



**TELECOLLABORATION: FOSTERING INTERCULTURALITY AMONG
STUDENTS OF TWO DIFFERENT LANGUAGES AND COUNTRIES**

PROYECTO DE GRADO

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Telecollaboration: fostering interculturality among students of two different languages and countries.

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**Submitted to the School of Education Sciences of
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Master's Report

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Dedicated to my two fathers, one in heaven and the other on earth...

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ABSTRACT

This study consists of the description of an intercultural exchange project called telecollaboration that aimed at providing students with opportunities of developing communicative competence using ICTs in two different contexts in the countries of USA and Colombia. Primarily, the description of the conditions for effective implementation of ICTs as the project itself and its methodological procedures are presented, and then the analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the methodological procedures too. In general, the results indicate that the experience was very satisfactory and that the pedagogical procedures for telecollaboration allowed clarity and evidence of intercultural awareness and orality in both audiences participating in the activity of telecollaboration.

KEY WORDS: Telecollaboration, interculturality, communicative competence, orality, live-peer talking.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This is a report on a small-scale classroom-based project which was designed to see to what extent the use of intercultural exchange in the form of live talk to peers in the USA and Colombia helped to develop students' speaking language skills and confidence. The use of a technological tool called telecollaboration may be seemed as a strategy to develop an intercultural competence in higher education.

This project shows the results of a virtual encounter carried out between students of Spanish from the University of Bellarmine in Louisville, Kentucky and students of English who belong to the program of Foreign Trade at Universidad del Valle in Cali, Colombia. After being examined academically students were paired up by two teachers (one from Colombia and the other from USA) in order to contact their pair and have a video-chat that must be recorded and handed in to their teachers.

As part of the research methodology, the use of ICTs were crucial to analyse the results. Telecollaboration was the technological tool implemented during the research. In language learning context, telecollaboration can be defined as an "internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/national backgrounds, set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence [...] through structured tasks" (Guth & Helm, 2010, p. 14).

Telecollaborative exchange among language learners has acquired a lot of importance in education and according to O'Dowd (2007) is considered as "one of the main pillars of online language learning" (p. 2). The students were asked to record the online experience using a software tool called Skype that allows making video chats and voice call services.

2. JUSTIFICATION

This project based on a technological tool called telecollaboration that offers an opportunity to interact with another culture and its people while developing orality. The use of technology allows a learning environment outside the classroom in which students can have a more enriching and realistic context. The importance of this project can be seen through its effectiveness in terms of learners' oral skills improvement. Furthermore, it is very relevant for university studies as a background for upcoming investigation on this field.

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1. General Objective

- To analyse how the use of intercultural exchange in the form of live talk to peers from different academic context help students develop speaking language skills and confidence.

3.2. Specific Objectives

- To describe appropriate conditions for collaborative work in order to develop intercultural communicative learning through ICTs.
- To analyse the effects of peer live-talking activities when promoting orality.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical framework deals specifically with two different areas, the first one is about the research itself, which is why I will start describing what it means to be a researcher. The second part is about telecollaboration and the concepts of interculturality and the use of technological tools in education. The ideas are presented here to frame the development of the project and to offer a reference for discussion and identification of advantages in the implementation of the telecollaboration tool.

The teacher-researcher

The teaching profession has always faced a big issue about theory and practice. Carr and Kemmis (1986) assert that there is a big gap regarding theory and practice since the former, usually does not represent what English practitioners encounter in their everyday practice. For these authors, theory looks for 'truth' while practice looks for change. They suggest that the field of educational research differs from any other area of research because education is essentially more practical than theoretical. Nunan (1990) encourages teachers to bridge this gap by adopting a research orientation in their classrooms and doing research projects that allow them to see themselves as teacher-researchers. This a very useful tool that helps them to be aware of what happens in the classrooms through observation. Being a teacher-researcher means to be able to evaluate more consciously the effectiveness of teaching.

In the field of TESOL, perhaps especially, many people have insisted that the distinction between teacher on the one hand, and researcher on the other, is essentially a false one and that the two roles can be combined at every stage. Stewart (2006) asserts that such a distinction between teacher and researcher affects negatively the perceptions in education. In line with this approach, I positioned myself throughout this project as a "teacher-researcher". So that the

results I obtained from the research were designed to feed directly back into my classroom practice; and also, to shed the light for those who believe in the classroom itself as the main source to change conventional perspectives in education.

Telecollaboration

There have been thousands of researches and experts (e.g., Baley, 2001; Curtis, 2001; Gow, Kember & Mckay, 1996; Sagor, 1992; Wallace, 1991) who have explored classroom investigation. Nowadays English practitioners are more conscious about what really means teaching/learning a foreign language. Taking this into consideration, we must not put aside two phenomena that impact English teaching/learning: culture and technology. The combination of these two elements have led the author of this work to carry out a project based on a tool called telecollaboration.

Telecollaboration is a term that has acquired a great importance in language teaching during the past 20 years. This term is often related to the OIE (online intercultural exchange). O'Dowd (2011) states that "traditionally, online intercultural exchange projects in foreign language education have involved the use of (text-based) online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in different countries to learn the others' language and culture" (p.369). This is a wide and practical technological resource that can be implemented through different tools or elements such as email, forums, blogs, videoconference, voice-chat, and social networking sites. All these elements permit to create a much more enriched academic context not only in the classroom or computer lab, but also at home.

There are several different models of telecollaboration. The *Cultura* Model, which has been successfully implemented in the United States, Europe and Asia, was developed by Furstenberg, Levet, English, and Maillet (2001). This model focuses on the inevitable connection between language and culture, which are two elements that are constantly evolving and defining individual and social identities. The *Cultura* model has been maintained and adapted by many teachers and

researchers who have found different purposes to be used along with the new technologies that reinforce the knowledge of cultures around the world.

Another type of telecollaboration is the institutional forms of *Tandem Learning* (Kötter, 2003; O'Rourke, 2005) which is related to language learners in geographically distant locations who are engaged in bilateral and bilingual exchanges. Different forms of telecollaboration have been implemented such as *trainee teachers* (Belz & Müller-Hartmann, 2003), *in-service teachers* (Müller-Hartmann, 2006), *Media or Communications students* (O'Dowd, 2006), and also *heritage speakers* (Blake & Zyzik, 2003). These variations of telecollaboration aim at meeting the needs of specific educational contexts where monolingual, bilingual, and also multilingual learners and teachers work together.

Anikina, Sobinova and Petrova (2015) emphasize that telecollaboration offers opportunities for universities to support their internationalization strategies and engage learners in dialogue with peers in different parts of the world. It usually takes place synchronously since preliminary arrangements are made between partners about time and topics for discussion. This project has found the opportunity to make two different groups to interact in two foreign languages in order to foster language skills and intercultural communicative competence. As Belz & Müller-Hartmann (as cited in Anikina et al, 2015) state: "it is also crucial that foreign language education is concerned not only with instrumental aims but also humanistic ones, and promote not only the acquisition of language and intercultural skills and competences but also intercultural dialogue and understanding." (p. 157).

There have been several projects and authors in Europe, Asia and the United States that have worked on telecollaboration as a way to facilitate the learning of both linguistic and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in higher educational contexts. Byram (1997) introduced the term "intercultural communicative competence" in order to establish a connection between grammar competence and sociolinguistic-pragmatic competence. For this author the idea of speaking a foreign/ second language implies many factors that go beyond grammar knowledge, learners must have a competence in culture, which means to be able to

understand not only a simple activity of communicating in a different language but also understand the underlying elements that produce an illocutionary act and the context in which that act is carried out.

Interculturality and Technological Resources

The concept of interculturality (especially in education) has evolved to change the language-culture perspectives. English practitioners are experiencing an evolution not only in teaching but also in the methods implemented in the classroom that meet the needs of multicultural learners who are eager to understand the language and its sociocultural aspects. Liddicoat & Scarino (2013) point out that the study of an additional language has long been understood as a way of coming to understand another culture and its people. As the processes of globalization, increased mobility, and technological development have come to shape ways of living and communicating. For that reason, it is very important to recognize the intercultural component in the teaching/ learning process as a tool for a better understanding on the language and the implications it has on peoples' behaviours and emotions.

There is something called by Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) as *Intercultural Dimension* in language teaching which is basically to enable learners to develop intercultural and linguistic competences, in order to understand and be aware of different cultures. This intercultural dimension gives them the possibility to become an intercultural speaker who can see other perspectives, emotions, and beliefs. The new technologies offer us various resources to create an academic environment where learning is enriching and multifarious with every encounter the learners experience.

Traditionally the main resource for learning in educational contexts has been the textbook, which is considered unauthentic material because it does not show the real use of the language. Garton and Graves (2014) illustrate some reasons why not to use a coursebook: first of all, it cannot meet the needs of a particular group of

learners, secondly, the language taught might not be appropriate and also it might not be culturally appropriate. Other reasons they mention is that it is outdated, not authentic, and is not representative of the local context, and finally it takes away the teacher's creativity.

For many years the textbook has been one of the main teaching materials because it is written by experts and published by well-known publishers, so it is considered a reliable and professional teaching material. Tomlinson (2011; as cited in Garton and Graves, 2014) defines materials as "anything which is used by teachers or learners to facilitate the learning of language" p.3. This definition includes videos, emails, Youtube tutorials, CDs, multimedia packages, chats, forums, and even instructions given by the teacher that are used to fit with learning aims and objectives.

Technology is transforming teaching methods and learning styles/strategies inside and outside the classrooms. Important publishers are producing not only CD-roms and DVDs but also websites and versions of their materials along with the use of *Interactive Whiteboards* (IWB) as a pedagogical tool which promotes learners' creativity and collaboration. Another important technological resource is the Web 2.0 tools, which allow learners and teachers to stop being passive learners and start creating (academic) knowledge. Some examples of the use of Web 2.0 tools are, social networking sites, (wiki)blogs or weblogs, chapters on Skype, and different applications that can be used through computers or mobile phones. Therefore, technology is encouraging learners to be more autonomous and take control of their own learning process.

Technology and the Teacher's Role

Teachers are not passive individuals in this new learning era, they must be willing to adapt themselves to the advantages of the new technologies and incorporate them to their teaching. The new century has brought a new generation

of students that Prensky (2001) calls *digital natives* and their teachers as *digital immigrants* who must be prepared to become more effective materials users.

As the teachers' role is being revolutionized with technological advancements, the cultural aspect is also revolutionizing. English practitioners are now more conscious of Intercultural Education. Byram et al (2002) insist on the fundamental job of the English teachers: "the role of the language teacher is therefore to develop skills, attitudes, and awareness of values just as much as to develop a knowledge of a particular culture or country" (p. 13). As they state this job requires for teachers to be able to use methods that help students understand the sociocultural factors underlying the second /foreign language. This means that, understanding a language involves understanding the reasons why every speech act is produced and its implications.

The world is leaning towards two processes: globalization and multiculturalism, which are breaking social and cultural boundaries. At this point education plays a significant role in those processes, especially in bi/multilingual educational contexts. They must face the challenge of transforming teaching methods and updating themselves to the new strategies and tools in order to get two distant geographical locations closer, to allow learners to have authentic encounters with the language and its culture directly from their protagonists.

Telecollaboration is one of those tools for online exchanges which has been implemented during the last decade, leading to an educational transformation that not only contributes to second/foreign language learning but also fosters intercultural awareness and strengthens educational perspectives and goals. The international conference in 2014 on "Telecollaboration in University Foreign Language Education" (Chun, 2015) at the University of León, Spain, which gathered educators, researchers, and university head teachers in order to promote OIE projects in the universities around the world exemplifies perfectly the current educational needs. Chun (2015) also presents the different positive factors in telecollaboration: it has been very successful, both for language and culture learning in different higher education contexts. Successes include personal and cultural benefits, linguistic and

sociolinguistic improvements, development of intercultural communication skills, and critical awareness raising. On the other hand, she mentions some negative factors that may occur when using telecollaboration such as, misunderstandings, tensions, negative transfer, differences in negotiation or interactional "styles" and conflicting overviews. All these factors must be taken into consideration when developing, implementing, and researching online intercultural exchanges.

Anikina et al (2005) reinforce this concept by offering some characteristics of collaboration in classrooms. For them collaboration promotes shared knowledge, which means that there is a shared responsibility among teachers and students where both groups of people reach specific goals within a framework of what is being taught. Collaborative teachers encourage students to share their knowledge and their learning strategies, to treat each other respectfully, and focus on high levels of understanding. At this point telecollaboration enables students to take (all the) responsibility for learning outside the classroom using ICTs.

Teachers in OIEs usually have a passive role since this intercultural exchange may be carried out outside the classroom where students can feel free and not have their common pressure of teachers' presence. Furstenberg and Levet (2014) advise that teachers should not intervene in the online parts of the exchanges but they should have an important role for planning and follow-up purposes. Teachers may not be present when online exchanges are carried out but they have set from the beginning the objectives and procedures taking place in the project.

It is undeniable that technology has an impact inside the classrooms and educational contexts are conscious about its effects in their students. Educators are constantly seeking methods to motivate learners and develop communicative competence and cultural awareness. Dai (2011) states that language learning is a process of developing the awareness of the world, and learning cultural knowledge is an important way for us to enrich learner's knowledge. Therefore, the implementation of technology tools facilitates the students' knowledge of the world, since they learn about culture-language phenomenon by the use of ICTs.

5. METHODOLOGY

There are two different aspects considered in this methodology: the first one of them refers to the methodology of the research itself; this being the procedures that helped achieve the objective of analysing the use of the telecollaboration tool itself. While the second aspect is the telecollaboration strategy, which is intended to describe the way the teacher-researcher of this project set up the telecollaboration activities themselves

5.1. Research Methodology

This is an exploratory research aimed at analysing the use of a technological strategy called telecollaboration that improves the communicative competence in the foreign language by interacting with peers from a different educational context; and at the same time allows learners to develop an intercultural perspective. The research was carried out during the second semester of the year 2015 in which a group of students from Universidad del Valle were asked to have virtual encounters with some students from Bellarmine, Kentucky in USA who were taking Spanish classes at their university.

Students' academic performance were the main source to examine and interpret the results of this intercultural experience that is assumed to have an improvement in their aptitude and attitude towards the foreign language. In-class observation determined the validity of this activity contrasted with the information presented in the survey and the written report by the students.

After the two sessions were recorded and presented to their teachers, students from Universidad del Valle, Cali answered some questions from a survey about the intercultural experience. At the same time Bellarmine students wrote a report where they showed their opinions and future recommendations on the virtual project. The survey was answered in Spanish and the report was written in English.

5.2. Research Instrument

Video/audio chats recorded by the students were the main evidence that supported this research and were analysed by both teachers in order to compare the encounters and the future students' performance in class. They were examined thoroughly in order to find some students' trends and cultural perspectives. Furthermore, performance and linguistic skills were also assessed during the sessions.

Reports and surveys¹ supported the findings in the video recordings. These two data-collecting tools were made in students' mother tongue to see the degree of satisfaction and their perception of this experience. The questions were addressed to perceive their self-concept before and after the activity.

Since this was an activity to be carried out outside the classroom the students had 15 days to contact their peers and make the video chats during their free time and there was not any teachers' intervention when recording the live-talk experience.

Students were informed about the topics that had to be considered when interacting with their peers along with the minimum time required as part of a summative assignment in the course.

5.3. Telecollaboration Project Methodology

This section describes the teacher's methodology to set the telecollaboration project.

¹ See Appendix 1- Questionnaire about the Virtual Encounter Experience.

This video-chat activity was divided in two sessions of at least 15 minutes long. During the first session students were able to get to know each other by talking about "safe topics" (their lives, academic studies, likes, family, etc.) This break-the-ice session allowed them to gain confidence by speaking in the foreign language. The students from Colombia were requested to speak English most of the time and the students from USA to speak Spanish during the virtual encounters.

During the second session the students talked about contemporary topics which were assumed to be known by their peers. In order to do this, students had previously prepared some questions for their peers that would be answered during this second session. The topics the students from Bellarmine had to take into consideration are immigration in their own country and presidential elections. At the same time students from Universidad del Valle had to be prepared to answer questions related to the war and peace processes in their own country.

As part of this project, students were also asked to write a report about this intercultural experience and answer an informal (written) survey on their perceptions regarding this conducted project. It is important to mention that both sessions were recorded outside the classroom using some technological tools. Both the report and the survey were made in their students' mother tongue in order to receive a more profound quality in their opinions and feelings with respect to this project.

The data gathering had a quantitative-qualitative method of analysis in order to have a broader perception of the results. As Dörnyei (2007) suggests, quantitative and qualitative methods are not mutually exclusive, and that combining them offers multiple epistemologies within each type, especially for virtual, intercultural, and multimodal FL/SL research contexts.

5.4. Socio-cultural Contexts and Participants

The subjects of this study were 42 students (24 from Universidad del Valle in Cali Colombia and 18 in Bellarmine University, Kentucky, US). The Bellarmine students were in the first year of college and were taking second level of Spanish. The Univalle students were enrolled in third (and last) class of English and had an A1 level of language proficiency.

The English teacher from Colombia and the Spanish teacher from USA had previously worked in order for their students to be paired up according to their level of communicative competence. Therefore, a student of Spanish would work with a student of English with the same characteristics of developed skills in the foreign language. Since the amount of students were not equivalent, (24 from Colombia and 18 from USA) some of the American students worked with two Colombian partners.

Students from Colombia were between 18 and 25 years of age and some of them had already taken English courses in the country or had studied in bilingual schools. In contrast, the age range for USA students was from 17 to 20 years old and few had taken Spanish language courses before.

As part of their formative curriculum, students were reinforced with a communicative approach presented in all classes in both universities. Besides this, the topics included in the virtual encounters had been explored during the classes.

5.5. Ethical Considerations

In relation to ethical concerns, all the students agreed on participating in this activity as part of their learning process. In this respect, to avoid any conflict of interest, they were explained in detail the procedures and both academic and research aims. There was not any student who refused to do the virtual encounters and record them for further analysis.

6. RESULTS

The results of this research project consist of two segments. The description of the condition for an effective intercultural exchange detailed in section 6.1. Telecollaboration Project; and the analysis of effectiveness of the intercultural exchange using ICTs in section 6.2. Telecollaboration Analysis.

6.1. Telecollaboration Project

Telecollaboration is the technological strategy implemented in this research. Students from different cultural backgrounds used internet communication to talk with a peer from a distant location within a language learning context. It was set to be outside the classroom but it would have an in-class impact since this method promotes confidence and fluency. Although the two teachers involved would neither be present nor participate during the virtual encounters, they had previously set up the rules of the assignment by establishing the time of duration for each session and the topics that must have been included in the two live-talking activities. **Chart 1. Characteristics of Telecollaboration.** Describes the features of telecollaboration as a class activity or project between two groups of intercultural students.

Chart 1. *Characteristics of Telecollaboration.*

OBJECTIVES	Fostering orality. Increasing fluency. Promoting interculturality through Telecollaboration.
RESOURCES	Video/audio recorded chats. (Skype) Surveys (made in the students' mother tongue: Spanish) Written reports (made by the students of Bellarmine in English)

DURATION	Two sessions of at least 15 minutes. Sessions recorded outside the classroom.
STUDENTS	Total of 42 students 24 students of the English Language from Colombia. 18 students of the Spanish Language from USA.
INSTRUCTIONS	Students must record both virtual encounters. They have to speak in the foreign language. Specific topics need to be covered in both sessions: The conflict with the Guerrilla in Colombia and presidential elections in USA.

6.2. Telecollaboration Analysis

This section seeks to accomplish the objective number 2 that is to analyse the use of telecollaboration in students' development of oral skills. It shows the brief review of the effectiveness of peer live-talking activities in students' learning.

The intercultural exchange was conducted through a video chat application called Skype. The students were required to have two sessions of minimum 15 minutes each, and these sessions must have been recorded in a video format. The students also implemented some voice recordings and pictures. Even though students were requested to record the session in a period of 15 minutes minimum. Most of the recordings took from 45 minutes to more than an hour, which was also surprising for the students.

I believe that the time allotted for each online session was sufficient because my partner and I ended up going over the fifteen minutes and spoke for about thirty minutes each session. Michelle, student from Bellarmine University, (Written report, Nov, 2015)

Besides this, the students from the University of Bellarmine had to write a report in English while the students from Univalle had to answer a survey (in Spanish) aimed to see their perceptions and feelings about this experience. Both data gathering methods were implemented in their mother tongues which encouraged students to express their feelings and also allowed a sense of accuracy in the information they provided.

In the course of the virtual encounters students were asked to speak (most of the time) in the foreign language, which meant that Bellarmine students would talk in Spanish and Univalle students would do it in English. The idea was that both languages were used simultaneously to convey meaning and sense. During the first session they talked about "safe topics" such as the place where they lived, their family, likes and their studies. The second session would be dedicated to talk about their perceptions on contemporary issues in their own countries:

Two sessions seemed to be an appropriate amount. The first session provided a good basis for further conversation and getting through introductions didn't take very long so there was still plenty of time to talk about our college life, daily activities, and other cultural topics. Cassidy, student from Bellarmine University, written report, Nov, 2015)

Previously both teachers had informed their students of some specific topics they would cover in the second session and had been requested to prepare a set of questions regarding to those topics before the session would be taken and recorded. The topics were immigration and presidential elections on one side, and war and peace process with the non-military organization named FARC.

The absence of the teacher during the activity may be considered a positive factor when interacting with another peer since it avoids stress and tension usually presented when the teacher is participating. The time designated to carry out the activity (15 days for each session) also helped students to organize part of the

information they would share and also some of them went beyond by preparing questions for their peers.

The fact that every participant was asked to speak in the foreign language created a sense of equality for both students when interacting and no one would be in a sort of advantaged position by using their mother tongue. During the video chats it was very natural to find students helping others as a part of the collaborative process when they did not know how to say something in the foreign language.

Most of the students in the reports expressed their agreement to make two sessions where the first one was meant to break the ice by talking about their lives and leisure activities. Some of them mentioned that after the first session where they were able to get to know their peers, they stopped feeling they were talking to a stranger. In fact, several students recommended doing this activity along the semester and include different topics regarding their university studies:²:

A suggestion I have for improving this project in the future is the possibility of extending it into a semester-long project. My partner and I really connected and became friends in the short time that we communicated. Cole, student from Bellarmine University (Written report, Nov, 2015)

In the surveys, students from Univalle expressed the big fear they felt to talk with an English native speaker. They were afraid of not being understood or not being able to express their ideas properly. However, they said that after the first session they felt more confident and they could speak in the foreign language fluently. Similarly, students from Bellarmine stated in their reports that before the encounters they felt insecure talking in Spanish but they really enjoyed the experience and learned many things about Colombia.

The videos recorded showed an improvement in orality in both sessions. The first evidence of this is the length of the recordings, an average of 35 minutes, which is the double time of the one assigned. Some students recorded more than one hour

² Appendix 2- Some Recommendations from students of Bellarmine University.

for only one session without noticing the time spent in the recording. Another evidence is the way they talked about their lives and the contemporary issues in the two interventions. All of this shows an increase when mastering the foreign language by offering a communicative interaction in real-time with a native speaker.

During the recordings, not only students spoke comfortably but also they were able to use utterances taking into account morphosyntactic rules previously studied. Although phonological patterns were not the main purpose, they could make a successful foreign language discourse with the elements they have already in their minds and their Interlanguage was not an obstacle to convey meaning and sense. Furthermore, they were aware of this improvement in their communicative performance since they expressed that in the survey when they were asked about how they felt and why. Most of them were very amazed on how they mastered the foreign language using different communicative strategies.

On the other hand, the written reports made by the students from Bellarmine showed a change of their minds with respect to Colombia and how they perceived universities and careers. Some of them were impressed by the different options of studies they have in our country, compared to their university in Kentucky. Some others highlighted the good English level of proficiency by comparison with their proficiency in the Spanish language.

After the virtual activity the students started losing their fear of speaking in public or making mistakes. One assignment that supports this outcome took place in the classroom when they had to talk about different negotiation styles around the world, where they showed more confidence and expressed their ideas in a more natural and relaxing way. This fact proves that the intercultural experience helped them increase their self-concept and feel more secure when speaking in the foreign language.

One difficulty was found by the students in terms of matching schedules to do the virtual encounters. Although both locations share the same time zone it was difficult at the beginning to find some free time to do the video chats. Besides this, some students had problems recording their voices using Skype or they could not

film their peer. In order to solve the problems, some of them used their mobile phones or took pictures to carry out the task.

In the surveys students declared that they were able to apply the foreign language knowledge, which was very satisfactory. They are convinced that this type of activities really help them to communicate effectively and have contact with the culture and language in context. Students want to continue having virtual encounters in order to improve their communicative skills:

Every intercultural experience is enriching; knowing about other worlds allows me to obtain that cultural background which is very important for future professional career. I definitely realized that it has been very helpful what I have learned about this foreign language (English), and besides, I had never had the chance to put in practice what I have learned directly with an English native speaker³. Alejandra Quiñonez (Answer to question number 1 in the Questionnaire, Dec 2nd, 2015)

Some of the students have become friends with their peers through social networks and have also planned to visit their country very soon. They have seen a need to maintain a close relationship and keep on practicing without a pressure of recording or having an academic grade.

³ Original text in Spanish translated by the author.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In general, this report provided the opportunity to describe a telecollaboration project among two different educational/ international students by allowing them to interact through the use of a tool from the new century, telecollaboration.

The description allows a step-by-step setting up of such a project which also offers a relevant reference for future projects that aim at promoting students' orality development and the integration of technology in the EFL classroom.

On the basis of the survey results, the written reports, the video recordings, and in-class observations we could conclude the ICTs (in particular telecollaboration) are very useful tools in education since they help to develop not only communicative competence but also an intercultural component in foreign language learning processes. There is an evident successful experience in both students and teachers who found very satisfactory outcomes.

The amount of time spent to do the virtual encounters was higher than the one agreed at the beginning of the task. The students had dialogues and small debates on particular and contemporary issues in both countries without experiencing stress or breakdowns. The use of two languages during the sessions allowed them to break language barriers and to enrich vocabulary.

Students' cultural awareness was raised and we found an increase in confidence when speaking in the foreign language in the classroom. They feel more secure and understand the purpose of constant practice in terms of spoken skills. This proves that culture and language competence are not two different components and, on the contrary, they are complementary elements in educational settings.

It was interesting to see how students from Bellarmine asserted to have changed their perspective of the South American country and to be willing to know more about our culture and language. Equally, students from Univalle emphasized the importance of understanding another culture. Both groups insist on doing more activities like this throughout the semester.

Teaching practices evolve as culture and language do around the world. This small-scale project provides a subtle perspective to keep on implementing new strategies that foster real contexts for language learning. There is a room for improvement in this type of procedures and it would be interesting to explore other educational contexts in intercultural exercises such as this one with telecollaboration. Because there are so many opportunities for the use of technological resources, it would be nice to use other tools that promote (cultural) awareness and orality using ICTs.

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9. APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Students' Questionnaire about the virtual Encounter Experience

I. Questionnaire about the Virtual Encounter Experience

1. ¿Te gustó la experiencia intercultural? Explica por qué.
2. ¿Cómo te sentiste hablando en una lengua extranjera (inglés) con un hablante nativo de la misma?
3. ¿Crees que tu nivel de inglés fue suficiente para llevar a cabo este proceso comunicativo?
4. ¿Cómo calificas el nivel del idioma español de tu compañero(a)?
5. ¿Piensas que esta experiencia trajo beneficios en tu aprendizaje de la lengua extranjera (inglés)?
6. ¿Tuviste inconvenientes en responder o entender a tu compañero(a)?
Menciónalos.
7. ¿Te gustaría realizar esta actividad de nuevo si /no y por qué?

Appendix 2. Some Recommendations from students of Bellarmine University

- The only improvement would be to perhaps increase the amount of sessions from two to three, so that more of a connection is formed between the two students and they will have increased exposure to an experience like this.
- I think it would be cool to discuss what their education system is like. I know a lot of foreign countries education systems are different and I think it would be interesting to learn about Colombia's schooling.
- Perhaps a third topic could be introduced, such as a discussion on the education systems in each country, especially in regards to learning a language. The difficulty of learning another language is something that both students can empathize with and I think that education is a substantive enough topic to fill up an entire session.
- A suggestion I have for improving this project in the future is the possibility of extending it into a semester-long project. My partner and I really connected and became friends in the short time that we communicated.