected on her differing experiences between lingua franca and bilingual exchanges. Lingua franca exchanges undoubtedly hold potential for providing valuable opportunities for intercultural learning and for raising students' awareness of the role of language in intercultural communication. However, the learning outcomes of such exchanges have yet

to be explored in detail (see Helm, Guth, & Farrah, 2012; Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2015 for isolated examples), and it is also unclear what telecollaborative task types are best suited for such exchanges. Therefore, there is clearly a need for more research in this area in the future.

Critical Telecollaboration

Much has been written on how communicative language teaching for many years neglected its original aims of social justice and political education (see an interesting discussion in Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001). Kramsch (2006) suggests that this was because foreign language education was "under pressure to show evidence of efficiency and accountability" (p. 250), while Byram (2014) believes that language teachers have been "too concerned with the instrumental purposes of language teaching for communication" (p. 210). In recent years, this has been addressed to a certain extent by the increased prominence paid to intercultural approaches in education and by the introduction of sociocultural components in policy documentation on foreign language learning such as the Common European Framework on Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001).

However, it has been noted by Helm (2013) that as telecollaboration becomes more popular, there also has been a tendency in this area to shy away from difficult themes and subject matter and to smooth over difference in all but its most superficial manifestations. Many of the telecollaborative tasks identified by O'Dowd and Ware (2009) reflect a shallow approach to culture based on traditional communicative classroom themes such as musical tastes, travel, sports, etc. Tasks such as these, while perhaps useful as initial ice-breakers or for generating language practice, are likely to have little effect on students' understanding of the target culture or to lead to a critical reflection on their own culture. Kramsch (2014) questions the value of such telecollaborative projects by suggesting they are "phatic exchanges that are no longer what communicative language pedagogy had in mind when it aimed at teaching learners how to interpret, express, and negotiate intended meaning" (p. 98). The outcomes of such trivial exchanges can be that students use their online interactions to sidestep difference and to focus instead on what cultures may have in common at a superficial level (O'Dowd, 2016).

Various authors and practitioners have recently proposed alternative applications to telecollaboration in order to greater exploit the educational potential of this activity and to recapture the original transformative and critical goals of communicative language education. This so called "Critical Telecollaboration" attempts to refocus online intercultural exchange so that there is a genuine engagement with and negotiation of difference as opposed to a superficial "surfing of diversity" (Kramsch, 2014, p. 98). Helm (2016)

describes critical approaches to telecollaboration as online exchange experiences which seek to foster greater understanding of multiple "other" perspectives and to address social and political issues in an increasingly polarized world that seems to be characterized by conflicts, inequalities, and injustices. She outlines four assumptions of common telecollaboration, which critical approaches challenge. These are that online intercultural contact will lead to understanding and foster equality, the native speaker is the ideal interlocutor, the main aim of telecollaboration is simply to foster communicative and sociocultural competence, and, finally, that technology is a neutral medium (Helm, 2016).

Various examples of Critical Telecollaboration already exist and are being carried out around the globe in different educational contexts. The *Soliya* exchange format (Helm, 2016), for example, brings together students from the USA and Arab/Muslim countries to engage in open yet guided dialogue on cultural and political issues which affect their countries' relationships. A further example, reported by Porto (2014), shows British and Argentinean students engaging in collaborative project work related to the Falklands War and producing documents and activities aimed at supporting reconciliation between the two communities. Projects such as these offer students the opportunity to engage in intercultural dialogue on themes that form part of their countries' historical memory and to become more aware of alternative perspectives on themes which have been viewed until now through one particular cultural prism.

Examples of this approach were also present at the Telecollaboration in Higher Education conference in Dublin in 2016. Benabdallah and Messadia (2016), for example, presented the "On the Other Side of the World" Project which brought together university students from Arab, African, Asian, European, and American countries and engaged them in online dialogue about sociopolitical issues and deep-rooted stereotypes. Similarly, Mason (2016) reported on a project between students on the Cultural Studies Masters course at the University of Sousse, Tunisia and undergraduate students from the USA, taking a course in "US Foreign Relations". This exchange used the *Cultura* model (Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001) to explore cultural, religious, and foreign policy issues and to develop better understanding between students in the Muslim and Western worlds. Finally, Tcherepashenets (2016) presented a study based on collaboration between classes at the State University of New York, Empire State College (USA) and Tecnológico de Monterrey, which used online discussion on such topics as immigration, commercialization of culture, and ethical dilemmas as productive points of departure for exploration of the challenges and rewards of world citizenship.

Cross-Disciplinary Telecollaboration

One of the most interesting developments in recent years in the field of telecollaborative learning has been the growth of cross-disciplinary telecollaborative initiatives which engage students not only in "pure" foreign language practice, but also in collaborative projects based on different subject areas. This gives students the opportunity to develop language and culture skills while working on subject content, and it also provides them with different cultural perspectives on the particular subject area.

The volume by Schultheis Moore and Simon (2015) provides a fascinating overview of examples of online exchange initiatives in the humanities, which have stemmed from the work of the COIL Center in New York. Contributions to this volume provide examples of how online intercultural collaboration can be integrated effectively into the study of subject areas as diverse as jazz music, feminism, the diaspora, gender roles, and human rights. Elsewhere, Vallance and Ibayashi (2015) report on a project which engaged Japanese undergraduate students and UK high school pupils in online collaboration to design and program robots in both the real world and in virtual world simulations. Duus and Cooray (2014) describe a project for students of marketing which brings together business students in the UK and India to take part in a simulation which involves working in online virtual teams and setting up a new business in India. Finally, Lindner (2016) reports on an exchange between business studies students at the University of Paderborn in Germany and Masaryk University in Brno in the Czech Republic which involved students collaborating online with their international partners to create a website which compared a product, service, or managerial innovation across two cultures.

In the Telecollaboration in Higher Education conference, several presentations looked at how telecollaboration can be integrated into other subject areas. Deutscher (TiHE, 2016) reported on a study in Germany which looks at 12 different telecollaborative exchanges based on geography education, while Meechan (2016) spoke of telecollaborative initiatives taking place in disciplines as varied as ancient history, music education, anthropology, and community health nursing at the University of Michigan. Finally, Schmidt, Franz, Phillips, and Kim (2016) presented the Global Health Live Pacific project, which brought together students and teachers from four countries on a weekly basis via Google Plus Hangouts for sessions with invited guest lecturers and experts in the subject of global health.

Cross-disciplinary telecollaboration undoubtedly offers numerous benefits for educators and students alike and opens up many educational possibilities. However, the concept of telecollaboration and its modus operandi are often not familiar to university educators in disciplines outside the humanities, and it is here that CALL practitioners may have a role to play offering

training and presentations to colleagues at their institutions across disciplines which highlight the educational value of online collaboration and exchange and the important role of intercultural communication in the future careers of all graduates.

Combining and Integrating Telecollaboration with Other Modes of Education

As awareness of the educational potential of telecollaborative learning grows, many educators are integrating online intercultural collaboration with other forms of instruction and study programs. Interesting examples exist in the literature of forms of telecollaboration being integrated with Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as well as with universities' work placement and physical mobility programs.

One example of combining online courses with telecollaboration comes from Princeton University, where Jennifer Widner introduced an online version of her course "Making Government Work in Hard Places" at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs. Widner engaged the 19 students who were taking part in her on-campus course in interaction with 2,000 learners from around the world who were following the course online (Huber, 2015).

An innovative approach to integrating online exchange with online content courses has been pioneered by the Sharing Perspectives Foundation which is a nonprofit organization dedicated to providing students and academics with opportunities to collaboratively study contemporary themes related to the subjects of political science, law, economics, and social science. Their model of online exchange involves participating universities constructing a shared curriculum which is presented through video lectures by the participating educators and, after watching the video lectures, students come together in subgroups in a web-based video conference room to discuss the lectures of that week. These discussions are hosted by professionally trained facilitators. Students are then required to collaboratively design, conduct and share survey research about the topic in their own communities in order to learn about the broader societal impact of the topic (www.sharingperspectivesfoundation.com).

Universities have also begun to explore the potential of using telecollaborative exchange to support and enhance traditional activities such as work placements and physical mobility programs. Vriens and Van Petegem (2012) report on the Enterprise-University Virtual Placements (EU-VIP) project which looked at the different ways virtual interaction can be integrated with international work placements. One of their case studies involved undergraduate students in business management who undertook work placements abroad in

different foreign companies. The students participated in regular videoconferencing seminars with their peers at the home institution, and the program enabled students to exchange experiences regarding national and international work placement. The authors reported that in this way the students at home had the opportunity to share the international experience and the students abroad were able to reflect more critically on the differences in business culture between their two countries.

Telecollaboration is also beginning to be used to support "traditional" physical mobility programs. In her review of language learning and study abroad, Kinginger (2009) calls for those involved in student mobility "to establish telecollaborative courses linking students at home to their in-country peers in the precise locations where they will study abroad and thereby to establish contacts through prior, institutionally sanctioned interaction" (p. 111). However, as with other cases of telecollaborative initiatives outside of foreign language departments, using telecollaboration as a form of premobility for connecting internationally mobile students with students in their home institutions remains in its infancy, and very few examples have been reported in the literature to date. One exception is Elola and Oskoz (2008), who summarize a project of U.S. students reporting and reflecting on their experiences via blogs while studying in Spain with partners in another American institution.

At the Telecollaboration in Higher Education conference, various speakers reported initiatives which attempted to integrate phases of online and physical mobility in their study programs. Leahy and De Gruil (2016) reported on the telecollaborative exchange project between institutions in Ireland and France, which connected Irish students of French studying business studies and event and hospitality management with French students of English from the chemistry department. The exchange progresses from telecollaborative exchange in year 1 to a short period of physical mobility in year 2 and then to a full year of studying abroad in the partner university in year 3. Similarly, Sergaeva and Yudina (2016) shared their experience in participating in a joint project between Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (Norway) and Herzen State Pedagogical University (Saint Petersburg, Russia). In this project the blended course "Intercultural Communication in Educational Settings" was taught by an international team of teachers, and web-based activities were followed by one-week face-to-face sessions in Oslo and in St. Petersburg. Finally, Giralt (2016) reported on an exchange between the University of Limerick in Ireland with my own institution, the University of León in Spain. In this case, students were offered the opportunity to engage in a two-month online exchange with partners in the country where they planned to carry out their Erasmus mobility.

While examples of telecollaborative practice in international mobility programs such as these highlight the clear potential which virtual exchange can offer students across university education, it is clear that there is still much to be done in researching how telecollaboration can contribute to enhancing universities' physical mobility programs, and in particular how they can be integrated on a practical level. Various questions remain: for example, who should run and organize these exchanges, as in many institutions physical mobility programs are run by technical staff and not by educators experienced in language and cultural education. Furthermore, there have also been concerns expressed that telecollaborative exchange may be used by institutions to introduce a two-tier system of mobility which involves physical mobility for the wealthy and virtual exchange for those who cannot afford to travel abroad (Lawton, 2015). If telecollaboration is to be used in connection with physical mobility, it should not be promoted as a *second-best* option, but rather as an international learning experience in its own right with distinct advantages and limitations. It should be used in collaboration with, not instead of, physical mobility programs.

Small Networks of Practice Emerging

Needless to say, there is currently a myriad of ways in which telecollaborative practitioners come together to organize their exchanges and projects. While in primary and secondary education, most telecollaborative teachers appear to establish contacts through large networks such as eTwinning and ePals which have thousands of members, at the university level, telecollaborative practitioners tend to come together and collaborate within smaller networks or communities of practice based on their specialized interests or subject area.

The Teletandem Brasil Project (www.teletandembrasil.org/), for example, stems from the Universidade Estadual Paulista in Brazil and matches Brazilian university students who want to learn a foreign language with students in other countries who are learning Portuguese. The network began in 2006 and now engages Brazilian students in structured, institutionalized online language exchanges with partner universities in over 40 universities in the USA, Mexico, Columbia, Germany, and Italy.

Another example is X-Culture, which was launched in 2010 by Dr. Vas Taras as a network for teachers and students of international business studies who wanted to give their students first-hand experience of international virtual teams. In the first year universities from 7 countries participated in X-Culture and by 2015 almost 4,000 students from over 100 universities in 40 countries were participating in X-Culture (http://x-culture.org/).

In the Dublin conference, there were also some examples of telecollaborative networks involving various institutions or practitioners around a common theme. One of the most interesting of these was the Virtual Dual Immersion Program which is a telecollaboration project founded by the Jesuit universities in Latin America and the United States. The presenters Marturet de Paris and Coffey (2016) explained the project was grounded in the mission to bridge the social, linguistic, and intercultural gaps among students of English and Spanish in Jesuit universities in the United States and Latin America. They reported how their network had begun with 38 participants in 2006 and now placed more than 1,500 learners per semester and cumulatively celebrates more than 10,000 participants.

Although many practitioners find their telecollaborative homes in such small networks, there has been a growing demand among practitioners to establish a framework which would provide greater support for practitioners and researchers in the field of telecollaboration. Stemming from this demand, the conference saw the launch of a new academic organization— UNICollaboration: The International Association of Telecollaboration and Virtual Exchange. The goals of the organization are to promote the development and integration of telecollaborative research and practice across all disciplines and to actively engage in awareness raising of telecollaboration and virtual exchange at institutional and policy-making level. Among the organization's activities will be the celebration of regular conferences and training workshops, support for practitioners in finding telecollaborative partnerships, and launching an online open source journal dedicated exclusively to telecollaborative research across academic disciplines.

Videoconferencing Exchange and the Impact of the Medium

The final tendency which stands out when reviewing recent publications and presentations on telecollaboration is the increased use of videoconferencing technology to engage learners in synchronous interaction with learning partners and the subsequent interest in the impact of the medium on intercultural communication. Malinowski and Kramsch (2014) highlight the important impact of the technological medium itself on online intercultural encounters. Basing their work on videoconferencing exchanges between French and American students, the authors suggest that the computer interface and the common technical problems of echo, frame-freeze, etc. play a major role in how students communicate online, and this can often hinder intercultural learning. They are not the only ones to identify the important impact which the medium has on computer-mediated intercultural communication. Kern (2014) warns that "what one sees on the computer screen is a highly mediated, filtered, and designed version of the world" (p. 341), and he argues that

telecollaborative learning needs to draw learners' attention to how the online medium influences how communication takes place and brings with it its own ideas about what communication actually is.

These are very useful propositions for the design of future online exchanges, as they urge practitioners to raise students' awareness explicitly to the assumptions and genres which they bring to online interaction, and they also serve to draw attention to the impact of the computer medium on our communicative activity. Studies on the impact of videoconferencing and multimodal communication are very present in the recent literature (Barron & Black, 2015; Hauck & Youngs, 2008; Van der Kroan, Jauregi, & Jan, 2015; van der Zwaard & Bennick, 2014) and at the Dublin conference. Azaoui (2016) looked at how teachers deal with unexpected technical interruption in telecollaborative exchanges, Develotte (2016) examined the integration of videoconferencing in *Cultura*-style exchanges, while Blin and Dey-Plissonneau (2016) reported on a preliminary study that looked at the emergence and realization of affordances that emerged during interactions that took place during weekly videoconference sessions between French as a Foreign Language teacher trainees from the University of Lyon 2 (France) and learners of French from Dublin City University (Ireland). In total, more than 15 presentations looked explicitly at the role of videoconferencing in telecollaborative interaction, which exemplifies the importance of this medium in modern telecollaboration.

Conclusion

I set out in this article to provide an overview of the most significant emerging trends and tendencies in telecollaborative practice. In order to achieve this, I reviewed the recent literature in the area and I also identified recurring themes from the 2016 Telecollaboration in Higher Education conference at Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. The main trends identified included the diversification of telecollaborative partnerships and networks, the rise of critical and cross-disciplinary approaches to telecollaboration, the combination and integration of telecollaboration with other modes of education, and, finally, the emergence of videoconferencing as an important tool for online intercultural interaction. Lack of space has meant it was impossible to look at the many different research methods which were reported at the Dublin conference. However, this area is certainly worthy of further attention in the future, as many innovative techniques were presented, including eye-tracking software (Michel & Smith, 2016) and micro-interactionist approaches (Guichon, 2016).

In conclusion, it would appear that telecollaboration's third decade as an educational tool will be characterized by a broadening of interpretations of what telecollaboration should involve and what its educational goals can be. As practitioners and researchers, it is our challenge to anchor the activity

within sound pedagogy and relevant research methodologies which demonstrate its value to education.

About the Author

Robert O'Dowd teaches EFL and Applied Linguistics at the University of León, Spain. He has taught at universities in Ireland, Germany, and Spain and has published widely on the application of telecollaborative networks in university education. His most recent publication is the coedited volume *Online Intercultural Exchange Policy, Pedagogy, Practice* for Routledge. He has participated in many international projects about telecollaboration and he recently coordinated INTENT—a project financed by the European Commission aimed at promoting online intercultural exchange in European Higher Education (www.unicollaboration.eu).

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