

## The competences of the telecollaborative teacher

Robert O'Dowd\*

*Department of Modern Languages, Universidad de León, León, Spain*

Telecollaboration, or 'online intercultural exchange' (OIE), refers to the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations with the aim to develop their foreign language skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work. Many studies have demonstrated the potential of this activity for supporting collaborative learning and developing intercultural awareness. This article focuses on the implications for teachers and addresses the question: what are the skills, attitudes and knowledge which a foreign language teacher needs to establish and successfully carry out an online intercultural exchange with their learners? To answer this question, the paper presents research based on the Delphi technique, consulting a large group of 'experts' and 'experienced practitioners' and achieving a gradual consensus on the necessary telecollaborative skills, knowledge and attitudes. The final set of competences is presented and problematic issues related to the model are discussed with reflections on the comments from the experts who participated in the study.

### Introduction

The ability to integrate and exploit information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the foreign language (FL) classroom has become an essential part of the FL teacher's repertoire of skills in the twenty-first century. This has been recognised by many of the leading publications in this area. For example, the *European Profile for Language Teacher Education – A Frame of Reference* (Kelly et al. 2004) recommends that FL teacher education should prepare trainee teachers for '[p]articipation in links with partners abroad, including visits, exchanges or ICT links' and that courses should also provide '[t]raining in information and communication technology for pedagogical use in the classroom' (2004: 5). The *European Portfolio for Student Teachers of Foreign Languages (EPOSTL)* (Newby et al. 2007) also recognises that 'ICTs play an increasingly central role in FL learning and require teachers to be familiar with information systems and computer-mediated communication' (44).

One of the basic ICT activities in FL education is online intercultural exchange (OIE) or telecollaboration. This refers to the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations with the aim to develop their FL skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work. Research has demonstrated the potential of this activity for supporting collaborative FL learning and developing intercultural awareness and online projects (O'Dowd

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\*Email: [dfmrod@unileon.es](mailto:dfmrod@unileon.es)

2006; Ware and O'Dowd 2008). Furthermore, online portals, such as e-tandem, Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections (IECC), eTwinning ([www.etwinning.net](http://www.etwinning.net)) and ePals ([www.epals.com](http://www.epals.com)), have enabled a significant number of online FL exchange projects to be set up by teachers around the globe. For example, according to the administrators of ePals, there are over 130,000 classes of primary and secondary pupils registered on the platform and several thousand new classrooms join each month. Today, telecollaboration has come to be seen as one of the main pillars of the intercultural turn in FL education (Thorne 2006), as it allows educators to engage their learners in regular communication with members of other cultures in distant locations and gives learners the opportunity to reflect on and learn from the outcomes of this intercultural exchange within the supportive and informed context of their FL classroom.

With this in mind, it is perhaps not surprising that there is also a growing interest in how future teachers can be trained to set up and exploit online intercultural exchanges in their classrooms. In general, these studies have followed an 'experiential modelling approach' (Guichon and Hauck 2011: 188) which involves offering trainee teachers the opportunity to take part in online exchanges themselves in order to experience the tools and processes which they will be expected to use in their own classrooms in the future. Researchers who have followed this approach include Antoniadou (2011), who engaged student teachers in Barcelona in telecollaborative exchange with American peers using the 'Second Life' virtual world. Similarly, Müller-Hartmann (2012) describes how future teachers in Heidelberg, Germany and at Columbia University, New York collaborated together online in the analysis and re-design of textbook tasks. However, there has been no attempt to provide a comprehensive description of the skills, attitudes and knowledge which teachers need in order to set up and implement an online exchange in their classrooms. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature.

First, a review of how telecollaboration can contribute to current approaches to intercultural education is provided. Then current models of generic competences for online educators will be presented, accompanied by a discussion on how these models fail to capture the uniqueness of telecollaborative activity. The process to develop a model of telecollaborative competence for teachers, based on the Delphi Method, will be described and the model will then be presented, and various 'dilemmas' which emerged during the process will be discussed. The article concludes with a discussion of how to teach and assess telecollaborative competence for teachers.

### **Using telecollaboration in intercultural foreign language education**

Early interpretations of communicative language teaching tended to ignore the sociocultural dimension of communicative competence and instead assumed a certain universality in the way in which speech functions were used and interpreted. This was highlighted by Buttjes (1991), for example, who suggested that communicative language teaching excluded the learners' cultural background and failed to see the acquisition of communicative competence as a process of cultural adaptation. Similarly, it has been suggested that, while the concept of communicative competence has done much to highlight the social contexts of language use, it 'has come to be interpreted somewhat narrowly and prescriptively, as appropriate language use rather than competence in the social and cultural practices of a community of which language is a part' (Roberts et al. 2001: 26).

One of the principal outcomes of the absence of cultural content in communicative language teaching was that it moved the focus of the language classroom from preparing learners to read in the FL to being tourists in the foreign country. The content of many

communicative syllabuses involved helping learners to buy bus tickets, ask the way and order food in the target language. This was criticised by many as a superficial approach which lead to the trivialisation of language learning and a lack of motivation among students. Pennycook saw it as being responsible for creating what he describes as 'the empty babble of the communicative language class' (1994: 311). Bredella and Christ (1995) suggested that the problem with this approach was that learners were encouraged to believe that interlocutors from different cultures would automatically mean and understand the same thing when engaged in conversation together. Therefore, there was no need for learners to ask others what they meant by their utterances and, as a result, to find out more about the different worldview of their partners.

In the search for an alternative, many commentators argued that the anodyne nature of communicative language teaching materials should be replaced by a return to more culturally specific content which would highlight different cultural interpretations of words and utterances (Durant 1997). The Council of Europe's *Common European Framework of Reference* (2001) has done much to enhance the importance of cultural content and the need for intercultural mediation skills by referring to sociocultural knowledge of the target culture and the ability to act as a cultural intermediary between one's own cultural and the foreign culture. Byram (2010: 320) has argued that the content of the language classroom should come from citizen education, '... enriching it with attention to intercultural communicative competence ... while providing opportunities for methodological and cross-curricular cooperation'.

It is interesting to explore how this form of intercultural citizenship education could exploit telecollaboration as a basic tool for the achievement of its objectives in the classroom. For example, Byram (2008: 187) suggests that such an approach to education involves 'causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience and analysis and reflection on it ... activity that involves working with others to achieve an agreed end'. It is easy to imagine how engaging students in online collaborative project work which involves collecting and sharing information about how global problems are dealt with in their local cultures could fit such an approach to learning.

Different aspects of telecollaborative exchange have indeed already been shown to contribute to intercultural approaches to FL education. For example, telecollaborative exchanges have been found to provide learners with a different type of knowledge to that which they usually find in textbooks and in other traditional cultural studies resources (O'Dowd 2006). As opposed to objective factual information, the accounts which students receive from their partners in their virtual interaction tend to be of a subjective and personalised nature. For this reason, exchanges can be particularly useful for making students aware of certain aspects of sociocultural knowledge (Byram 1997), such as how institutions are perceived in the target culture and the significant events and people in the target culture's 'national memory'.

Second, it has been shown that telecollaboration can also contribute to the development of 'critical cultural awareness' (Byram 1997), as learners have opportunities in their online interaction to engage in intense periods of negotiation of meaning in which they can discuss cultural 'rich points' (Agar 1994) and elicit meanings of cultural behaviour from real informants in the target culture. Learners are led to become more aware of the relativity of their own cultural beliefs and values as they try to make them explicit for their partners (O'Dowd 2003, 2006). However, researchers emphasise that this is only the case when online exchange involves explicit comparison of the two cultures and the expression of direct opinions and reactions to the submissions of others (O'Dowd 2003). Such dialogue

between partners contrasts with interaction which involves an unreflective exchange of information between partners.

Finally, Belz and Kinginger (2003) have highlighted the potential of telecollaborative exchange for making learners aware of cultural differences in communicative practices. Their work has demonstrated how online exchange can contribute to the development of second language pragmatic competence, because interaction with native peers can lead to the learner's exposure to a broad range of FL discourse options and because learners consider their partners to be 'people who matter' and are therefore more motivated to establish successful working relationships with them in the FL.

While telecollaboration is clearly of great value to any intercultural curriculum, the challenge considered here is how to develop a framework of telecollaborative competences which will be of relevance to teachers and teacher-trainers working with intercultural curricula. What do teachers need to know in order to set up and organise an exchange? What skills will they need in order to work with their partner-teachers and to exploit the exchange in their classrooms? What attitudes are necessary for teachers to integrate telecollaboration into their approach to teaching?

### **What does telecollaborative teaching involve?**

The growth in research on telecollaboration has revealed the complexity of an activity which refers to many different types of online contact involving various educational contexts, types of partners, online tools and pedagogical approaches. For example, teachers have used online exchange in classroom-integrated projects such as *Cultura* (Furstenberg et al. 2001), where virtual activities and online interaction with foreign partners are integrated with the activities which happen in class time. However, other institutions have used telecollaborative exchange in autonomous learning contexts where students are responsible for maintaining virtual contact with their partners outside of class and then report their learning outcomes to the teacher at the end of the course. Online exchanges have also been integrated into distance learning courses, such as the *Tridem* exchange reported by Hauck and Lewis (2007), and informal learning contexts, such as the *Literalia project* (Stickler and Emke 2011).

The literature also reveals FL classes engaging in online collaborative projects with different types of virtual partners, communication tools and task types. While many exchanges involve classes interacting with partner classes who are native speakers of the target language, projects have also been reported which involve multiple groups in different locations using a lingua franca, or indeed which engage students in interaction with specialised interest communities such as members of online fan groups or participants in online newspaper fora (Hanna and de Nooy 2009; Thorne, Black and Sykes 2009). Furthermore, exchanges can entail the use of a wide variety of online communication tools and environments. For example, many use 'closed environments' such as institutional Moodle platforms, or the private environments offered to users of ePals or eTwinning. Others use more open communication tools such as email, blogs, discussion fora or Skype telephony. Finally, online intercultural exchange can entail a wide range of task types and exchange structures which will reflect the aims and pedagogical beliefs of the educators involved (see O'Dowd and Ware 2009 for a typology of task types in telecollaboration). Some exchanges, for example, have reflected a strong emphasis on intercultural learning (O'Dowd 2003; Ware 2005), while others have been located firmly in interactionist approaches to language learning and have focused on tasks which aim to maximise episodes of corrective feedback and the negotiation of meaning (Tudini 2003).

This wide range of options can be daunting for inexperienced practitioners, and the question arises whether existing models of ICT competences for teachers can provide sufficient support and guidance. Four representative models can be identified in the literature: (1) the 'Skills pyramid for successful online FL teaching' (Hempel and Stickler 2005); the International Society for Technology in Education's (ISTE) 'Technology Standards: Performance Indicators for Teachers' (ISTE 2008); the 'ICT Competency Standards for Teachers' (UNESCO 2008); and the 'E-moderator competencies' (Salmon 2003). See Table 1 below for the main components of each of these models. While only one of these models is aimed specifically at online FL educators (Hempel and Stickler 2005), all of them provide significant insight into the skills and knowledge which educators need to teach effectively online. The models also concur in many of the basic skills and competences which a teacher will need. For example, three of the four models refer to the need for online educators to have basic technical skills, while other aspects, such as the ability to communicate and socialise online effectively with one's learners and the pedagogical skills of being able to design and implement appropriate tasks and assessment procedures, are also mentioned regularly. However, none of these models reflect the specific skills, knowledge and attitudes which are required of the telecollaborative teacher.

There are four basic characteristics of telecollaborative activity which set it apart from more general online learning scenarios. First, telecollaboration is inherently 'intercultural', both in practice and in its underlying pedagogical principles. Unlike online learning activities which involve online interaction between teachers and students at their local institution, the purpose of telecollaboration is to use online technologies to engage students in intercultural exchange with members of other cultures. This is made clear by Belz (2003: 2) in her widely cited definition of telecollaboration as 'institutionalized, electronically mediated

Table 1. Models of ICT competence for teachers.

Skills pyramid for successful online FL teaching Hempel and Stickler (2005)	Technology Standards: Performance Indicators for Teachers ISTE (2008)	ICT Competency Standards for Teachers UNESCO (2008)	E-moderator competencies Salmon (2003)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Basic ICT competence.</li> <li>• Tech competence with software.</li> <li>• Dealing with constraints of the medium.</li> <li>• Online socialisation.</li> <li>• Facilitating communicative competence.</li> <li>• Creativity and choice.</li> <li>• Own style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitating and inspiring student learning.</li> <li>• Designing digital-age learning experiences and assessments.</li> <li>• Model digital-age work and learning.</li> <li>• Promote digital citizenship and responsibility.</li> <li>• Engage in professional growth and leadership.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational policy.</li> <li>• Curriculum and assessment.</li> <li>• Pedagogy.</li> <li>• ICT (technical) competence.</li> <li>• Organisation and administration.</li> <li>• Teacher professional development.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of online processes.</li> <li>• Technical skills.</li> <li>• Online communication skills.</li> <li>• Content expertise.</li> <li>• Personal characteristics.</li> </ul>

intercultural communication under the guidance of a languacultural expert (i.e. teacher) for the purposes of FL learning and the development of intercultural competence'. Second, while many other online learning activities involve teachers working alone with their students, the telecollaborative teacher is by definition obliged to work in collaboration with two or more teachers or collaborators who are located in different cultural and institutional contexts. This means that telecollaborative teachers require keenly refined intercultural skills and attitudes in order to be able to collaborate with their colleagues and to coordinate the exchange in a manner which is beneficial to all parties.

Third, while many online tasks can be relatively short in nature and isolated from other aspects of classwork, successful telecollaboration tends to be a long-term, complex activity which permeates the whole FL course and is often closely integrated with the classroom's other themes, tasks and day-to-day interaction. This was identified as one of the key characteristics of successful telecollaboration by one of its pioneers, Bruce Roberts, who stated as early as 1994 that 'when the email classroom connection processes are truly integrated into the ongoing structure of homework and student classroom interaction, then the results can be educationally transforming' (Roberts 1994, np). A model of telecollaborative competence for teachers therefore needs to reflect this approach more than a generic model of online teacher competences would. Finally, while in many online educational activities the teacher is required to play an active role in online interaction with the students, in many telecollaborative projects the teacher's active participation in the online interaction is not required, as students usually interact online exclusively with their distant partners. It is the teacher's role to prepare students for their online interaction, to debrief them following contact with their partners and to integrate the themes of the interaction into their classes (Furstenburg 2010). This will have consequences for the required online skills of the teacher, and also for the pedagogical skills of relating students' online and classroom activities.

In general, authors have only touched on the skills and knowledge needed by teachers engaged in telecollaboration, and these usually refer to the ability to design tasks, choose the appropriate online tools for the exchange and evaluate learning outcomes. For example, in a recent special issue of the journal *Language Learning and Technology* dedicated to online exchanges, Lewis, Chanier and Youngs (2011: 4) identify the following requirements for telecollaborative teachers:

In the initial stages of a project the teacher is responsible for preparing learners for the challenges to come; designing tasks which will enable them to engage productively with members of another culture; selecting the right tools for the project; setting basic rules; establishing a clear timeframe and providing the space necessary for learners to reflect periodically.

Dooly (2010: 293) adds to this list by pointing out that telecollaborative teachers 'must be able to not only design effective telecollaborative tasks, but be able to monitor and assess the learner interaction (in the classroom and online) in order to optimise the task-as-process'. Finally, Belz (2003) refers to the need for educators to sensitise their learners to the cultural and institutional differences which may lead to misunderstandings and the formation of stereotypes.

It is clear, then, that many of the competences of the telecollaborative teacher can already be gleaned from more generic models of ICT competence for teachers and from the insights and experiences of previous studies on telecollaboration. However, there is still a need for a reliable and comprehensive model of telecollaborative competences for teachers.

### **Methodology for developing a model of telecollaborative competence for teachers**

The aim of the research reported in this paper was to develop a model of telecollaborative competence for FL teachers which could be adapted to as many contexts as possible, while also being scientifically rigorous and reflecting the expertise and experience of as many practitioners and researchers as possible. In order to design such a model, the first step was to review how similar models had been developed, in particular the four models of ICT or online education competence which were outlined in the previous section.

The processes varied greatly. Hempel and Stickler (2005: 311) based their model on their own experiences, explaining that their 'skills pyramid for successful online FL teaching' was based on 'several years' experience with teaching languages using a synchronous online environment and training tutors for online language courses'. This contrasts with Salmon's (2003: 25–27) 'e-moderator competencies' which was developed through a three-stage process of content analysis of online interaction, the use of focus groups to collect qualitative data on online teachers' experiences and the refining of drafts of the model based on practitioner feedback. Both the UNESCO and the ISTE models were developed on the basis of expert meetings in which initial drafts of the models were proposed and later refined by a 'multidisciplinary group workshop' (UNESCO 2004: 1) in the case of the former, and by 'individuals in more than 30 countries' (personal email with authors) in the case of the latter.

While it is undoubtedly important that the development of telecollaborative competence should take into account the opinions of experts, it is also necessary to reflect the existing literature on telecollaborative teacher competence. This enables reflection on the collective experience of practitioners and can also contribute to the scientific rigour of the model. The Delphi technique combined the findings of the literature with the input of practitioners. Kelly et al. define Delphi as a 'three-stage iterative questionnaire-based research technique' (2004: 108) and point out various advantages which Delphi has over a focus-group technique, as used in some of the other models outlined earlier. First, as participants are consulted at a distance and are not brought together, there is no risk of a particular participant's ideas being suppressed and no one person dominates proceedings. Furthermore, participants can work on their answers in their own timeframe, and the financial problems related to bringing groups of experts together are avoided.

Online questionnaires and virtual dialogue are moreover appropriate tools for a group of practitioners committed to online collaboration and exchange. This is also the most practical approach, considering that the main experts and experienced practitioners of telecollaboration are located all over the globe. The process followed in this study is similar in many ways to the process used by Kelly et al. (2004): a group of experts were consulted three times, but the first iteration was drawn up based on the competences outlined in the literature, rather than being based on the experts' original proposals and suggestions. This initial draft of competences was then adapted and developed based on two rounds of feedback from the experts. A total of 100 experts and experienced practitioners from different educational and geographical contexts were contacted regarding participation in the study. These included the author's personal network of collaborators and colleagues, authors of published literature on the area, active practitioners who were identified in telecollaborative platforms such as eTwinning and ePals and other practitioners who were recommended by experts. This panel came from all levels of FL education – primary, secondary, university and adult education – and were based in Europe, North and South America and Australasia.

Using an online survey tool, the panel were presented with a first draft of 30 'can-do' statements of 'telecollaborative competence for FL teachers' based on a literature review

carried out by the author. The statements were divided into three key areas – organisational skills, pedagogical skills and electronic literacy skills – and included statements such as ‘The telecollaborative teacher can use online networks and professional contacts to locate and establish contact with possible partner-teachers in distant locations’ and ‘The telecollaborative teacher can identify tasks for the online exchange which fit with the established curriculum and with the needs and interests of the students involved’. Respondents were asked to evaluate the importance and relevance of the ‘can-do’ statements on a Likert scale from 1 (not important at all) to 5 (vital), and to add comments and feedback about aspects they felt were missing or any bad formulations they had identified.

Responses were received from 60 of the 100 experts originally identified and contacted. In addition to completing the scale for each of the 30 statements, the respondents provided 76 comments and suggestions which were taken into account for the second draft of the statements. The descriptors which received a mean value of greater than four and a standard deviation of less than one were maintained. This was the case for 25 of the original 30 statements. The others were eliminated and the 25 statements were edited and refined linguistically according to the suggestions of the respondents. Furthermore, 10 new descriptors which were suggested by practitioners were incorporated.

Based on the qualitative feedback, one main significant change was made to the overall structure of the model. The original draft had deliberately been focused on ‘can-do’ formulations which had described the organisational, pedagogical and electronic skills which telecollaborative teachers were believed to need. It had been a deliberate decision to avoid the controversial issue of evaluating attitudes. However, 10 suggestions were received on the first draft which pointed out that socio-affective aspects of a telecollaborative teacher’s attitudes and beliefs were missing from the draft of the model. For example, one expert pointed out that ‘the teacher also needs to be able to understand and possibly show empathy for a situation which their partner-teacher finds himself in’, while another suggested that the ability to organise an exchange with a partner-teacher depended less on organisational skills and more on ‘an openness to and interest in their partner’s situation’. A third expert also referred to ‘the willingness of the telecollaborative teacher to resolve conflict and to identify different cultural perspectives in a conflict situation’.

The attitudes and beliefs which were added to the second draft refer not only to being open to alternative practices and beliefs of the partner-teacher and being willing to find compromise when partners have alternative aims and needs, but also to a ‘pedagogical openness’ to integrating new electronic tools, to adapting one’s class plans and to changing one’s perception of the teacher’s role in the classroom. Perhaps the most basic and essential attitude for teachers participating in online exchange is appreciating and understanding the role of culture in FL education, and this was also included.

Based on these amendments, the second draft contained 41 statements. These were programmed once again into the online survey tool and were sent to the same 60 experts who had responded to the first draft. Of this group, 56 responded to the second draft of the survey and, in addition to completing the Likert scale for a second time, provided 19 statements and suggestions for adaptations. The comments on this second iteration involved fewer suggestions for major changes and additions, and instead suggested small linguistic clarifications (for example, ‘maybe a clarification of “construction of knowledge” would be useful in no.20’) or provided confirmation that the experts were in agreement with the statements. As in the previous round, the descriptors which received a mean value of greater than four and a standard deviation of less than one on the Likert scale were maintained, and this was the case for 40 of the 41 statements. This third iteration was taken to be the 40 descriptors of the competences of the telecollaborative teacher.



### The model of telecollaborative competence for teachers

The 40 descriptors were the basis for a model with four sections – organisational, pedagogical and digital competences, and attitudes and beliefs. The competences were generally defined in terms of ‘can-do’ statements. However, this was not possible in the cases of knowledge (e.g. ‘the telecollaborative teacher ... has knowledge of the common causes of organisational and intercultural problems in online exchanges’) and attitudes (e.g. ‘The telecollaborative teacher displays ... an openness to partner-teachers’ alternative pedagogical beliefs and aims’). The descriptors are presented here in [Tables 2–5](#).

### Dilemmas and challenges in the elaboration of the model

During the process of developing this model, various dilemmas related to the content and focus of the model emerged which were impossible to resolve to the satisfaction of all experts and practitioners. It is important to outline these areas of debate and present the various viewpoints before justifying the final decision which was taken.

The first was in relation to the level of technical or electronic literacy. In the current literature on electronic literacies, there seems to be a general consensus that teachers do indeed need to be aware of, for example, the Web 2.0 technologies which are available to educators and to feel comfortable to a certain degree working with and implementing

Table 2. Organisational competences of the telecollaborative teacher.

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*The telecollaborative teacher ...*

- can use online networks and his/her own professional contacts to locate possible partner-teachers in distant locations
  - can establish and explain clearly to possible partner-teachers his/her plans and expectations related to a possible exchange
  - can design the structure of an exchange (i.e. aims, minimum participation requirements, language use) which reflects the interests, L2 proficiency and level of electronic literacy of his/her own students
  - can negotiate effectively with the partner-teacher the structure and organisational technicalities of the exchange which take into account both institutional contexts (calendars etc.) as well as the needs and interests of both sets of participants
  - can employ various strategies to ‘match’ learners from the different institutions and to create effective partnerships and exchange groups
  - can maintain a good working relationship with the partner-teacher throughout the exchange, identifying problems as they arise
  - can alter the logistics of the exchange to adapt to developments and problems as they arise (e.g. low levels of participation, access to technology problems etc.)
  - can articulate to his/her virtual partner-teachers the learning objectives and pedagogical beliefs that lie behind his/her proposed tasks
  - can apply his/her experiences of previous online exchanges in order to avoid repeating mistakes and to innovate his/her practice
  - can apply his/her knowledge of the educational context in which the partner class is working in order to structure the exchange and avoid problems.
  - has knowledge of the common causes of organisational and intercultural problems in online exchanges and can apply a series of techniques and strategies to deal with these problems
  - is aware of action research methodology in order to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of his/her online exchange
  - is aware of measures to ensure that the exchange receives appropriate academic recognition within the home institution
  - can successfully articulate the relevance and the added pedagogical value of telecollaborative exchanges to colleagues and superiors in order to support their use throughout the institution.
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Table 3. Pedagogical competences of the telecollaborative teacher.

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*The telecollaborative teacher ...*

- can identify tasks for the online exchange which meet at least some of the objectives of the participating classes' curricula
- can support students in discerning and reflecting upon culturally contingent patterns of interaction in follow-up classroom discussions
- can apply his/her knowledge of the culture and language of the partner class to organise culturally and linguistically rich tasks for the exchange
- can design tasks which are attractive and relevant for students and which serve to develop culturally and linguistically rich interaction
- can design tasks which support the activities of collaborative inquiry and the construction of knowledge
- can integrate appropriate assessment procedures and rubrics which accurately reflect the activities which students carried out during their exchange
- can explain clearly to students what is expected from them during an exchange – deadlines, performance objectives, learning outcomes etc.
- can integrate seamlessly and effectively the content and themes of the telecollaborative exchange into his/her contact classes (when they exist) before, during and after the exchange itself
- can provide learning support for learners either through scaffolded guidance (in the classroom or in online tutorials) or through the provision of reflective tools, such as learning logs or journals.

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Table 4. ICT/Digital competences of the telecollaborative teacher.

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*The telecollaborative teacher ...*

- can choose the appropriate online communication tools (e.g. email, blogs, wikis, Skype) to fit both the everyday online practices of the students as well as the project's aims.
- has a basic working knowledge of current (e.g. Web 2.0) communication tools and their pedagogic affordances and constraints.
- can explain the use of the chosen tools to his/her students or can provide them with online or third-party support for learning how to use them.
- has a basic working knowledge of web management systems (e.g. Moodle) or exchange platforms (e.g. ePals, eTwining) in order to locate and run his/her online exchanges.
- can organise and structure real-time student interaction taking into account the particular affordances and technicalities of synchronous tools such as videoconferencing, chat etc.
- can interact appropriately online with his/her partner-teacher and, if necessary, with the participating students, attending to online communication norms (e.g. responding to emails in a timely manner, using appropriate register etc.)
- can organise the online exchange in a manner which protects students' safety and respects privacy issues related to students' work.
- can model social presence and online identity for his/her students and help to create an online community of trust and learning.
- can instruct learners on how to use online tools autonomously – tools which help them resolve language difficulties (e.g. online dictionaries, Google translator, multimedia authoring tools).
- can develop in students a critical understanding of online tools – the interests they serve, the type of communication they promote etc.

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online technologies (Pegrum 2009: 56). However, when this competence was presented in the first round of consultation, many recipients questioned its relevance. For example, the value of the statements that the telecollaborative teacher should have 'a basic working knowledge' of current (e.g. Web 2.0) communication tools and of web management systems such as Moodle was questioned in the following ways by different practitioners, for example:

Table 5. Attitudes and beliefs of the telecollaborative teacher.

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*The telecollaborative teacher displays the following beliefs and attitudes:*

- a belief that culture plays an intrinsic role in FL education and online communication
- an openness to partner-teachers' alternative pedagogical beliefs and aims
- a willingness to look for compromise with the partner-teacher in relation to task design, exchange structure and other issues
- an interest in trying out new telecollaborative tasks and new online tools which may be proposed by students or partner-teachers
- a willingness to deal with new messages, texts and questions in contact classes or tutorials as they emerge during the online exchange
- a willingness to accept that the teacher is not the sole authority on the target culture and language
- interest in learning with students about new aspects of L2 language use and cultural products and practices from their exchange partners

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Many school teachers will resist the notion that they have to be able to manage a moodle, when their schools employ an IT person to do that. In this range of new skills being demanded, I believe teachers' best expertise lies in the language and intercultural domains, they can look for technical support. (Respondent feedback to online survey Round 1).

I think it is vital for the teacher to CHOOSE the tools but not to be an expert in USING the tools ... (Respondent feedback to Round 2).

The statement nonetheless received a sufficiently high approval rating from the expert group in the two rounds to be maintained, although this is an issue which should be considered if the model is to be used in the future for self-evaluation or assessment purposes in teacher education courses. For example, in comparison to other online education activities, teachers do not themselves usually need to actively participate in the online interaction. For this reason, it will normally be sufficient, for example, for teachers to be able to set up a blog without needing to be able to create multimedia content in the blogs. On the other hand, while being able to rely on the support of a technical expert is ideal, it may not be the reality for all FL educators and, in any case, teachers need to be aware of the tools available to them and their inherent functions before being able to decide which tools to use in their online exchanges.

A second dilemma was related to current methodological principles and educational theories and the extent to which they underlie telecollaborative practices. A great deal of online FL education practice is based on the educational theories of constructivism and socio-constructivism (Johnson 2006), and in much of the current literature a socioconstructivist approach is taken for granted in telecollaborative classrooms. For example, in their overview of teachers' roles in telecollaboration, Lewis, Chanier and Youngs (2011: 4) reveal a clearly socioconstructivist perspective when they write: 'Rather than being responsible for imparting knowledge (which in some cases she may not possess), her task is to scaffold the construction by learners of shared knowledge'. Pegrum (2009: 61) also clearly links such pedagogy to online learning when he suggests that online teachers 'need the skills to deal with the heavy monitoring and mentoring demands of social constructivism'.

It was therefore unclear to what extent a model aimed at FL teachers from all educational traditions should position itself in a constructivist approach. The statements received criticism from different experts for being either too much in favour of a constructivist approach or for not being sufficiently constructivist in nature. For example, one expert wrote the following: 'As for "organising culturally and linguistically rich tasks", I don't

think this teacher-led approach works in a constructivist learning exchange'. However, another colleague, evaluating the same round of the survey, seemed to interpret the model as being overtly constructivist in nature and suggested this be stated more explicitly: 'If this survey is only geared toward socio-constructivist learning, you could stress this in the instructions or by giving your definition of the term telecollaborative teacher'.

It was decided that the model should in fact reflect a socioconstructivist approach to learning, because the literature on telecollaboration refers regularly to the use of tasks which support 'collaborative inquiry and the construction of knowledge' and also portrays the teacher as 'supporting students in discerning and reflecting upon culturally-contingent patterns of interaction in follow-up classroom discussions'. However, the model also requires teachers to be open and tolerant of partner-teachers with 'alternative pedagogical beliefs and aims'. While telecollaborative teachers do often come to exchanges with widely shared beliefs about teaching and learning, differences in inherent beliefs of education have also been documented in the literature (O'Dowd and Ware 2009). It is precisely the ability to tolerate and work with these differences that is part of the intercultural skills and beliefs of the telecollaborative teacher.

### Conclusion: next steps

This paper set out to provide a model of the different competences which teachers will need in order to organise and employ telecollaborative exchanges in their classrooms. Based on a version of the Delphi technique which combined a review of the literature and the insights of over 60 practitioners and experts in the area, a model was drawn up which contained four sections – organisational, pedagogical and digital competences, and attitudes and beliefs. The model clearly reflects that telecollaboration is an activity which requires intercultural skills and attitudes not only on the part of students, but also on the part of the teachers who set up such projects.

The next step is undoubtedly to put this model into action and to explore how it can be put to use by teachers in their daily work and by teacher-trainers in pre-service and in-service teacher-training education. This might involve adapting the model to a portfolio-based format similar to the *EPOSTL* portfolio mentioned at the beginning of this paper (Newby et al. 2007). In addition, further research might expose trainee teachers to the text and audio-based data collected from previous online exchanges (online interaction between teachers, teacher interviews, classroom recordings etc.) and require them to identify examples of the different competences in the data.

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