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Developing a Reflective Practitioner through Telecollaboration in Language Teacher Preservice Education – A Bottom-up Perspective

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The article presents the experience and reflection on an international telecollaborative project in the light of training the language teachers as reflective practitioners. Student teachers of the Institute of Applied Linguistics at the University of Warsaw (UW) collaborated with student teachers of the Faculty of Education and Social Work at the University of Valladolid (UVA) within the framework of the EVALUATE project in the winter semester 2017/2018. The exchange aimed at developing professional teaching skills, language and digital competences. However, in the described study the exchange is observed from the perspective of the student participants and their teachers. This paper focuses on the impact of such intercultural exchange on developing the reflective competence by preservice teachers. It also highlights the interrelation between the research track and content track within the framework of the project. The outcomes of the experience go beyond this particular exchange and may be generalized to a wider educational environment which involves telecollaboration at various educational and professional levels.

Introduction

Telecollaboration in educational institutions has been gaining more and more interest among teachers and educators at all levels for various reasons. It enriches the curriculum, creates a vivid culturally rich learning environment via contacts with peers, which increases the need and motivation to learn foreign languages and allows for a meaningful use of technology. The focal points in each project vary depending on the needs of participants and organizational settings. In telecollaborative projects much depends on learning by doing. This refers to Dewey's idea *Recognition of the natural course of development ... always sets out with situations which involve learning by doing* (Dewey, 1974, p. 364). The students cannot be taught, they can be coached. The question is how to design a learning environment to develop a reflective practitioner for telecollaborative activities at

various stages of education in order to guide teacher trainers preparing teachers for the present and future challenges as the preservice teachers might participate in many international exchange projects initiated by the teachers individually or supported by various organizational bodies. Telecollaboration, as we see it, is in deep connection with the project-based learning methodology (PBL) – developed from Dewey's ideas – both in the procedure starting from an authentic situation and evolving into the elaboration of a product and in its education potentiality in terms of social interaction and cognition. Fragoulis and Tsiplakides (2009), who like us, are using the PBL for language learning purposes, mention an extensive list of benefits provided by the use of this methodology. Among all of them, those that draw our attention have to do with the fact that project activities offer opportunities:

- for 'the natural integration of language skills' (Stoller, 2006, as cited in Fragoulis and Tsiplakides, 2009, p.114),
- to perform authentic activities that imply 'appropriate levels of difficulty or involvement' (as cited in Fragoulis and Tsiplakides, 2009);
- 'to examine the tasks from different perspectives' (Reeves et al., 2002 as cited in Fragoulis and Tsiplakides, 2009) and develop 'problem-solving and higher order critical thinking skills' (Fragoulis and Tsiplakides, 2009, based on Allen, 2004).

Using the Activity Theory methodology, the work by Gibbes and Carson (2014) shows how the PBL (or more specifically the Project-Based Language Learning, PBLL) provokes contradictory responses of the students due to their different perceptions of the learning experience depending on whether work aligns or not with their personal motivations. In the article, reflection itself is seen not just as a means to assess the project's success but as the means to develop professional competences as English teach-

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ers at the Tertiary Teacher Education level, namely: to reflect on the use of diverse methodologies and strategies for English language teaching.

eTwinning is an example of a very flexible exchange program in which the project-based learning is extensively applied, and which is aimed at primary and secondary educational levels. It has received a huge popularity since 2005. There are 195,393 schools participating, 593,144 teachers participate in 77,153 projects.¹ The projects vary because they all fit particular needs and interests of the teachers and learners as well as the curriculum requirements. The program involves all age groups from the youngest, aged 3–12 years up to vocational school learners aged 19–20 years. Depending on the needs and circumstances, the participants share photos, pictures, and short films. They can also take part in collaborative lessons through Twinspace videoconferencing tools. Learners older than 12 years may post messages, comment on peers' posts, and interact online from home. The framework of the program allows for flexibility but also emphasizes strict reference to the formal curriculum. Teachers may recommend the use of a variety of digital tools according to their needs, such as email, social networks, Padlet, Google Docs; however, Twinspace with its user-friendly blog, diary, storage and videoconferencing facilities enhances cooperation and it is sufficient for the majority of participants. eTwinning allows to overcome geographical limits as the partners cooperate across borders. Although partners may choose the language of communication, it is mainly English. That is an essential added value for learners in the country or community where there is one dominating language, namely Polish on the one side and Spanish on the other (Gajek and Poszytek, 2009; Gajek, 2010, 2012, 2017). Participation is voluntary. However, in Poland eTwinning has been introduced to the curriculum for languages since 2018. In such programmes teachers – eTwinners are either pioneers or learn from examples and experience of their colleagues.

With the growing number of schools and teachers participating for example in eTwinning, the focus has turned towards teacher training for telecollaboration. Thus, there is the need to prepare teacher trainees for telecollaboration as part of their academic, professional preparation to allow them to gain linguistic, intercultural and professional competences in a way which is more cost-effective than other exchange programs. A new track aimed at teacher training institutions which has been incorporated into eTwinning is an example of such an attempt. Moreover, there is also the need for research on the effectiveness of telecollaborative practices undertaken at the tertiary education. However, rigorous research procedures substantially change the learning environment for the participants at the bottom of the research structure. That may have a different meaning for each of the

stakeholders. As Dewey (1974, p. 151) says: *He [the student] has to see on his own behalf and in his own way the relations between means and methods employed and results achieved.* Thus, students and teachers participating in the exchange need to make their participation meaningful in order to get involved and benefit from it. The study shows how students develop a reflective approach by making the exchange meaningful for them.

Telecollaboration for language learning and for professional development of teachers

Telecollaboration for language learning and for professional aims has a long tradition. Diverse studies refer to the role of the learner and the learning tasks, teaching methodology and chosen media (Furstenberg, 2001; Belz, 2002; O'Dowd, 2005; Guerin et al., 2010). Some attention is given to the role of the teacher (Müller-Hartmann, 2007; Dooley, 2010; Dooley and O'Dowd, 2018). Mont and Masats (2018) provide a practical description of teacher's roles and activities in telecollaborative projects. Their tips clearly demonstrate that the role of a passive technician (Schön, 1987) who learns the content knowledge available in the literature and passes it onto the following generations is not sufficient. Such teachers do not have any chance to use their own experience, creativity or critical reflection in their practice. The only role assigned to such classroom teachers is to make sure that students comprehend the content knowledge without questioning the validity or relevance of it to their students or to their own context (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). This approach renders teaching into a 'lifeless' practice by killing the curiosity and creativity of teachers (Kincheloe, 2008). Dooley (2010) stresses the need of change as teaching is no longer associated with transmission of knowledge. The emphasis is, instead, on knowledge building, where interaction goes in three ways: teacher-student, student-student, and student-teacher. Dooley observes that web 2.0 invites a teaching style that stimulates and orients students towards critical thinking.

Thus, training abilities to reflect on own practice becomes essential for teachers. For Dewey (1933/1997) reflective teachers take responsibility for their actions and consider alternatives rather than acting without thinking. Reflective teachers have three distinguishing characteristics: open-mindedness, responsibility and wholeheartedness. They are able to accept and implement different ideas. They are not afraid of novelty. Open-minded people ready to revise their beliefs when they encounter new data, and they are open to accepting the possibility of making mistakes. As Larrivee (2008) explains they

¹ data collected on September 26th, 2018

are aware of the fact that they may not be right, and they are not in a race to win a debate. Open-minded reflective teachers listen to their students and peers, and they are capable of adjusting their practice to different conditions.

Responsibility means 'taking ownership of the consequences of one's actions.' Responsible teachers are aware of the fact that their actions might have unintended consequences for others, and they can react accordingly. Wholeheartedness means constant willingness to improve a situation. Wholehearted reflective teachers look for different measures to help their students. They do not give up until they find a solution (Larrivee, 2008). Even when they face a lot of uncertainty, confusion, and frustration, wholehearted teachers search for the best actions.

Reflection on the practitioner's activities involves reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. The former is a response to challenges which arise while we do something. It may contain the element of surprise. The latter occurs when we look back on what has been done and how the actions have contributed to the outcomes (Schön, 1990, p. 26).

Bortoluzzi and Mullen (2018) define 'a reflective telecollaborative teacher' as a practitioner, *who 1) is actively involved in identifying and discussing intercultural development with her partner(s), 2) critically reflects on methodological issues pertaining to intercultural competence and the telecollaboration process, 3) revises the telecollaboration process of intercultural and language learning for herself and her students in a continuous learning loop, 4) consciously transfers the intercultural knowledge and critical reflection on telecollaboration to offline classroom teaching* (Bortoluzzi, Mullen, 2018; following Kolb, 1984; Edge, 2011; Liddicoat and Scardino, 2013). The authors exemplify their ideas on the basis of the Canadian-Italian Exchange for Language Learning (CIELL). Current analysis will be based on the participation of the Authors in the EVALUATE project with some reference to earlier telecollaborative exchange projects.

EVALUATE project

EVALUATE is an acronym for Evaluating and Upscaling Telecollaborative Teacher Education. It is an Erasmus+ KA3 (EACEA/34/2015) project which aims at carrying out a European Policy Experiment. This project will evaluate the impact of telecollaborative learning on student teachers involved in the Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in the participating European countries and regions.

It investigates the impact on future teachers' digital-pedagogical, intercultural and linguistic competences. The entire top-down results based on planned 1000 student participants will be presented in the second half of 2019 (O'Dowd & Müller-Hartmann, 2018). That is why the aim of this study is to partially evaluate and reflect on its impact from the bottom-up perspective based on one of the many exchange sub-projects within the EVALUATE project.

Model of exchange applied in EVALUATE

The theoretical background of the project is the Progressive Exchange Model which has been widely used in the telecollaborative practice and research to date (O'Dowd and Ware, 2006; O'Dowd and Lewis, 2016). The model involves three interrelated task types which move from Information Exchange, Comparing and Analyzing Cultural Practices and working together on a Collaborative Product. Telecollaboration is also referred to as the Virtual Exchange or Online Intercultural Exchange. It involves engaging students in task-based interaction and collaborative exchange projects with partner-classes in other locations through online communication technologies under the guidance of their teachers (O'Dowd and Lewis, 2016).

Especially, the three tasks are to develop pedagogical-technical competences, transversal competences – ability to learn and initiative-taking and intercultural competences (Figure 1).

Teacher trainer participants were introduced to the EVALUATE project and trained in various aspects involving telecollaboration, including the 3-task model. They received a manual, were offered a training week and were equipped with introductory tools for student teachers. They could also meet their partners face to face or online and work together on the project's Moodle platform. Telecollaboration took place at two different levels: at the teacher trainer level while designing their own project based on the 3-task model, and at the student teacher level with the aim to accomplish the tasks in international teams. During the development of this particular exchange, a mentor belonging to the EVALUATE team monitored the trainers' work. They maintained frequent contact with him or her mainly as regards access to the Moodle platform itself and the work required from the students to the project team. Students had to fill in an initial pre-test, and then three diary entries after each task. After the exchange, trainers and the mentor met virtually to discuss impressions and students' feedback about the experience that was recorded and sent to the mentor. Both, students and trainers got certificates of participation in the EVALUATE project.

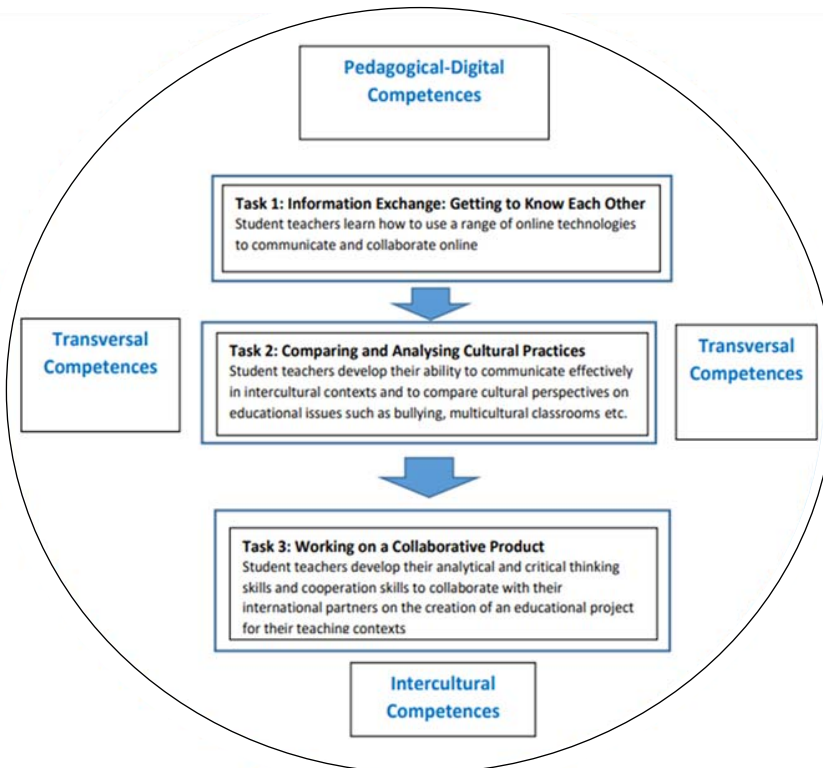
How the 3-task model was implemented

The first two tasks were done on the EVALUATE Moodle platform. To complete the third one the students were allowed to use all means of communication which were convenient for them.

As said before, trainers were introduced to a pedagogical model that consisted of three tasks (Figure 1). Here is a brief summary of their design following the EVALUATE guidelines (O'Dowd, Müller-Hartmann, 2018). The activities comprising the tasks mostly adopted the Moodle forum type:

- Task 1 (Information exchange: Getting to know each other) consisted of two different activities. Activity 1 – 'A portrait of yourself' – was performed individually and implied that

Figure 1. Interrelation between the tasks and competences



Source: O'Dowd, Müller-Hartmann, 2018.

the students should give information about their personal interests and experience based on a photograph of their choice. Activity 2 – ‘Getting to know our Universities’ – required national team work and involved a search for information about their universities. Students were asked to comment on their partner peers’ contributions in the forum provided for each activity.

- Task 2 (Comparing and analyzing cultural practices) aimed at exchanging and analyzing information about how literature was dealt with in a Primary class in their home countries. It involved pair work in their home universities and international work in small groups of four people, that is, each international small group was arranged in two national couples. A forum was provided for each small group. It consisted of two activities (3 and 4) performed by the national couples which needed to be followed by a small-group discussion in the forum. In Activity 3 couples were asked to select a short story or tale often used during Primary lessons in their home country, make a summary of the plot and play emphasis on any remarkable aspects, and explain to their partner couple about their choice and what made the story interesting for Primary school children. Activity 4 required planning a 3-activity ‘teaching

sequence’ for a Primary lesson on the grounds of the chosen story and following the teaching guidelines used at their home University. This was particularly interesting for the trainers, as we expected students to notice similarities and differences in the didactic models used in the Primary classrooms.

- Task 3 (Working on a collaborative product) involved international team work. In this case the previous small groups had to work as real teams in a collaborative way, inventing or choosing a story and making decisions on the design of the teaching sequence respecting basic guidelines, using similarities and incorporating assets from each model. In this task students were also expected to address two important issues: firstly, to relate the activities to at least two of the EU key competences; and secondly, to put forward a plan for attention to diversity, which meant considering how to develop inclusive education for children with different origins, educational special needs, different learning styles, etc. In other words, how the sequence of activities would enhance children’s understanding of inclusion and the need for it. For this activity, students were encouraged to use any social network or communication resource that would have helped them to communicate fluently with the other members of the team.

The study

Aims and instruments

The aim of the study was to focus on the process of developing a 'teacher' as a reflective practitioner through participation in a European research project on telecollaboration. The term 'teacher' is here applied to student teachers. The study is qualitative as the instruments of the analysis essentially include the performance of tasks, reflective diary entries, in-class ongoing discussions, and final presentations as well as group interviews.

The analysis of the data in the Polish group was based on:

1. the observations of the students' activities on the Moodle platform;
2. in-class ongoing discussions;
3. students' diary entries that are obligatory in the EVALUATE study, which have been forwarded to the teacher trainer;
4. final evaluation conference (audio-recorded).

The analysis of the data in the Spanish group was based on:

1. the observations of the students' activities on the Moodle platform;
2. in-class ongoing discussions,
3. final evaluation conference, which included: final reflective presentations followed by teacher questions that triggered further reflection on the whole telecollaboration procedure, in English (video-recorded); and not recorded informal discussion in Spanish.

What makes this telecollaboration exchange different from others is that writing the pre-test and diary entries after each task reflecting on their own performance and the whole EVALUATE project was compulsory for every student.

In the diary entries they answered reflective questions, for example:

- What have you learnt about selecting technologies that enhance what you teach and how you teach?
- What do you feel you have learnt about your own and your partners' national and educational cultures?
- How do you feel about working in an intercultural team?
- Has this project affected in any way how you will use online tools and environment in your own teaching career in the future?

What is more, organizing the final class meetings and recording them were also recommended by the EVALUATE project coordinators. That is what brings reflection to the front, and that is why collecting data for this particular study was meant to be the least intrusive. The questions for the final meetings and group interviews suggested (but not strictly required) by the EVALUATE coordinators were as follows:

- Tell us about your experience with the telecollaborative exchange you did this semester.

- What do you feel you have learnt from it?
- What were the most positive aspects?
- The most challenging?
- What do you think about the activities you were asked to do with your peers?
- What tools did you use to communicate with your peers? Why did you choose them?
- How would you describe your relationship with your peers?
- What would you advise the project coordinators to change about the project for future iterations?
- Do you see yourselves as continuing this type of activity when you are teaching in a school?
- Why/Why not?
- What would you see as the major challenges?
- Do you feel this experience has improved your digital-pedagogical competence? In what way?
- Do you feel this experience has improved your intercultural competence? In what way?
- Do you feel this experience has improved your foreign language competence? In what way?

The teachers were free to select the ones relevant to their needs and the needs of the students.

The telecollaboration teaching process – the student participants

The participants were divided into nine international groups consisting of two students of the University of Valladolid and two students of the University of Warsaw. Students at both universities were pre-service English teachers at the primary level. However, they differed in the year of study and their level of English, being in both cases higher in the Warsaw group.

Students in the Polish group were at B2.2 up to C1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR; Council of Europe, 2001). It was their last course to gain teacher qualification at BA level. Their intercultural experience was varied as some of them studied abroad within the framework of Erasmus+ programs, other participated in voluntary activities abroad. But some of them had not had much contact with foreigners before the exchange. The content of the project work was fully compliant with the regular course syllabus. The course requirements in terms of planning activities for young learners and writing a reflective commentary (diary entries) were the same for the project participants and other students.

The Spanish group consisted of 20 Spanish students with B1.2 level of English (CEFR) arranged in couples. The project was a part of their ordinary English course at the Teacher Education. It is important to notice that the University of Valladolid is located in a monolingual area of Spain where there is hardly any exposure to English or any other language. Students were used to working in small teams and presenting their work in front of the class.

The results

For both partners, participation in the exchange created a learning environment in which students were working in international groups. They got hands on experience in the project work. Students developed transversal competences such as international project management and solving problems in telecollaborative projects. It was important for students that they participated in a big international research project.

Both groups enjoyed the exchange. They learnt a lot about the partners' country and university. They identified similarities concerning many areas such as interests, goals, education systems, methods and content of teaching; however, less attention was paid to the more institutional part of the university (Task 1, activity 2) and demanded more tasks for personal interaction leading to getting to know each other. The majority of them (80%) did not mention any stereotypes about the other culture. They used various patterns in sharing the work in international groups.

Polish group

In the exchange, all Polish students developed discursive competences, e.g., how to communicate with peers whose command of English is slightly lower in a polite and respectful way. They learned some Spanish while translating vocabulary and in written communication, especially when they could not understand the excerpts of English texts with Spanish inferences. Those who knew Spanish appreciated the opportunity to practice it in spoken and written communication with their partners. They also valued the importance of the right level of English, sufficient level of computer literacy and appropriate types of activities for the successful implementation of telecollaborative projects in teaching. Students learned as well about the EU 8 competences for lifelong learning and their application in teaching young learners.

However, Polish students did not improve their language skills in English. They noticed that people of Polish and Spanish origin as non-native speakers of English make different mistakes while using the language. In some groups Polish participants divided their work, so collaborative skills were not developed at the expected level, e.g., in some groups, only one Polish student communicated with the Spanish partners. Some of them had little opportunity to develop intercultural competence because it was already quite high. However, all of them learned something about Spain, the country of their partners. Participation in the project was voluntary, to some extent, so students with high intercultural competence joined the project without hesitations. As they were allowed to select ICT tools for communication in the third task, they used the ones which they were familiar with, such as Moodle, Facebook, Google Drive, WhatsApp, WhichApp, Skype, Gmail. Therefore, they could hardly say that their digital competence has improved.

Concerning the outcomes of the exchange, their critical commentaries refer to the fact that speaking part is missing in the project: 'we were not able to establish any sort of connection in written communication,' 'speaking was missing in the project.' On the one hand, they said they would prefer more intensive spoken interaction. On the other hand, they realized how difficult it was to organize synchronous sessions. As the tasks were prescribed by the methodology applied in the project and the teachers, students found the interactions as forced, and they perceived the exchange not long enough to build closer relationships. They would prefer more activities based on spoken communication.

Moreover, they claimed that strict deadlines were needed: 'the coordinators should have set deadlines.' However, they declared that based on this experience they would use collaborative projects in their teaching practice in the future. They also expressed their willingness to have more international exchange projects during their studies, not only in a teacher training course.

Spanish group

The added value for the entire Spanish group involved in the project was the use of English as a Foreign Language, the development of comparative skills and knowledge of Primary education systems and opportunities for intercultural exchange.

As opportunities to use the English language in real life are relatively small in the Spanish context, students acknowledged telecollaboration as a great chance to prove their communication skills in English and claimed that they improved their English by communicating with Polish students displaying a higher level of English. Nevertheless, some of them were happy to switch into Spanish if the Polish partner could use it.

The intercultural exchange was an opportunity that not all the students were able to make good use of. It depended primarily on the motivation and initiative of the groups. Some learned a lot of facts and practical tips about Poland, and one group even planned a trip to Poland in summer; however, another group failed to receive information about the partners' country or failed to ask for it. These conclusions illustrate that students' initiative and interest is essential in telecollaborative projects but also indicates that non-reliability in one's language skills may lead to failed communication. However, most of the students declared that they would start telecollaboration projects in their teaching practice.

They noticed the same pedagogical underpinnings of teaching young learners as well as small differences in the Polish and Spanish versions of some traditional fairy tales (such as Cinderella). They also recognized the fact that there was a difference in the timing of school lessons (Polish lessons being 45 minutes long and Spanish lessons being 55 minutes long).

As regards the use of ICT, students were already familiar with Moodle in the university context but

found it too rigid to work with when dealing with fluent communication. They would prefer being introduced to the use of another platform with better communication tools.

From the social point of view, in most of the cases, the students' declared that the virtual relation between partner student teachers in a formal environment should have lasted longer, giving students more opportunities to get to know each other in a more personal way and expanding telecollaboration beyond one course.

It is interesting to notice that this teacher collaboration led to an Erasmus+ KA1 Agreement for student and teaching staff exchange between the Institute of Applied Linguistics (UW) and the Faculty of Education and Social Work (UVA) and only in the first call (20 December 2017) 16 second-year students from Spain applied for the University of Warsaw as one of the destinations of their choice, which might have been influenced by this telecollaboration experience. There is no exact data to prove that, though.

Developing a reflective practitioner through the exchange – the trainees' perspective

Although required for the research part within the framework of the EVALUATE project, the necessity of writing a pre-test and the diary may seem tedious. The entries in a journal were obligatory to provide the EVALUATE coordinators with hard data on the effectiveness of the telecollaborative exchange. From the students' perspective, such entries do not contribute to the growth of linguistic or cultural knowledge and skills, but they strongly support the development of reflection. In the students' diaries, reflection-on-action was well documented. The research setup justified the need for reflective diary entries.

Examination of the students' materials on Moodle allows for confirmation of their quite high intercultural competence. They often visited and commented on partners' profiles. The quality of their entries and the way they reacted to specific situations, which might have developed into conflicts, demonstrated high intercultural competence, which prevented any problems.

During the final conference, the students suggested that the project should have been longer to build closer relationships. As the final product was a written work, their activity was more focused on writing, and not on spoken communication. For them, written communication was less valid and less attractive than spoken conversation. They found written communication as more impersonal, which did not build real bonds between participants. As the activities were prescribed to fulfill the common grounds of the exchange as a whole within the framework of the EVALUATE project, some of the students would have preferred more autonomy. On the other hand, those who felt lost a bit in the third activity would have preferred entirely controlled actions. It turned out that some students not used to collaborating did not share the work but split it among the team members.

An interesting fact was that both groups of students would require keeping deadlines more strictly but mainly by the other side.

In the learning conditions created by the exchange project, students learned the essential skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, communication and collaboration, which were perceived as the key to success (*The Partnership for 21st Century Learning*, 2015).

Developing a reflective practitioner through the exchange – the trainers' perspective

Since 2008 the Polish teacher trainer has initiated and participated in many telecollaborative exchange projects with the following educational institutions: Corning Community College in New Jersey and Community College in Las Vegas, US, Universities in Beijing, China, Budapest, Hungary, Moscow, Russia, Milan, Italy, and Tartu, Estonia. Reflection-on-action has already been published (Gajek, 2016). This experience was more focused on being a part of a broad policy experiment both in terms of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. This involves such new activities as induction to the exchange in the teacher training session. The tasks were built according to the guidelines and supervised by the coordinators, not prepared autonomously by the exchange partners. The dialogue with the partner and the project coordinator was limited to the implementation of the plan and fulfilling the research aims. Thus, creativity and the opportunities to respond to the needs of the students were limited. Moreover, it was surprising that the participating teachers were not perceived as team members by the coordinators, so they did not have access to the data submitted by their students. However, creating the detailed plan of the exchange and ongoing discussions with the Spanish teacher trainer contributed to the identification of many similarities and a few differences in the approach to teacher training and the course content.

The Spanish trainer had never before taken part in telecollaboration projects, though she was well acquainted with Erasmus and international relations at the university level. She attended a training week taught by the EVALUATE team and read the documents provided by them. Though she considered the Moodle platform good enough for designing the students' tasks following the EVALUATE guidelines, she found the interaction between partner students through the platform tough and not fluent enough. Besides this, the high number of students under her supervision at the university at the same time, many of them not participating in the project, made it difficult for her to monitor more intensely the development of the tasks in progress. However, she observed satisfaction and involvement in most of the students partaking, although their contribution was uneven depending on different factors such as attendance to lessons, difficulties in teamwork schedule, academic and non-academic responsibilities, self-reliability, etc.

The learning experience of the trainers refers to the four points presented by Bortoluzzi and Mullen

(2018) through discussion with the partner and the coordinator: critical reflection on the intercultural competence and the telecollaboration process, cyclical work on knowledge exchange and transfer, and reflection to offline teaching.

Conclusions

The bottom-up perspective on participation in the policy experiment is limited to this particular experience inside the Erasmus+ KA3 EVALUATE project, and is uneven as regards the data analysis, since the compulsory EVALUATE diary entries were not transmitted to the Spanish teacher trainer. Nevertheless, it demonstrates that the process of collecting data for documenting progress might contribute to the development of reflective practitioner in teacher training settings. The research track openly introduced to students gives them a sense of belonging to a broader European research project, which justified their effort put into filling the test and diary entries. The entries documented their progress in becoming reflective 'telecollaborative' practitioners. Even though writing the diaries after each task was a time-consuming activity they had not experienced before, it contributed substantially to the development of the students' reflective approach to what they did in the exchange project. The top-down results of EVALUATE will be made public in September 2019, but this study contributes to the bottom-up insights into correlations among the international project actions, developing a reflective approach to teaching and showing some side effects of the research procedures. Students participated in the exchange project not only as research subjects and providers of data for EVALUATE but as practitioners who could make the exchange meaningful for themselves and make the most of it in various aspects of their professional and personal development including the reflective approach to learning and teaching.

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Abstract

The paper presents the results of a telecollaborative project between BA students of the University of Warsaw and students of the University of Valladolid within the framework of the European Erasmus+ EVALUATE project. The aim of that project is to justify the effectiveness of telecollaborative activities for professional development of future language teachers. The experience confirms that initial intercultural competence is essential for undertaking such a project. It also validates the need for blending professional preparation of language teachers so that they realize that the teaching methods and pedagogical approaches which are introduced in their pre-service courses are very similar or even the same irrespectively where they get their qualifications. Such blended learning activities are complementary to national teacher training programs and to Erasmus+ students exchange projects.

Keywords: telecollaboration; reflective practitioner; teaching English; teacher training; international exchanges

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