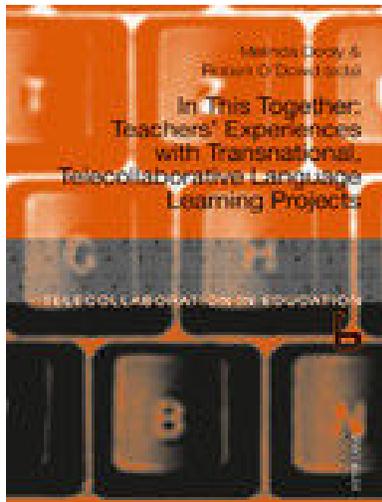**BOOK REVIEW**

MELINDA DOOLY / ROBERT O'DOWD (Editors) IN THIS TOGETHER: TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES WITH TRANSNATIONAL, TELECOLLABORATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING PROJECTS

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The series of scholarly works dealing with education was enriched in 2018 with some new publications of Peter Lang Publishing House, one of these being the collective volume coordinated by Melinda Dooly and Robert O'Dowd. In This Together: Teachers' Experiences with Transnational, Telecollaborative Language Learning Projects is volume 6 in the series Telecollaboration in Education and combines the outcomes of research and practice in the domain of innovative, IT-based and -assisted teaching and learning practices. Among the authors we find four researchers: Dr. Melinda Dooly and Dr. Dolors Masats Viladoms, both with a wide experience in teacher training, Dr. Robert O'Dowd and Dr. Randall Sadler, experts in the application of telecollaboration in education with a special focus on language teaching and learning, as well as practicing, experienced educators like Alexandra Bonet Pueyo, Sara Bruun, Maria Mont, graduated and respectively wannabe teachers with telecollaborative and intercultural experience, such as: Granada Bejarano Sánchez, Anaïs García-Martínez, Gerard Giménez Manrique, Maria Gracia-Téllez, Jennie Ingelsson, Anna Linder and Anna Morcilo Salas.

The first chapter of this collective work, *Telecollaboration in the foreign language classroom: A review of its origins and its application to language teaching practice*, signed by the editors offers insight into the practice of telecollaboration – the concept refers to a structured, online collaborative learning process taking place among geographically apart groups of learners –, its origins and implementation into the language teaching process. Having a strongly practical character, the volume shares primary and secondary school teachers' experiences with telecollaborative projects, highlights and difficulties included. Although it might seem an innovative teaching practice – taking into consideration the use of technology, indeed it is – with a rapid expansion in the past ten years, its origins date back at least one century: "School pen pal exchanges and even multimedia exchanges have existed since at least the 1920's when Célestin Freinet established the Modern School Movement in Europe." (Kern, 2013, p. 206 in Dooly & O'Dowd, 2018, p. 12). During this decade of expansion it experienced numerous definitions, "virtual connections" (Warschauer 1996), "teletandem" (Telles 2009), "globally networked learning" (Starke-Meyerring & Wilson 2008), "online interaction exchange" (Dooly & O'Dowd 2012) are only a few among the terms used referring to it. Still, the authors of the volume prefer the term telecollaboration as being the most wide-spread denotation. In terms of the two editors, telecollaboration can be defined as:

> "the engagement of groups of learners in extended periods of online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partners from other cultural contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programmes and under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators." (p. 16)

or even beyond the limits of education:

> "the process of communicating and working together with other people or groups from different locations through online or digital communication tools (e.g., computers, tablets, cellphones) to co-produce a desired work output. Telecollaboration can be carried out in a variety of settings (classroom, home, workplace, laboratory) and can be synchoronous or asynchronous. In education, telecollaboration combines all of these components with a focus on learning, social interaction, dialogue, intercultural exchange and communication (...)" (Dooly, 2017, pp. 169-170 in Dooly & O'Dowd, 2018, p. 16).

Although there is no consensus in classifying telecollaboration as a method, methodology, approach or practice, one thing is sure, as an object of study it has slowly become part of teacher education and training. The subsequent chapters of the book, where more or less experienced teachers and even student-teachers report about their results in telecollaborative educational projects or units should stay as a proof for that. A real strength of the book is the authors' reflection on the results of their telecollaborative projects, the analysis of positive and negative experiences to draw conclusions for the improvement of similar future endeavours.
In the second chapter entitled *A telecollaborative science project: Searching for new ways to make language learning authentic* Anaïs García-Martínez and Maria Gracia-Téllez, students of pedagogy approaching graduation reflect upon their teaching internship offering them the experience of a telecollaborative project. As

devoted aspirant teachers wanting to embrace this profession in a conscious way, they consider this new approach being of great impact upon language learning and above all authentic language learning, capable to face the communicational needs of nowadays' 'information society'. In designing a telecollaborative project they relied on the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to be most efficiently realized according to them by means of Project-Based Language Learning (PBLL), implying beside language competence both social (communication, sharing, collaboration) and working skills (documentation, use of IT devices, sorting, decision making, etc.). Throughout the project the two future teachers had following criteria in mind: students should acquire beside foreign language (English) specific content, too, they should use the language in a natural, real-like manner and language learning should be aided by modern technology (Technology-Enhanced Project-Based Language Learning – TEPBLL).

Two groups of students were involved into this innovative project: one group of 3rd grade students of a school in a socially disadvantaged area next to Barcelona and a 4th grade class in a school in Mollet del Vallès belonging to the metropolitan area of Barcelona, having experiences with innovative language teaching methods and the use of technologies. An auxiliary but not less important aim of the project was inclusion of socially disadvantaged children and of students with learning difficulties:

> "As we saw it, bringing innovative methodologies to the classroom
> to engage those students who do not possess the cultural capital
> to succeed in education was crucial to help them escape from
> social determinism and start conceiving their social mobility in the
> near future as a reachable aspiration." (p. 40)

The two classes participating in the project had to find out how humans can move, one of them exploring the skeletal and the other one the muscular system by using English as means of communication. The expected outcome was a final video about their findings put together and uploaded to YouTube and to the school blogs.

The topic of chapter three, *Are we really that different? A telecollaborative project between refugee students from Myanmar and a primary school in Sabadell (Spain)*, signed by Anna Morcilo Salas, is a collaboration between refugees in Thailand, youngsters between the age of 17 and 23, taking educational courses, and a primary school in Spain. Beside the innovative approach of telecollaboration, the project faced one more challenge implying collaborative work between two groups of students very distant in age, with the scope of improving language and digital competence on both sides. The initiators of the project hoped for an additional gain with European children in social sensitivity for the problems of refugees and on behalf of the latter ones in extended education and didactic issues, as they were supposed to collaborate with the project teachers regarding material design and to give feedback: "Once again it seemed important to involve the students in the decision-making process since they were adults who had their own conception of the education they wanted. (...), so I tried to involve them in the planning process as much as possible." (p. 70)

The twofold topic of the telecollaborative project being the use of Present simple tense, respectively comparing the daily programme of the two groups of students,

primary school pupils in Spain (Peacock School) drilled grammar with help of materials offered to them by their teacher, while Myanmar students (Meerkat School) were in charge of creating different types of materials to this grammar issue to help their telecollaborative partners to learn it. The final outcome was a presentation/debate on similarities, differences between the two groups involved.

Chapter four, authors Maria Mont and Dolors Masats, is dedicated to giving to teachers with no or less experience with the telecollaborative approach practical advice for a successful implementation of this type of projects. All this happens based on two projects conducted with the same class of a public school in Mollet del Vallès, Catalonia - Spain in one year with a class in Toronto - Canada to the topic of *Travelling through Arts* and in the following year with an Austrian group of pupils from Vienna, bearing the title *Healthy Habits*. Of course one of the goals of the projects was improving language competence in English.

In chapter five, *Making a difference: Reflecting on a telecollaborative project aimed at social change*, Alexandra Bonet Pueyo presents the concern of the teachers' collective in the school she is working at, about educating socially committed youth using telecommunication tools in a conscious and responsible way. To reach that, the skills to be acquired by the students are: "(...) critical thinking and problem solving; collaboration across networks and leading by influence; agility and adaptability; initiative and entrepreneurialism; effective oral and written communication; accessing and analysing information; and curiosity and imagination." (p. 124)
The project meant to bring linguistic (English language) and intercultural gains, as well as, dealing with the problem of Syrian war refugees, to have a certain social impact, was run between a school located in Terrassa, Spain and one in Furuthorpkolann, Sweden. By means of the project's final result, a blog created by the joint Spanish-Swedish group, the participants hoped to raise public awareness of the Syrain crisis and to invite to reflection upon possible ways of offering help. As 21th century education should also aim at forming critical citizens capable of independent thinking, part of the tasks implied debating and argumentative text writing to learn how to take into consideration both sides of the problem – for and against.
Totally conscious of the drawbacks, hard work and in spite of this possible mistakes emerging from the participation in a project of this kind and complexity, the author summarizes with full satisfaction "And when 12 and 13 year old students can stand up and claim they know how the world must be, that the world must be different from the one that exists, one knows a good job has been done." (p. 144)

The next chapter reports about telecollaboration experience also made by prospect teachers in their internship period. Both of the schools involved are located in Spain, but one has English as language of teaching (School Queen Mary) for multilingual students and the other one Catalan, mainly for Spanish-speaking students (School Vailet). In this way the authors, Granada Bejarano Sánchez and Gerard Giménez Manrique, present a linguistic exchange including English for the Catalan-speaking and Catalan for the English-speaking education institution. Through the cooperative approach and the technological background introduced to language classes both of the schools with a tradition in project-based learning

experienced also something new and unusual in their daily routine. We perceive the working group contract containing every student's assignment signed by each member of the respective group, as really original and probably even efficient in raising sense of responsibility with children.

The telecollaborative project described in chapter seven, *Intercultural meetings in a Swedish-Kiwi e-mail exchange: Leassons Learnt*, focused on culture and everything this concept may involve and it was run with the participation of four classes in two different schools in Sweden and one oversized (about 90 pupils) class in a New Zealand school. Unlike the other projects presented in this volume, this one was not that much technology-based and -aided due to the gaps in students' IT competence.

"Clearly digital tools can and should transform teaching and by using them wisely teachers can take their students far beyond textbooks and workbooks and vocabulary tests." (p. 200) confesses Sara Bruun, the author of chapter eight, *Global goals: A virtual project with students from Sweden and Tanzania*, presenting a telecollaborative project between a school in Hässleholm, Sweden and one in Bagamoyo, Tanzania related to sustainability and also focusing on the improvement of English language competence. Two special issues should be mentioned here: first, this was the project facing maybe the biggest challenge taking into consideration the large cultural and infrastructural gap (lack of electricity and internet after a rain) between a European and an African country, and second, the participants were given due to the Swedish Council for Higher Education even the opportunity of personal meeting realized through a mutual visit in Hässleholm and Bagamoyo. It should be considered also positive, that students found out about critical reading and were offered guidance related to the reliability of information sources.

The framework initiated by Dooly and O'Dowd in their introductory part, embracing the seven descriptive chapters reporting about experiences with telecollaborative projects comes to closing in the last chapter signed by Randall William Sadler, not only summing up the content of the volume, but also offering rules/instructions for a successful collaboration emerging from the long-year experiences of all persons involved. Because running such projects means an increased workload and hopefully fruitful collaboration with a strange partner, taking into consideration the needs of all the participants, possible unexpected events, different school calendars and time zones when working with far-away countries and last but not least a good choice regarding technological tools used.

Certainly the above presented work has its undeniable merits, however we have to perceive as shortcomings the reduced readability of some of the inserted charts or graphics, the quite frequent occurrence of mistakes: "given that we had in mind that it could easily happened" (p. 59), "(...) I have a better idea of how live is in Spain as a young student. (...)" (p. 84), or "Moreover, these great amount of differences (...) was seen as an advantage (...)" (p. 148), of omissions: "They immediately saw that there was a real reason for them to be quiet and thereafter the recordings increasingly more accurate." (p. 60), "(...) the students may be using only one language, (...) or two languages (each partner may as a language mentor for the

other); (...)" (p. 111), "Moreover, through the use of the target language as a means of getting to know and work with other learners from another they would broaden their knowledge other cultures and traditions." (p. 140), – or just the omission of 's' in the third person singular –, of typing errors like "You can even try to join a teaching groups in your area (...)" (p. 107), "(...) to try to have a social impact through our everyday our jobs." (p. 143), just to mention a few of them. One could claim as reasons for dissatisfaction stylistic issues "(...) the challenges the students had were context-specific." (p. 192), or the use of acronyms not introduced previously – BIE staying for Buck Institute for Education, issue tackled and explained only in the list of references –, respectively the lack of interpunction affecting comprehension "Preparing for the future challenges they will face in their lives as the world becomes more and more interlinked must be a high priority for teachers everywhere." (p. 123), all avoidable through careful proof-reading. Still, these formal aspects cannot diminish the overall and above all practical value of the book, since we have to agree with the editors when summing up at the end of their introduction to this work:

> "If telecollaboration is to continue to grow as an educational practice, it will of course need the support of policy makers and researchers. But it will also need the contributions of reflective practitioners such as the ones featured in these chapters, providing insights into how telecollaboration can become an integral part of foreign language education." (p. 29)