

Chapter 2. A telecollaborative science project: Searching for new ways to make language learning authentic

Introduction

As our imminent graduation from teacher education draws near, we reflect on our recent experience in carrying out a telecollaborative project in our teaching internship (called ‘practicum’ at our university) during our final year of our degree. Four years back we took our first step in devoting our lives to what we feel is one of the most significant fields of inquiry in our society: education. For us, it is the most rewarding profession by far, but also one calling for a great deal of responsibility and time. It seems to us that innovative and excellent teaching requires a passion for teaching that implies dedication of considerable time, energy and spirit. It is with this in mind that we decided to take on the daunting task of designing and carrying out a telecollaborative project with our classes. However, as it has been stated, it is important to bear in mind that we are not yet practicing teachers, but in our final year of our teacher education degree. The project we have designed and implemented has been for our internship that we carried out as part of the specialization in English as a Foreign Language.

We begin by outlining the relevance this type of teaching approach can have on language education, not least of which is the importance for today’s teachers to be constantly engaged in a process of lifelong renovation, learning and formation. Parallel to this our society on the whole is moving towards what is regarded by many experts as the ‘information society’, where information of any nature, alongside its dissemination and use have become the axis of human activity. Within this scenario, the function of language, on the same plane with communication technologies, have become indispensable requirements to develop citizens capable of

seeking, analysing and sharing information and ideas, competences which according to Trilling and Fadel (2009) all students should acquire in order to succeed in the ‘information society’.

Thus, as future language teachers we understand and embrace the urgency of constantly updating our methods to equip our students with the necessary communication tools for today’s emerging social needs. We feel it would be pointless to teach a foreign language to new generations if we neglected the importance of teaching them how to adapt to new ways of interaction, and showing them how to integrate a wide spectrum of semi-otic resources including technologies, as a key means of communicating in everyday practices.

Another issue deserving special consideration in the teaching of a language is the methodology teachers use to present core content knowledge to their students. According to the article 62 of the Spanish Organic Law (2/2006), at the end of A levels, most Spanish learners have a command of English (as a foreign language) equivalent to an A2 level – a measure that is defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2001) as one of the lowest. Few will dispute the claim that such low results are in all probability due to a general lack of innovative approaches to teaching languages prevailing in Spain; currently most foreign language teaching approaches are chiefly focused on aspects of accuracy, such as grammar and spelling; much less emphasis is placed on learning to actually *use* the target foreign language. Our assumption is that it is no coincidence that when implementing a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, where the focal point is on meaningful communication and practice rather than on the mastery of structures, the results of foreign language learners increase prominently.

According to Richards (2006), CLT is a set of principles for language teaching that aim at the teaching of *communicative competence*, which is understood as being more complex than mere *grammatical competence*. While language learners in a classroom employing a grammar-based instruction would be primarily asked to mechanically practice the four linguistic abilities (speaking, listening, reading and writing), a lesson in line with CLT principles would be based on aiding learners to command all features of language, not only grammatical aspects, including aspects of using the language fluently and appropriately in the different modalities (writing, speaking, etc.) in real communicative contexts. As Richards (2006) explains it, these abovementioned features of language involve the development of (1) sociolinguistic competence, or the ability

to adapt one's language to different contexts of communication (e.g.: using a specific register to address to a determined group of participants); (2) discursive competence, or knowing how to both comprehend and produce different types of texts (e.g.: scientific, instructive, advertising, letters...); and (3) strategic competence, or the ability to overcome linguistic barriers despite having limitations in the language knowledge to make oneself understood (e.g.: using communication strategies such as code-switching, gestures, body language, etc. to maintain a conversation).

As we felt certain that we wanted our teaching lessons to promote and motivate our students in purposeful language learning, we tried to take into consideration the core assumptions of CLT, as listed by Richards (2006). These ten core assumptions of current CLT are:

1. Second language learning is facilitated when learners are engaged in interaction and meaningful communication.
2. Effective classroom learning tasks and exercises provide opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, expand their language resources, notice how language is used, and take part in meaningful interpersonal exchange.
3. Meaningful communication results from students processing content that is relevant, purposeful, interesting, and engaging.
4. Communication is a holistic process that often calls upon the use of several language skills or modalities.
5. Language learning is facilitated both by activities that involve inductive or discovery learning of underlying rules of language use and organization, as well as by those involving language analysis and reflection.
6. Language learning is a gradual process that involves creative use of language, and trial and error. Although errors are normal products of learning, the ultimate goal of learning is to be able to use the new language both accurately and fluently.
7. Learners develop their own routes to language learning, progress at different rates, and have different needs and motivations for language learning.
8. Successful language learning involves the use of effective learning and communication strategies.
9. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is that of a facilitator, who creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning.
10. The classroom is a community where learners learn through collaboration and sharing.

A second, and perhaps more important element of our final decision to design a telecollaborative project for our teaching internship is the notion that one of the most effective approaches which allows the foreign language teacher to bring the main CLT principles into the classroom is the implementation of Project-Based Language Learning approach (PBL; cf. Markham, 2011; Dooly & Masats, 2011; Dooly, 2016). In our view, the potential of the PBL approach resides in the fact that communicative activities can be easily contextualized and meaningful for the learners, given that the entire project is first presented in the form of a driving question that requires students to investigate and communicate among themselves and this is sustained during the entire period of the project as they work together to produce final output that answers the initial question. This premise can then be amplified when the project involves other language learners outside of the immediate classroom (Dooly, 2008, 2017).

Within this framework, the classroom becomes a social setting for interaction amongst the students. In this pedagogical approach, group work tasks allow students to collaborate and interact together to jointly achieve specific goals that will help them arrive, little by little, to the solution of the driving question. It seems to us that this approach is highly appropriate and an effective means to help students to develop the competencies required in a 21st century society, where, above all, they will need to strengthen their problem-solving skills, as well as the ability to work together and think flexibly and creatively.

Additionally, as we have already mentioned earlier, the need for students to acquire technologically enriched communicative skills are patent. Thus, on these grounds, we contemplated the promising benefits of implementing a Technology- Enhanced Project- Based Language Learning (TEPBL) approach and came to the conclusion that we did not want to finish our degree without seeing for ourselves how this method worked in practice. If designing and implementing a TEPBL would be a feasible means of adapting our lessons to our ever-changing environment, we really wanted to jump at the chance of experiencing it first-hand. In this manner, we took the risks of testing something completely unfamiliar to us in order to take advantage of all the above-mentioned prominent features that can help bridge the gap between technology and teaching whilst providing a context for developing fluency skills. And despite the difficulties and challenges this has posed for us, in the end, we felt that doing so –which included a long process of trial and error- could be an

important lesson for acquiring the ability to innovate; which must be a lifelong pursuit for all teachers to guarantee quality education. Thus, we asked ourselves, why not start by acting accordingly and converting our internships into a teaching laboratory?

It should be noted that our proposal adopted a dual-focused educational approach in which a foreign language has been used for learning both the language and specific content. We think that this is a propitious way to make students learn a foreign language because it offers similar conditions to those underlying the process of acquisition of the children's mother tongue, where there is a greater focus on understanding the message than on its formal characteristics.

As it has been previously mentioned, the use of technology in our project should not be forgotten. As language teachers our main goal is to teach students to communicate and this fact includes providing learners with as many pragmatic tools as possible to both understand and make themselves understood in a foreign language. At this point, we cannot neglect the role that technology plays in our current society, which is why we wanted to adapt our teaching practice to the digital age. Moreover, it entails a high degree of creativity to design tasks in which students feel they are using the language in a natural manner. Thus, using telecollaboration to communicate with students from a foreign school is a sublime idea that enables teachers to get rid of superficial activities and build situations through which students can experience this sense of naturalness and give more value to the learning of English. This is one of the reasons why we have created a Technology-Enhanced Project-Based Language Learning (TEPBL) lessons that integrate technology in several ways to promote both language and content learning (cf. Dooly, 2017).

The context of the project: Features of the participant schools and students

In order to frame the context in which our teaching sequence has been implemented, we provide an outline of each of the schools (herein called School A and School B), focusing in detail on each of the target groups. Located in a neighbourhood of Barcelona, School A is a state school

which takes in children from three different neighbourhoods. According to the data extracted from Idescat (2015), School A is set in a district with a medium-low income level, and a level of university studies of the general population below the average. This is an important issue as it underscores the high percentage of school failure or dropout directly or indirectly related to the challenges faced by the school's public to carry out higher studies. This, in turn, is most likely bound to be related to the poor economic resources of the inhabitants of the area, where the income per capita is notably below the average of Barcelona.

The classroom in School where the teaching sequence was developed hosted 3rd year students of Primary Education. This target group was composed of twenty-five eight and nine-year old students; twelve girls and thirteen boys, so it was a rather balanced group with regards to gender. Roughly about 3% of the pupils were children of immigrants, but the majority quite born in Spain, and were Spanish speakers. Nonetheless, although it can be utterly difficult for teachers to make use of a language that is not practiced by the students at home (only about 10% of the children in this class are Catalan speakers), the vehicular language of the school is the Catalan, as it is the language of use and communication in everyday life in Catalunya and it will bring students more opportunities in the labour and social world.

About 10% of the students pertained to ethnic minorities and marginalized sectors, such as gypsies. In general, the children come from working class or lower middle-class families, with low economic and sociocultural status. 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.

As regards English as a foreign language, it is the language chosen by the educational authorities of the district (as opposed to the other majority options of French or German), however students in School A still have a great deal of difficulties to follow the pace of the lessons due to their poor command of this language. Moreover, there is one student in the class who has been diagnosed with special educational needs and has an Individual Plan (IP), along with five students that present learning difficulties (but do not have IPs), so the entire project has been designed to include these students as well.

School B is located in Mollet del Vallès, a city which belongs to Vallès Oriental, a region of the metropolitan area of Barcelona. It is a two-form entry school, which involves Pre and Primary Education levels, and which has a well-documented experience in innovative language teaching, including the use of technologies. The teaching sequence was implemented in the class of 4th grade, which comprises twenty-two students who are between nine and ten years old; ten girls and twelve boys. Most of the students were born in Barcelona and currently live in Mollet (Idescat, 2015). There were three students who had been born in different countries: Morocco, Colombia and Ecuador.

Of those born in Barcelona, just five of them have Catalan as their mother tongue. The school is located in a region in which more than half of the population is not able to write in Catalan, as it is not their home or family language. However, none of the students (including those who were not born in Spain) had difficulties at the time for understanding Catalan or Spanish, and they were fluent in both languages. Regarding any special educational needs of the students, there was one child who was a year older than all his peers, and who was following an IP. Accordingly, the teaching sequence was also adapted to facilitate his understanding, including the design of several materials attending to different learning styles thus providing a great variety of activities.

As a particular characteristic of School B, it is relevant to highlight that Science and Arts and Crafts use a Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodology. In these cases, the teachers use the FL (English) to teach the core content, and the language is practised, above all, through projects (in order to develop group cohesion and autonomy). Through this methodology students can start to acquire all the content-obligatory language (Escobar, 2012) that is required to carry out the project.

The design of our project

In this section, we offer a picture of the teaching unit we designed to implement in our teaching internship. The project consisted of six sessions planned to be carried out in two different schools and at two different grade levels. As previously outlined, the importance of thinking of a

driving question was primordial. In our case, the driving question was: *How do we move and why?* As noted above, the question was chosen to promote the learning of the different body systems that we use to move whilst providing our learners with an authentic context for communication in English (as a foreign language). With this in mind, the entire project was specifically designed to be implemented by two different group classes (third grade and fourth grade) from two different schools (Schools A and B), working in parallel with each other.

As with any educational project planning, our departure point was to first decide on a final outcome that would push our students to answer the question of the teaching unit. We eventually chose a video as our final output. In the video, both schools would be asked to put in common different knowledge that they had acquired during the various tasks carried out during the project. They would then upload the video to *YouTube* so it could be added to the school blogs. Additionally, and also as part of the final result, a website has been created in which we have written everything we have been doing daily in order to involve the entire community in the two groups' learning process. Finally, as part of our planning, we decided that the students from each school would take part in what is commonly known as jigsaw puzzle tasks: each group was missing part of the information related to the body system related to movement, thus promoting the need for the groups to talk and interact with each other in order to discover 'the whole picture'.

In this particular case, it was decided that the students in one school (in our case School A) would explore the skeletal system and the other school (School B) would become young 'experts' in the muscular system. This implied that the learners would have to exchange their information to obtain a complete image of the functions and components of the different body systems in order to be able to create the final video explaining how humans move and why. However, we still had to decide on how this exchange of information could take place given that these schools were at different locations. Finally, it was decided that the project would include asynchronous telecollaboration through which the students from both schools would communicate and work together. The main tasks to be carried out would be to create different videos to teach their online classmates informative content related either to the skeletal or the muscular system, depending on the school.

In the following section, we provide a description of the backbone of our teaching unit.

Session 1

The teaching unit was first introduced by a video in in the FL (English) from the teacher of the parallel school. Thus, in the video shown to School A, the teacher from School B introduced herself and explained the project to the students: they had been selected to collaborate with another school, School B, to study the human body's system of movement. In the video, the teacher explained that School A would become experts in bones and School B would become experts in muscles. In order to get the whole picture of the two systems and how they worked together in the human body, they would have to exchange information and thus be able to create a final video. This video would be uploaded to YouTube and shared with the parents from both schools through the school blog, to make families participants of their children's learning. Equally, the video presented to School B featured the teacher from School A, explaining the same content to the other school but the other way around (students from School B would be experts in the muscular system and would have to exchange information with the experts of the skeletal system and so forth).

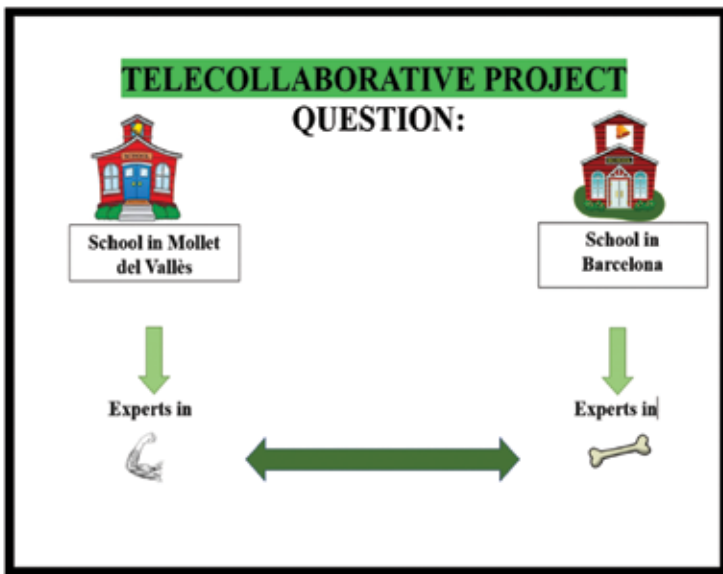


Figure 1. Chart outlining the collaboration between the groups (auxiliary visual aide)

The next step consisted of the showing and discussing in detail a big calendar with small envelopes containing the objectives of each lesson. This helped ensure that the students would always know what was expected from them.



Figure 2. Calendar of main objectives of the telecollaborative project

Next, we prepared an activity to check the students' understanding of the video presented, since it was crucial that they understood the purpose of the project from the very beginning. We invested a great deal of time in

assuring that our students understood the key points of the project. To do so, we filled in a visual mural with both groups that answered the following questions:

- *How many days will this project last?*
- *What schools are going to collaborate?*
- *What are we going to study?*
- *And the other school?*
- *What are the questions that guide this project?*
- *What do we have to create at the end of the project?*

Different students came up to add to the correspondent tags to the mural. After that, we passed a soft ball around to those students who did not participate, asking each one a random question about the mural. Finally, the mural was posted permanently on the walls of both classrooms so they could be checked regularly during the whole project.

Because it is very important at the beginning of telecollaborative projects to allow time for the partners to get to know each other (Dooly, 2008), the next part of session 1 consisted creating a video to introduce themselves as a class to each other. In the case of School A, students had to complete the gaps of some sentences in groups, research their meaning in case they had any doubts, then practice their sentences. Then, they had to record themselves saying their corresponding sentence.

In the case of School B, students had more command of English, so they were asked to construct four sentences in English by themselves. The groups had to be experts in either:

- Greeting the other class
- Stating their grade
- Stating which is the name of their school
- Stating what they will be experts in

FIRST VIDEO TO SCHOOL B

GROUP 1

H__ (hola), we are from
the s__ (escuela) _____



GROUP 2

Our c__ (classe)
is called _____



GROUP 3

We are in t__ (tercer)
grade

3

GROUP 4

We will be experts in
b__ (ossos)



GROUP 5

We will work t__ _____
(junts)

G__ b_ (adéu)!



Figure 3. Chart of sentences to be recorded in School A

Before recording in School B, the teacher walked around the classroom, observing the different groups and correcting pronunciation mistakes. The students then pooled their knowledge by writing their final decisions on what each ‘expert group’ would say on the blackboard (e.g. “*Experts in*

greeting, how will we greet them?” and so forth). The first session ended by recording the videos, which were then sent to the partner schools.

It is important to note that as future teachers, something that concerned us was the assessment process. So we decided that in this session the evaluation criteria would be based on how the students answered the teacher’s question when they were tossed the ball during the discussion time (this way we ensured that every student participated and understood the main ideas of the project) and on the correct completion of the mural, along with the students’ willingness to participate.

Session 2

As well as in the first session, in the second one, both schools followed the same procedure. The first thing that we did was to recap the project to make sure that our students remembered what the project was about. This was done through the review of the mural that had been already filled in during the previous session.

The next step was the completion of a ‘What Do I Know’ chart, in which students, individually, had to write what they knew about the human motor system. We insisted on making them understand that knowing nothing was not a problem, since this was only a diagnostic assessment so that they and the teacher would see their progress.

Next, it was the time to get to know the other school by watching the introductory video that the other school had created. Students were very engaged and willing to ask questions, so we let them participate, thus supporting their communicative abilities.

As previously mentioned, getting students to know what is expected from them is essential to achieve the learning goals. For this reason, after watching the video, we read the objective of the day: “To recognize different human systems”. Then, we went deeper into the topic of different human systems and their functions through different analogies. Most of the students did not even know the meaning of “human system”, so we compared our human systems with the operation of a bicycle: *like a bicycle, our body is composed of different parts that work together to accomplish different tasks. In a bicycle, for example, there are tires which work in*

coordination to move the bicycle; there are brakes which are needed to stop the bicycle; or the pedals, which work together to push the bicycle. The same thing happens in our body: we have different parts, our organs, which work “in groups” to carry out related tasks. Today, we will see 4 of these systems.

Following this, we posted images on the chalkboard of the four different human systems with their names below and asked the students to describe the functions of each system. To do so, four chairs were placed in front of the class; each one below a flashcard of a different human system and five volunteers came to represent the function of each system. For instance, the first chair was placed below the flashcard of the digestive system, so we gave to the first student a blender with lots of peas inside and explained that the peas represented the food in our stomach. Then, the student was asked to whip the peas, as if the blender was our digestive system. This way, the students could observe that the function of the digestive system consisted in breaking food into small pieces. Each system was explored graphically and empirically during the class (we will not detail all four systems in this chapter, due to need for brevity).

Briefly, to summarize, the respiratory system was represented with balloons and the nervous system was depicted through commands on a computer. The fourth chair was the most important as it represented the two systems under study in the project: the muscular system and the skeletal system. Both classes came to the conclusion that these systems worked like one system, called the locomotor system. We represented its function with a bicycle, which has different pieces that allow its movement, like our muscles and bones. So, students rapidly saw the function of our locomotor system: to allow movement. To check for understanding of the first part of the session, students in groups of five were given flashcard of one of the human systems and a worksheet to be completed. Finally, to complete these part of the ‘discovery’, the students were made to understand that all the systems work together, not in isolation. This was done through a discussion of the different systems that went into eating an apple (muscular – biting; respiratory – breathing; nervous – commands to bite; digestive and so forth).

To finish the session, we proceeded to do the recording in groups for the telecollaborative part of the project. First of all, we distributed the students in heterogeneous groups where they were each assigned a role,

which would rotate every lesson. This way we ensured that everyone had the chance to experience different roles and develop different skills.

The roles were the following:

- A spokesperson (in charge of verbalising the script)
- A technician (in charge of recording)
- A writer (in charge of writing the script)
- An international person: (in charge of encouraging, helping or making sure that all members try to use English, for example by checking a dictionary for unknown words)



Figure 4. Distribution of roles for making telecollaborative video

Once the roles were distributed, each group recorded themselves regarding what they had learnt. This task was scaffolded with support pictures (see figure 5).

SECOND VIDEO

GROUP 1

T___ (avui) we have
seen ___ (number)
human systems



GROUP 2

All the systems are
c___ like the parts
of a b___



GROUP 3

We will study the
___ system.



GROUP 4

The ___ system has
b___ and m___



GROUP 5

We need your h___
(ajuda)



G___ b___ (adéu)!

Figure 5. Visual scaffolding for video recording for telecollaborative partners

During this session, the assessment criteria were based on the answers students gave to the incomplete text and their videos. Moreover, as a diagnostic assessment was also implemented, the teacher gathered the evidence and students were also aware of the previous knowledge they had.

Session 3

In this session, every school worked on its speciality: the functions of the skeletal system were studied by School A students, while School B focused on the functions of the muscular system. As in the previous lesson, students were given a recap of the previous session. This was through a viewing of the video made by their telecollaborative partners. Next, guided by the ‘daily’ objectives envelop in the calendar, the two groups began their individualized work on each assigned human system. As with the previous session, this was done through highly empirical work of exploring how the systems worked. For instance, in School A, in order to better understand how the skeletal system functioned, students used hangers (to discover the bone system) and eggs (to relate to outer protection of the skull), and a ‘Frankenstein role play’ wherein they had no fluid joints.



Figure 6. Example of experiment flashcard

These activities were carried out in groups, conclusions drawn and discussed and then a video for the partner school was produced.



Figure 7. Scaffolding for telecollaboration video recording

School B also carried out experiments to ‘discover’ the different systems as can be seen in figure 8. This was followed by a recording for the partner class, although in this case, students were given more autonomy regarding the content of the video (see figure 9).

GROUP EXPERIMENT

YOU HAVE:



Bubble paper



Glass

 QUESTIONS	 ANSWERS
If I throw the glass without bubble paper...	a) The glass won't break b) The glass will break
- What is the function of the bubble paper?	a) No function b) Movement c) Protection.
- What is one function of the muscles?	a) No function b) To cut food c) To protect the bones 

Figure 8. Instructions for group experiment School B

Recording for each function:

Today we have learnt the f_____ of the muscular system.

One function of the muscular system is _____

Another function of the muscular system is _____

Another function of the muscular system is _____

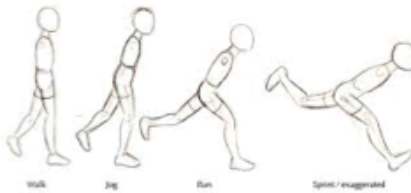


Figure 9. Instructions for recording video School B

Session 4

As in the previous lessons, the videos made for the telecollaborative project played a key role in either recapping the previous session (watching their own videos) or in setting up a listening exercise for preparing the students to learn about the partner class' system. To do this, the students were given a sheet of paper and asked to jot down the three functions of the muscular system that they were about to see in the video from School B. The teacher played the video twice to ensure that everyone got the functions and then the group discussed them and make sure they had understood everything completely. The students then drew that both the skeletal and the muscular system have similar functions, given that they work in parallel and constitute the locomotor system.


The process for creating the next video in school A was based more on games and songs than 'experiments'. For instance, to find out more about the role of bones for the human body, the students were introduced to the song "Dem Bones", which they listened to (and followed along while signalling the bones mentioned in the song) and then they learnt

parts of the song. Next, the students had to put together a ‘bone puzzle’ (see figure 10). The names of the bones were quickly reviewed through an adapted version of ‘Simon Says’ in which students had to signal the parts of their bodies where specific bones were located if given the order (e.g. ‘Simon says to touch your skull’).



Figure 10. Bone puzzle

The video for the telecollaborative partner featured the class singing ‘Dem Bones’ for their partners. School B, which was studying the muscular system, explored their topic through flashcards and a memory game. The students played in teams as they tried to label the different muscles in the body. This was followed by the writing and practicing of the video script describing the location and names of the human muscles selected for the students to learn.



Learning about muscles

Hello La Maquinista!

We have learnt a lot of muscles today!

For example: *

This is _____

This is _____






Figure 11. Scaffolding for video about muscles

Session 5

In this session, both schools followed the same procedure, beginning the lesson by watching the video from their telecollaboration partners. Again, once the videos had been watched, a student read the objective for the lesson. For this session it was “To reflect on what we have been studying”. In other words, this was the session in which students had to do a final summary including all the concepts tackled during the whole project.

This was done by first recapping everything they had been doing, using the ‘pass the ball’ strategy so that everyone had a turn to answer key questions such as “*What is one function of the muscular system? Where are the biceps located? What is one function of the skeletal system? Where is the skull located?*”

This round of summary discussion was followed by a contest in which students had to write their answers on small chalkboards every time the teachers showed them a card. Finally, after group summaries, reflection and discussion, the students had to individually complete following worksheets as final assessment. These were gathered and discussed as a group.

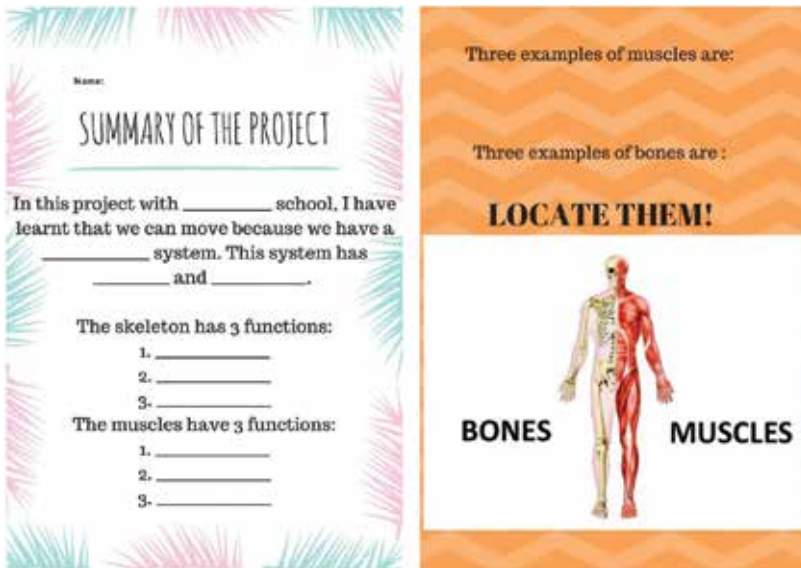


Figure 12. Final assessment worksheets

For the videos of this session, the students recorded themselves answering the question “How do we move and why?”. To do so, they could use the support of a transcript the teachers provided as scaffolding, but the teachers also let them express themselves in their mother tongue, since they wanted to see their level of acquisition of the contents. In this session, the teachers evaluated the ability for students to recognise and select the appropriate words for a specific sentence (through the worksheets). Moreover, the oral competence was also assessed, and the teachers could see students’ progress and compare it with the first diagnostic assessment.

Session 6

Before this session, the partner teachers edited a video that combined the answers from the students of School A and School B in order to show the roundup video to them in the last session. The video was uploaded to Internet so the students could view it in class. To finalize the project, students did a self-assessment activity in which they had to reflect about what they had learnt through the project, and possible modifications they would make to the project, including what they liked most and something they really did not like because, as future teachers we feel that we need to be open to criticism in order to improve our own teaching practices and to learn from our mistakes.

VALORA'T! ESCULL UNA CARA QUE REPRESENTI CADA FRASE



I have respected my mates

I have respected the materials

I have worked in groups

I have learnt about "telecollaboration"

I have learnt about the locomotor system

 QUÈ ÉS EL QUE MÉS T'HA AGRADAT? _____

QUÈ ÉS EL QUE MENYS T'HA AGRADAT? _____

Figure 13. Self-assessment questionnaire

Challenges

We hope that by having shared our project with our readers, it will serve to motivate other language teachers to incorporate telecollaboration in their lessons. Although we began the project with lots of fears and insecurities due to our lack of experience both in teaching and in telecollaborative practices, we can now assert that our project has been totally successful. It is for this reason that we want to encourage other teachers who do not have previous knowledge or who are unsure about applying this methodology to their own practices to be brave and do it since it provides the students an authentic purpose for communication which we think is very difficult to deliver through other language teaching resources.

It is our experience (admittedly based on anecdotal observation) that English in both School A and School B is a subject that many of the students detest, perhaps due to a sense of lack of authenticity that characterizes English lessons in Spanish schools. This may contribute to the students feeling it is a pointless and difficult language to master. This is probably one of the underlying reasons that when we first introduced the project to our students and they realized it would be in English, we both noticed a feeling of frustration in their faces. However, this did not surprise us, given that we had in mind that it could easily happen. For this reason, we tried to motivate them saying that they would change their conceptions towards English during the development of the project, since we had designed highly visual elements which would surely help them to understand the concepts, regardless of their English level, as well as new technologies that would engage them a lot.

And we were not wrong. The fact of designing hands-on experiences, including technologies in every lesson and, above all, collaborating with children from another school made our students forget their initial displeasure and made them use English without even noticing it. Through the evidences we were collected daily, we have been able to see that our students learnt a good deal of both English and content related to the human body, while having fun learning! It has delighted us how our students were willing to continue with the work the next session, how they used the dictionaries without being asked to do it to look up new words to use in their videos, and how they arrived to our classes saying “I have a new idea when we record, we can act as if we were at the cinema...” or “Can we do a trip to visit the other school?” Another example was when students were

watching the other's school video. We were also inspired by their response to seeing other students working with them; they really felt the need to work with their partners and to know more about the subject matter in order to finish the project. Even the shy students who usually refrain from participating were willing to talk and share their ideas with the rest of the class. These little details are the ones which make us feel proud of our time and dedication to this project.

Of course, it cannot be denied that some challenges have arisen during the implementation of such an innovative project. One of our biggest fears regarded using the cameras. We were not sure if students would treat the gadgets appropriately or if they would just touch everything and lose the focus of the task. In the first session, we had some problems with the cameras, since all the students wanted to record themselves and they got side-tracked a bit from the purpose of the activity. This made us lose a lot of time, but luckily we could finish all the activities planned. At the beginning of the next session we reflected on this issue with our students, who realized that the most important thing was not to record, but to have time to practice their speech to be able to send it to the other school. Luckily, in the next sessions students were so engaged in the tasks that they did not feel the need to find amusement elsewhere, a fact which made us proud of our activities design.

Another fear was the level of noise that typically occurs in this type of lesson. In the first session, it was a bit difficult to keep the rest of the class quiet while a group was recording, since this was something new and really engaging for them. However, and from the first session on, this problem was reduced as we made them see the result: lots of students were talking behind them, so the recording was not clear enough for their partners to understand it. They immediately saw that there was a real reason for them to be quiet and thereafter the recordings increasingly more accurate.

Another challenge we experienced was the roles distribution. Neither one of us had much experience with managing group work in a class before and much less with assigned roles, so we were not sure about the reaction the students' would have. In the first sessions it was a bit complicated for students to understand that everyone would end up performing each role. So they all wanted to be "technicians" from the very beginning and it was not easy to try to calm them down. In the following sessions, as they saw that the roles were rotating, this problem disappeared.

Added to that, it should not be forgotten that the implementation of such an approach calls for a good deal of preliminary preparation and planning, since teachers face the dual challenge of covering both communicative

and disciplinary competencies. This goes hand in hand with the next hurdle we would like to raise, which focuses on the risk of trivializing either the subject matter or the foreign language in an attempt to ensure that all the students understand and acquire everything. As we see it, breaking down large amounts of information into smaller tasks due to the students' lower command of English can be greatly beneficial to aid them to understand tasks, but lowering down significant levels of the subject matter can give room to underachievement of basic knowledge. It seemed to us that the solution to this issue could be found through the careful design of scaffolding, which provides children the necessary assistance to bridge the gap between what they cannot do without help and what they can do autonomously. The use of authentic materials, visual organisers, substitution tables and word banks, the diagrammatic representation of information, understanding through seeing, or responding through doing are outstanding resources that we have used to offer students this additional support that they undoubtedly needed to understand others and to make themselves understood in a foreign language. Presenting the tasks in an attractive way for children, through games or interactive activities has also been fundamental to counterbalance the cognitive demands that entails giving a lesson in a foreign language. In fact, learning by playing games involves further engagement in cognitive learning and is also an exceptional way of making everyone participate, so this is something we are very proud of as regards our project design and materials.

Finally, arranging our schedules was something difficult too. Doing this project entailed a good deal of coordination between both schools, since we needed each other's videos to complete our information during the different sessions. This was very stressful at first, since we had to ensure we implemented the lessons the same days. In fact, we first planned to do a synchronous telecollaboration in the fifth session but it became impossible because we could not coincide in time. However, in the end we were able to create a sense of group cohesion with only asynchronous exchanges.

After having implemented the teaching sequence, we both agree that we are flooded with a feeling of pride and satisfaction. Yes, we have done it! At the beginning, when we decided to jump into this project, we felt quite nervous and afraid of failure. However, the support we gave each other constantly, the time we have devoted to making the most of the experience and all our combined effort have yielded outstanding results.

Despite the abovementioned challenges, what cannot be denied is how satisfied we feel now. After having implemented this teaching unit,

we have definitely come to the conclusion that the activities that language teachers must promote need to be communicative, contextualized and meaningful for the learners. Telecollaboration can involve investigation and discussion between different groups of learners in order to produce a final product that aims to answer the question of the project, thereby promoting collaboration and interaction, while making the most of ‘authentic’ communicative opportunities.

What is more, this type of ‘digital’ communication is precisely one of the skills presently required for the future working force, so, why not let them start now?

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