1 Telecollaboration for intercultural foreign language conversations in secondary school contexts: Task design and pedagogic implementation

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1 Summary

This TILA report addresses issues of task design and pedagogic implementation for intercultural telecollaboration exchanges between secondary school pupils from different countries. It is based on case studies of three telecollaboration scenarios: tandem conversations in 3D world environments in OpenSim, lingua franca conversations in 3D world environments in OpenSim, and lingua franca conversations in a multimodal environment combining video communication in BigBlueButton with chat and forum in Moodle. These scenarios are distinguished by relevant task design features including topic selection, blended learning task ensemble, tandem and lingua franca constellations, telecollaboration tools and communication modes, and physical locations. Pupils’ performance data, feedback comments from teachers and pupils as well as participant observations provide insights into the workings of these task design features and their affordances for intercultural communication practice:

Topics that enable pupils to talk about their own experiences, likes and dislikes, and opinions are generally well suited to foster authentic communication. Worksheets or posters with guiding questions, keywords or controversial statements help stimulate the interaction. Pupils should also be encouraged to discuss topics that come up spontaneously.

Telecollaboration exchanges require embedding in blended learning ensembles. In a preparatory phase, teachers need to make sure that their pupils are sufficiently familiar with the tools to be used. As regards the conversation topics, an evenly balanced preparation on both sides is of key importance. In a follow-up phase (in class or in a forum), pupils should be guided to reflect on their telecollaboration experience with the aim of raising awareness for the challenges of intercultural interaction, fostering openness and curiosity, and critically revising one’s own attitudes. Learning diaries and portfolios help them become more autonomous in both intercultural communication and learning; they help teachers improve pedagogic assessment and feedback.

Tandem constellations are in line with a general preference in foreign language teaching for communication with naive speakers. Challenges were observed regarding organisation of matching school classes, helping pupils to act as native speaker experts, and switching between the two languages involved. It seems advisable to adopt the “one session, one language” principle at least in the initial stages of pupils’ tandem telecollaboration experience. Lingua franca constellations, on the other hand,

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2 Disclaimer: The TILA project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This report reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.
can be highly motivating since they offer authentic communication on an equal footing. Pupils seem to feel more confident and less worried to make mistakes; focus is on getting the message across.

The telecollaboration tools available in TILA support all communication modes relevant for intercultural foreign language communication. As regards intercultural communicative competence development, oral communication seems to be particularly strong and attractive particularly because of its positive effects on pupils’ fluency and confidence. It should be emphasized, however, that the various communication tools and modes have their respective strengths and pedagogic values. A multimodal approach, including telecollaboration from home, thus seems to be best suited for serving the full range of intercultural communicative skills required as well as for coping with adverse conditions in schools’ computer labs for spoken interactions.

The pedagogic affordances offered by telecollaboration exchanges open up new ways for intercultural foreign language learning beyond the limitations of the physical classroom. For pedagogically sustainable solutions, however, it is essential to make telecollaboration part of the regular curriculum. At the same time, teachers should be aware of the scaffolding needs of weaker and intrinsically less motivated pupils as well as of their own needs for continuous professional development.

2 Objectives and approach

In the context of our study, it is helpful to distinguish between pedagogic objectives and research objectives. In all TILA telecollaboration exchanges, the overall pedagogic objective is to enable pupils from different countries and cultural backgrounds to meet in pairs or small groups and to engage in communicative and intercultural foreign language interaction. This objective is based on the insight that communication should not only be the goal of learning but also its medium. Opportunities for authentic and spontaneous intercultural communication practice are thus considered to be of key pedagogic importance; and telecollaboration tasks are designed and implemented for creating such opportunities beyond the natural limitations of the physical classroom. Our study’s overall research objective is to try out and explore various options for TILA task design and implementation in a series of telecollaboration exchanges (Hoffstaedter & Kohn, 2014; Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2015) in order to reach a better understanding of the issues involved and to be able to formulate guidelines for teachers. Concerning task design for intercultural telecollaboration also see O’Dowd & Ware, 2009 and Thomas & Reinders, 2010.

When designing tasks and activities for intercultural telecollaboration between pupils in secondary schools, a network of complementary and interacting shaping forces needs to be considered (Figure 1). To facilitate case study glimpses into the workings of these forces and their impact on the nature and quality of the pupils’ intercultural communicative interactions, various manifestations of telecollaboration exchanges were set up that incorporate relevant manifestations of topics and task ensembles, communication modes and telecollaboration tools, pedagogic language constellations, and physical locations.
The following sets of empirical data\(^3\) were available for analysing the telecollaboration exchanges of this study with regard to the impact of the respective shaping forces they incorporate:

- recordings and transcripts of pupils’ oral and written communicative performances,
- results from pupils’ user experience questionnaires,
- feedback interviews with the teachers and pupils,
- participant observations during implementation and coaching of the telecollaboration exchanges.

### 3 Telecollaboration scenarios

This study focuses on three different telecollaboration scenarios in which pupils communicate in a 3D world environment based on OpenSim (scenarios A and B), or in a multimodal set-up combining the video communication environment BigBlueButton with chat and forum/blog facilities on the TILA Moodle (scenario C).

\(^3\) The user experience questionnaire and the interview questions can be found in the appendix.
The telecollaboration exchanges involved tandem interactions between native and non-native speaker pupils (scenario A) or lingua franca interactions between pupils who were all non-native speakers of the respective target language and language of communication (scenarios B and C). The physical location varied as well: in scenario A, the OpenSim environment was accessed from the schools’ computer rooms during class hours; in scenarios B and C, pupils met outside class hours either from a computer in school or from their home computer.

The thematic focus of the telecollaboration exchanges was on everyday topics of rather low intercultural saturation such as “waste disposal and prevention”, “eating habits and vegetarian diet”, “fashion”, “Christmas” or “new technologies and social media”. This orientation is in line with an interactional understanding of intercultural communication. Pupils should mainly draw on personal experiences, likes and dislikes, and opinions in order to be able to engage in preferably spontaneous and natural conversations similar to the ones in private encounters.

All telecollaboration tasks are embedded in a blended learning ensemble that generally consist of a preparatory phase, a telecollaborative main phase, and a follow-up phase. In the main phase, the primary focus is on intercultural telecollaboration exchanges in the respective telecollaboration environment. This may include e.g. synchronous spoken communication in a 3D virtual world environment in OpenSim or in a video communication room of BigBlueButton, synchronous written communication in a Moodle chat room, or asynchronous written communication in a Moodle forum/blog. The preparatory phase involves tasks that help prepare the ground for the main telecollaborative event. Preparatory tasks may in particular concern a selection of the following pedagogic objectives:

- knowledge development within each country/culture group
- introduction or exploration of relevant means of expressions
- exploratory discussions within each country/culture group
- induction to the technological environment and tools
- introduction of the telecollaboration task and procedures

Preparatory activities usually take place in the classroom and may be combined with forum posts and upload of resources in the Moodle course. In the follow-up phase, pupils are typically engaged in activities designed to securing learning results. They present and discuss outcomes from their telecollaboration activities in class and reflect on their experiences individually or in small groups, with or without teacher involvement. In this connection, learning diaries and e-portfolios have their place.
The table below provides an overview of the telecollaborative pilot units analysed and discussed in this report.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overview of telecollaboration scenarios</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical environment</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scenario A</strong> During class hours PC lab at school</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Scenario B</strong> Outside class hours PC at school</td>
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<td><strong>Scenario C</strong> Outside class hours At home</td>
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3.1 **Scenario A: Tandem conversations in OpenSim**

A tandem exchange was implemented in three telecollaboration sessions in OpenSim, each involving a French class learning German and a German class learning French. The pupils were between 14 and 15 years old and their level of proficiency was A2/B1. The topic of the first unit was waste disposal and waste prevention; the second unit was dedicated to questions concerning food with a special emphasis on a vegetarian diet; and the third unit had a fashion topic. Each unit consisted of a preparation phase in class, a telecollaboration session in OpenSim and a follow-up phase during which experiences from the telecollaboration session were presented and discussed in class or in a forum in Moodle.

For their telecollaboration session, the French and German pupils met in pairs during class hours and accessed OpenSim from the school computer room. The conversations were stimulated by posters, which served as “learning stations” displaying topic-related pictures, images and texts. Whereas the poster content for the first two sessions was selected or created by the teachers, the posters for the fashion unit consisted of pictures the participating pupils took of themselves in their favourite outfits.
A French and a German poster from the session on waste disposal and waste prevention

A French and a German poster from the session “Veggieday – a day without meat”.

Pupils were asked to take notes during their telecollaboration session to be able to discuss the results of their exchange in the follow-up phase in class and in a forum. For the fashion topic, pupils had a worksheet with keywords that provided guidance for their conversation in OpenSim.
To avoid sound problems, presumably caused by network overload, the number of parallel telecollaboration pairs had to be reduced so that only 4 to 6 pupils were able to take part in the actual telecollaboration in OpenSim (see 3.4.6).

Regarding the two tandem languages involved, two options were explored. In the first two telecollaboration sessions, pupils switched between German and French during the respective session. The language switch was triggered by the language of the posters set up in OpenSim. Three posters in German and three posters in French were placed in the environment; the pupils went from poster to poster and were required to communicate in the language of the respective poster. The third session did not have an internal language shift. It was entirely dedicated to German as the target language for the French pupils.
3.2 Scenario B: Lingua franca conversations in OpenSim

Telecollaboration scenario B represents a lingua franca constellation in which pupils from the Netherlands and the UK meet in an OpenSim environment to communicate in their common target language German. The pupils were 17 years old and their level of proficiency was B1. The session took place before the Christmas break, and the pupils were asked to talk about whether and how they celebrate Christmas and to plan a “virtual” international Christmas Party. As in scenario A, pupils began with a session in class with preparatory tasks; they then met in pairs or small groups of three in a relaxed café environment in OpenSim. The discussion was not supported by posters; the pupils used a worksheet instead.

For the OpenSim session, the pupils met outside class hours working from a computer or laptop in school. They were matched in pairs by their teachers and were then asked to use the Moodle forum to arrange a date for their meeting. In the OpenSim environment, the pupils were accompanied by a member of the TILA team who recorded the conversation and also provided support in the case of technical problems.

Worksheet with a task description for the OpenSim meeting (scenario B)
3.3 Scenario C: Lingua franca conversations using a multimodal approach

Telecollaboration scenario C was implemented for two different telecollaboration exchanges in the lingua franca format but with German or English, respectively, as the target language. In both exchanges, the pupils met in pairs outside class hours accessing the telecollaboration environment from home. The available communication tools were bundled in a multimodal set including the video communication platform BigBlueButton as well as chat and forum/blog in the TILA Moodle.

In the first telecollaboration unit (C1), a class of French pupils (who had already taken part in the scenario A sessions, see chap. 3.3.1) and a class of Dutch pupils interacted in their common target language German. The pupils were 14 or 15 years old and their level of proficiency was between A2 and B1. To accommodate their technological preferences and/or technological infrastructures available at home, the pupils could choose between synchronous oral communication sessions in BigBlueButton or asynchronous written communication in a Moodle forum.

The pupils were given a list of conversation topics to choose from (see below). They were matched in pairs according to their thematic and technological preferences. Pupils who met in BigBlueButton were supposed to choose and talk about five different topics; pupils communicating in the forum were asked to address three topics.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic options:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Selling alcohol to teenagers: at the age of 16, 18 or 21 – opinion + argument(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Buying clothes: should you consider where clothes are produced – yes / no – Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Compulsory school attendance: should one be more strict with kids who skip school – yes / no – arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. School life: what I like and what I don’t like about my school – examples and suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Meals: food in the school canteen – opinion – suggestions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. A vending machine in school (e.g. for hot and cold drinks, snacks or sweets: good idea? / better not? – arguments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

List of topics for pupils to choose from

Pupils who met in BigBlueButton were also required to arrange a time for their meeting by email.

The second telecollaboration unit (C2) was in the lingua franca format as well. It involved pupils from a school in Germany and a French school in Spain communicating in their common target language English. The topic was about new technologies and social media. The pupils talked about the social media they used, how important computers and mobile phones were for their daily lives, and whether new technologies and social media were a curse or a blessing (see below). They were provided with a worksheet, in which they were asked to note down their own answers and the answers of their partners as input for the follow-up discussion in class.
Questions for the discussions on new technologies and social media

The pupils had to contact their partners by email and arrange a time for their meeting in BigBlueButton or in the Moodle chat room. Those who tried to meet in BigBlueButton but encountered technical problems were asked to switch to their chat room in Moodle. Partners who were not able to agree on a time slot for an online meeting in BigBlueButton or the Moodle chat were supposed to use the Moodle discussion forum. This multimodal arrangement of three different telecollaboration options ensured that all pupils were able to participate in the telecollaboration task.

4 Analysis of task design and pedagogic implementation

Based on an analysis of the available empirical data including performance recordings, pupils’ user experience questionnaires, feedback interviews with teachers and pupils, and participant observations, the three telecollaboration scenarios will now be discussed with regard to relevant issues of task design and pedagogical implementation. Particular emphasis will be given to topic selection, topic and conversational interaction, the intercultural dimension, preparatory and follow-up tasks, tandem and lingua franca as well as telecollaboration tools, modes of communication and locations.

4.1 Topic selection

When trying to engage pupils in authentic communication with an emphasis on intercultural interaction, it is of crucial importance to find and create topics pupils can relate to and engage with spontaneously. These were the topics addressed in the three telecollaboration scenarios under investigation:

- Waste disposal and waste prevention (scenario A)
- A vegetarian diet (scenario A)
- Fashion (scenario A and C)
- Christmas festivities (scenario B)
- New technologies and social media (scenario C)
- Favourite meals and meals offered in the school canteen (scenario C)
- Selling alcohol to teenagers (scenario C)
- School life (scenario C)
- Homework (scenario C)

Apart from “Waste disposal and waste prevention” and some aspects of “A vegetarian diet” and “New technologies and social media”, the topics did not require any specialized background knowledge. It was generally sufficient for the pupils to draw on personal experiences, likes, dislikes, habits, and opinions. In
addition, results from the user experience questionnaires provide evidence of an overall positive self-assessment. Pupils who participated in the French-German tandem exchange (scenario A) on the topics “Waste disposal and waste prevention”, “A vegetarian diet” and “Fashion” said that they were satisfied with their communicative interactions; they were able to make themselves understood; and they managed to speak fluently and to express what they wanted to say (Figure 2).

![Pupils' evaluation of their communication](image)

Figure 2: Self-assessment of pupils participating in the OpenSim French-German tandem exchange in scenario A (Value range: 5 = I agree; 1 = I do not agree)

Overall, there was no difference between pupils’ assessment of their communication with regard to the three topics. One of the French pupils, however, said that even though the topic on waste disposal and waste prevention was very interesting, he found it easier to talk about a topic like fashion because it enabled him to talk about himself. His view was echoed by the Dutch teacher, who confirmed that pupils liked to talk about topics they could personally relate to.

Both teachers involved in telecollaboration scenario C/unit 1 (in which pupils were given a selection of topics to choose from) emphasized that it was positive for the pupils to be able to select from a range of topics, and they agreed that the number and choice of topics was just right:

„Ja, das war genau richtig. Also es war nicht so viel, dass sie sich nicht entscheiden konnten. Aber sie hatten eine bestimmte Wahl. Also ich fand das echt goldrichtig. Genau die richtige Form, richtigen Themen, richtige Menge.“ (Scenario C1_teacher_NL)

The French teacher commented that pupils found the questions very interesting and, quite importantly, that the discussion continued even later in class:

„Ja, die Themen haben sie interessiert. Also es gab auch später dann in der Klasse so Diskussionen darüber. Also das waren schon Themen, bei denen sie viele Fragen und auch viele verschiedene Meinungen hatten. Also insofern glaube ich, dass es gut war.“ (Scenario C1_teacher_FR)

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4 See interview with a French pupil (Scenario A_student_FR1) from French-German tandem exchange
4.2 Topic and communicative interaction

Posters in OpenSim with pictures, questions or controversial statements (scenario A) or worksheets with keywords or questions addressing certain aspects of the respective topic (scenarios A, B and C) were intended to stimulate the communicative interactions. Did this prove successful? In their communication, all pupils used the communication prompts provided; and these prompts also seemed to help them start a communication and keep the interaction going.

In the BigBlueButton conversations about new technologies and social media (scenario C, unit 2), one of the pupils would usually start the communication by reading the first topic question, which was then followed by a spontaneous reply from the other pupil. In the same way they would then read and discuss the other questions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question 1:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ES3:</strong> So, what do you want to start?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DE3:</strong> Well, which social media do you use?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ES3:</strong> (laughs) I use erm, well, Google erm well all kind of like YouTube, Google, Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr. I mean everything.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DE3:</strong> Ok (laughs). Well, I only use Google and Facebook because my father doesn’t want us to use things like Twitter or WhatsApp. <em>He is &lt;break&gt;</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>etc. (12 follow-up turns)</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question 2:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DE3:</strong> Yeah. Erm I have another question. What would it mean to you to be without a computer or smartphone for a day, week or month, or longer?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ES3:</strong> I could be a week without a phone because I went with friends erm out of country. There was no internet, so we were like for a week and I mean it was great. But for a month I don’t think I could be a month without a computer or phone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DE3:</strong> Well, yeah. For a week maybe without a computer or maybe for two weeks and when I am erh vacation or camp or something but for a month I am not sure. Because me too like &lt;break&gt; I watch a lot movies and without a computer it would be (ES3 laughs) pretty hard. (end of exchange on this question)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Question 3:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ES3:</strong> Yeah. Mm. Do you think new technologies, social media communication (?) choose (?) blessing or curse or a curse?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>DE3:</strong> (?) It is true (?). I see a lot of kids in the first grade with their IPhone and it is bigger than their own head and I think that is pretty crazy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ES3:</strong> Yeah, yeah. Like I see &lt;break&gt; yeah like children like eleven years old and they have an IPhone and they have an IPad and they have a computer. I mean at that age I didn’t even know how that worked, so.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>... (7 follow-up turns)</td>
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Example 1: Extract from Scenario C2, EN11_BBB3_DE3_ES3

This kind of procedure of going through the various topic questions could also be observed in the written chat conversations on the same topic some pupils engaged in because BigBlueButton was not accessible for them. Pupils would pose a question from the worksheet, discuss it, and then move on to the next question (Example 2 below).
15:09: Mariya has just entered this chat
15:09: Jana has just entered this chat
15:10 DE6: Hello
15:10 ES6: Hi
15:11 DE6: Let’s discuss the questions

**Question 1**
15:11 DE6: Which media do you use?
15:12 ES6: I use lot’s of social medias
15:12 ES6: and you?
   etc (6 follow-up turns)

**Question 2**
15:17 DE6: What do you like or dislike about these media?
15:20 ES6: About Facebook I don’t like mostly the ads and that in your news feed you have so many posts of your friends, there is one thing I don’t like about whatsapp that the first year it’s free but than you have to pay
   etc (3 follow-up turns)

**Question 3**
15:26 DE6: What would it mean to you to be without a computer or smartphone for a certain period of time?
15:28 ES6: I am so addicted to my phone, not so much to my computer
   etc (3 follow-up turns)

**Question 4**
15:42 DE6: Next question: do you think new technologies and social media are a blessing or a curse?
15:45 ES6: In my opinion it’s blessing because you can communicate with the people all over the world but it’s also a curse because you can be addict
15:46 ES6: what do you think?
   etc (14 follow-up turns)
16:15 DE6: I have to finish soon. I think we’ve discussed the important things
16:18 DE6: Goodbye!
16:18 ES6: Bye!

Example 2: Extract from Scenario C2, EN11_Chat2_DE6_ES6

The pupils’ communicative performance in these two environments differed in interesting ways. Whereas the written chat communication tended to be very much focused on completing the actual task by discussing the specified topic questions, the oral communication environment BigBlueButton usually encouraged spontaneous exchanges on additional topics. Such thematic digressions occurred before, after or while discussing the questions set in the task. In the following example from a discussion
in BigBlueButton on “New technologies and social media”, the communicative exchange between a girl from Spain (ES3) and a girl from Germany (DE3) about the given topic lasted less than 10 minutes. During the remaining 35 minutes, the pupils talked about other topics they seemed genuinely interested in.

After the end of the “official” part, the Spanish girl asks a personal standard question:

ES3: Erm, (laughs) *so* where do you live? Well, where do you live in Germany? I can *(unclear)*.

The German girl answers her partner’s question and then immediately directs the conversation towards movies:

DE3: *Well.* South and well in Baden-Württemberg. It is like something like a big part of Germany. In the south west, I think. Well. Yes. (They both laugh). I am not good at Geography. So, Erm, you like watching movies or?

With this question they plunged into a very lively and enthusiastic conversation about movies, TV series and books. They told each other what they liked or didn’t like and then continued to touch on questions around school, family background and holidays. At the end of their conversation, they befriended each other on Facebook.

In her feedback interview, the German pupil said she was very happy with the conversation. She emphasized that she and her partner got along very well and that they were less focused on the original task but talked more about themselves and private things instead:

"Also ich war sehr zufrieden. Ich mein’, wir haben uns echt gut verstanden und es war zwar eher so, dass wir uns weniger auf die Aufgabe konzentriert haben, sondern mehr auf uns selber und so über private Sachen geredet haben, aber <break> Also ich war sehr zufrieden mit dem Gespräch." (Scenario C2_pupil DE3)

Concerning the worksheet with specified questions she said it gave them a certain structure, which she found very helpful. But she also made clear that it was good that the structure was not too tight so that they could also talk about other things as well.

"Ja hätt, hätte ich jetzt <break> also hätte ich das Blatt nicht gehabt, dann hätten wir wahrscheinlich überhaupt nicht über das Thema geredet, also es war schon gut so ein Blatt zu haben. […] wir hatten halt wirklich nur dieses Blatt, was uns so ein bisschen Struktur gegeben hat und eine Zeitangabe, wie lange wir se reden sollen und dann ging das halt einfach ganz leicht, man hat halt die Frage gestellt, dann hat der andere seine Meinung gesagt, man selbst hat seine Meinung gesagt und dann konnte man noch ein bisschen darüber reden und <break> also ein bisschen Struktur ist gut, aber zu viel Struktur wäre dann glaub wieder zu schlecht gewesen. […] Also, ich weiß jetzt nicht so genau, was man noch verbessern könnte, aber ich fand’s eigentlich recht gut so wie’s ist, einfach, dass man ein Thema hat, worüber man reden soll, aber ja man trotzdem irgendwie auch über andere Dinge reden soll." (Scenario C2_pupil DE3)

Other pupils also commented on switching to their “own” topics:
And we well mostly talked about ourselves instead of doing the task. But I think it is a good thing.” (Scenario C2_pupil ES2)

The pupils were also asked whether they had the feeling that the tasks had a positive effect on the development of their communicative skills. In connection with oral communication in BigBlueButton, several pupils mentioned the advantage of being immersed in authentic conversations:

“It does help us to learn English because we use it in real situation, I would say. Like in class you know that it is like with friends nothing will happen, but here ... I think it is good because it puts us in a real situation. So just to see how we will be able to talk in a real situation.” (Scenario C2_pupil ES2)

Another pupil mentioned that communicating with peers from another country had a positive effect because they had to speak English since it is the only language they both had in common. She compared this with speaking English in the classroom and said that it feels strange to her because everybody knows German:


The same pupil also noticed that they communicated more fluently and without thinking too much about how to express what they wanted to say. They just started and tried to get their message across.

„Das hat einen schon weiter gebracht, wenn man einfach dieses Denken und Reden dann schneller eingeübt hat und das einfach schneller ging als sonst, weil sonst sitzt man so da: 'Warte, wie heißt das nochmal? Wie heißt das?' und *dann* <break> und dann sagt man's erst. Und deswegen es hat schon was gebracht. “ (Scenario C2_pupil DE3)

Other pupils mentioned that in the course of the telecollaboration they became more confident with their English despite inevitable mistakes

„Auch wenn dann am Anfang einfach Fehler dabei sind, aber irgendwann wird man so ein bisschen sicherer, find ich.“ (Scenario C2_pupil DE1)

Being understood by their conversation partner also had a positive effect on pupils’ confidence:

„Auch so mit dem Selbstbewusstsein, weil man gemerkt hat: 'Oh, okay man versteht mich, wenn ich Englisch rede. Ich kann jetzt Englisch reden'.“ (Scenario C2_pupil DE3)

Pupils were, however, aware that telecollaborative exchanges would need to take place on a more regular basis to have a real impact on learning outcomes:

„... wenn das man es öfter wiederholen würde, dass sich dieser Effekt einfach weiter einfach ausbauen würde. Es war einfach jetzt mehr ne Erfahrung als dass es jetzt viel gebracht hat.“ (Scenario C2_pupil DE2)

„Also so <break> Ich mein, wie gesagt, das Selbstbewusstsein steigt einfach mit jeder Unterhaltung und man fühlt sich immer sicherer in der Sprache und das Denken geht
The learning potential of regular telecollaborative interactions was seen by teachers as well:

“[It would have a positive effect] if we can make it a routine ** yeah yeah. Um of course anything like this can always work on individuals if it if it sparks a new friendship or some new interests or something.” (Scenario C2_teacher_DE)

But teachers also noticed that stronger and more proficient pupils seem to profit more than less motivated or less eager ones. They emphasized the importance of finding ways to ensure that all pupils can benefit from the opportunity to communicate with peers from another country:

“Seeing the names [of pupils who participated in the oral communication in BBB as opposed to others who did not meet] & also from the feedback I got in class, an unpleasant -but not new - thought is occurring to me is that such projects involving personal motivation outside class will benefit the best pupils, the most serious or capable ones. As such it jeopardises some of our objectives.” (extract from an email feedback exchange with the teacher; Scenario C2_teacher_ES)

“… and of course it is very good but in terms of linguistic improvement. I would very much wish that the others the ones who are not so able would find a motivation eh with you know having an authentic contact with a with a speaker and you know wanting to do more. ** But that’s still to come, I think.” (extract from a feedback conversation with the teacher - Scenario C2_teacher_ES)

A more diversified and individualized pedagogic approach is obviously needed to help weaker and less motivated pupils to become involved in and to profit from intercultural telecollaboration exchanges. Suitable scaffolding may, for instance, include moving from clearly defined short tasks to more open and spontaneous ones, starting with controlled written exchanges in a forum or chat before tackling spoken exchanges in BigBlueButton, or teaming pupils up with a more proficient classmate before asking them to engage in a telecollaboration on their own.

4.3 The intercultural dimension

In TILA, conversations are generally considered intercultural because of the communicative involvement of pupils from different countries and lingua-cultural settings. Intercultural content is not in the foreground; it is considered a means to an end, which is the intercultural interaction. Preference is thus given to topics that are within the reach of pupils’ own experiences and opinions, and have a natural potential for triggering spontaneous conversations without the need for additional knowledge development phases. An orientation towards soft intercultural topics such as “fashion”, “eating habits” is, however, of value since it makes pupils curious about their partners and helps them to discover and become aware of interpersonal and intercultural differences and similarities.

Not surprisingly, the Christmas topic in telecollaboration scenario B was ideal for this purpose. Because of pupils’ different religious backgrounds and family routines within the same country, this topic already triggered animated intercultural discussions during the preparatory session in class. Yet, pupils were also
able to discover intercultural differences when discussing the topics in telecollaboration scenario A. All pupils said they learned something about the other country or culture when talking about vegetarian diet and eating habits or fashion. Only with regard to the topic on waste disposal, one pupil indicated in the questionnaire that she was not able to learn anything about the other pupil’s life and culture (value: 2). This opinion might be due to how the topic was actually discussed, since the issue of waste disposal is generally likely to raise intercultural controversies. All pupils, however, expressed their communicative satisfaction: they enjoyed communicating with their partners and found the communication motivating. (Figure 3).

According to the French teacher, the pupils were very interested in the topics and continued asking questions in the follow-up sessions in class. She even had the impression that most of the intercultural differences were discussed in the follow-up session and not so much in the telecollaborative interaction between the pupils. This was the case in the units on waste disposal and vegetarian or vegan diet:

„Und das war das Gleiche mit Ernährung, also dieses Vegan-Konzept. Die haben so viel dann gefragt, also was soll das heißen und wie … und ich glaube nicht, dass sie in der Interaktion davon gesprochen haben. Also wir haben uns dann noch ein Video angeschaut […] über so einen veganen Jungen; und das hat sie super interessiert.“ (Scenario_A_teacher_FR)

It seems that some pupils became aware of intercultural differences during the interaction with their partners and then wanted to learn more afterwards.
4.4 Preparatory and follow-up tasks

The TILA telecollaboration exchanges confirmed that it is crucially important that the actual telecollaboration sessions are embedded in blended learning ensembles (Kohn, 2009) with substantial preparatory and follow-up activities in class.

The amount of preparation for the main telecollaboration phase varied depending on the pupils’ familiarity with the topic and their level of proficiency. A topic like “waste disposal and prevention” usually required additional background knowledge and thus more preparation than a topic like “fashion”, which pupils could easily discuss drawing on their likes and dislikes and personal opinions. The extent of preparation also depends on the level of language proficiency. Pupils at A2 level might need preparation for any topic because they lack useful words and phrases, whereas pupils at B1 are already proficient enough to tackle unfamiliar topics. Preparatory tasks might also be helpful for broadening pupils’ views on a certain topic and for encouraging them to think about questions and possible replies.

The pupils themselves have relatively clear ideas about the kind of preparation they need. Two pupils who took part in the tandem telecollaborations in scenario A were asked whether they found it important to be prepared for a telecollaboration exchange. One of them said that for him the preparation for the unit on “waste disposal and prevention” was particularly helpful because he did not know enough about this topic and was not familiar with the required vocabulary. Even for a topic like “fashion”, however, which he considered more easily accessible because of being able to talk about his personal likes and dislikes, he considered a preparation in class quite useful since it gave him ideas and an orientation for the conversation. Another pupil from the same telecollaboration exchange also said it was important to be prepared, but she added that the preparation should be such that it would not inhibit a natural and spontaneous conversation.

Due to time restrictions, it was not always easy to cover all phases in both participating classes. Sometimes, for instance, one of the teachers did not have enough time for the preparatory phase because of an upcoming exam. A lack of preparation, however, tended to have negative effects on the telecollaboration. It happened, for instance, that the communication became one-sided because one of the pupils did not know what to say. When asked why the communication in two of the sessions did not go very well, one of the French pupils said it was because her partner was not sufficiently prepared. On the other hand, pupils who lacked preparation sometimes felt uncomfortable when they noticed that their partner was better prepared for the task than themselves. One pupil mentioned she would have preferred being on the same level with the other pupil so that they would both either know something about the topic or nothing:

„Also bei uns war’s ja jetzt so, dass sie hält echt schon Einiges im Unterricht hatte und ich halt nicht und deswegen waren wir so auf unterschiedlichen Stufen, aber <break> Es <break> Also hät <break> ich hätte es nicht schlimm gefunden, wenn sie auch nichts gewusst hätte, weil’s, wie gesagt, ein Thema ist, da muss man jetzt nicht in der Schule lernen, wie’s funktioniert, ** aber einfach vielleicht ein paar Infos mehr oder so wären vielleicht schon ganz gut gewesen, oder sie halt auch weniger“ (Scenario C2_pupil DE1)

Some of the pupils who participated in the telecollaboration on “New technologies and social media” in BigBlueButton (scenario C, unit 2) and who were all able to communicate fluently in English said they found it better not to prepare to much so that the communication would be spontaneous. One pupil
mentioned that it was difficult to prepare for this kind of conversation and pointed out that in real communication people needed be able to communicate without being prepared and also had to learn to cope with a lack of vocabulary:

“Im normalen Alltag muss man ja auch damit umgehen können, dass man ein Wort nicht weiß.“ (Scenario C3_pupil DE2)

Another pupil expressed the view that preparing for the task would make the conversation less spontaneous and authentic:

„dann wird das so eine steife Unterhaltung und das ist ja nicht echt und das ist ja auch nicht Zweck der Sache quasi“ (Scenario C2_pupil DE3)

“hätte der [Lehrer] uns jetzt noch drauf vorbereitet dann <break> wie gesagt, dann wäre es so unecht geworden und so steif, deswegen. Ich fand’s eigentlich so gut.“ (Scenario C2_pupil DE3)

For the respective teachers, it seems necessary to find a good balance regarding how they prepare their pupils; they need to agree on how they want to proceed; and they should involve their pupils in the process.

Besides the thematic preparation it is also essential to familiarise the pupils with the learning platform (e.g. Moodle) and the telecollaboration tools they are going to use. Teachers and pupils often underestimated the amount of induction required. A pupil who participated in the German lingua franca exchange in OpenSim (Scenario B_pupil_NL1) complained about the lack of technical preparation and support. She said she liked the thematic support they got in class but would have needed more help with the technical side of the project.

In addition to facilitating communicative practice, telecollaboration activities create a relevant potential for incidental language learning, in particular when pupils notice communication problems and try to solve them. Most of these opportunities, however, are rather fleeting; they tend to fade away unless measures are taken to pick them up and further explore the issues involved. This is where the follow-up phase has its place, whose overall function is to reflect on the pupils’ experiences from the intercultural interactions and to secure and consolidate learning results. The need for following up on the telecollaborative exchange became most evident when teachers reported that pupils continued asking questions after the telecollaboration and that most of the intercultural differences were discussed in the follow-up session in class (see 3.4.3). Sharing and discussing outcomes of the conversation with classmates (in small groups or with the whole class) seems very important for enlarging upon and consolidating issues addressed during the interaction. In all scenarios, the tasks required pupils to take notes during or immediately after the conversation. They were, for instance, asked to note down the gist of what their partners said. These notes, and maybe also occasionally looking at recordings, help to support and enrich the collaborative explorations and reflective discussions in class or in a forum.

It is generally important to talk about pupils’ experiences and help them to make best use of the opportunities provided in their interactions. A Spanish pupil, for instance, who had participated in the discussion on new technologies and social media (scenario C2) mentioned in the feedback interview that his German partner was very curious and had asked many questions that had nothing to do with the
He said he was not sure whether this was okay; but when he later talked about this issue with his teacher, she explained that it was good to be curious:

"He wanted to learn things about me very fastly but I think he is just curious and I think it is just a bad thing like we talked with this <break> about this with my teacher and she said that on the opposite, it was good to be curious. So I think yeah it is good. Me too, I wanted to know things about him. I was maybe little bit more reversed." (Scenario C2_pupil ES2)

This incident indicates how important it is for pupils’ to reflect on their telecollaboration experiences. Follow-up sessions give teachers the opportunity to address attitudes like curiosity, openness and empathy and to help pupils develop their intercultural awareness and competence. Reflective explorations and clarifications also enable pupils to develop responsibility for the development of their linguistic, communicative and intercultural competence (also see the concept of “languaging”, Swain, M., 2006). In this connection, learning diaries and portfolios play a key role. They can guide pupils’ reflection and also give teachers the opportunity to better assess their pupils’ learning outcomes, potential and needs.

Since telecollaboration tools often include recording options, pupils’ performance data are generally available for enriching self-reflection, assessment and feedback. Teachers could look at selected chat discussions, forum posts or recorded BigBlueButton sessions and provide a summary feedback on issues that might be relevant for the whole class. Performance recordings could also be part of exams. Pupils, on the other hand, could be asked to include successful passages from their conversations in their portfolios combined with reflective comments.

Generally, there was often not enough time for substantial follow-up sessions during the telecollaboration exchanges run in the TILA project. This was mainly because only few teachers managed to make these activities part of their regular teaching. To ensure a lasting impact on pupils’ intercultural communicative competence, however, it would be necessary to integrate telecollaboration as a regular component into the curriculum.

4.5 Tandem and lingua franca constellations

In TILA pilot courses, intercultural exchanges make use of two different types of target language constellations, tandem and lingua franca. Scenario A represents a tandem constellation, in which each of the two participating school classes has the native language of the other as their target language, i.e. the French class is learning German and the German is learning French. Scenarios B and C represent pedagogic lingua franca constellations in which two classes with different native languages share the same target language. In scenario B, pupils of a Dutch class and a British English class learn German and use it as their lingua franca; in scenario C1 pupils from France and The Netherlands also use German as their lingua franca and in scenario C2, pupils from Germany and Spain learn English and use it as their lingua franca.

These two language constellations differ in their pedagogic affordances for intercultural communication practice. In a tandem constellation, the interacting pupils switch from one of the two languages to the other either within or between sessions, thus changing from native speaker expert to learner role and back. As learners, they profit from having communication with a native speaker, whom they can also ask
for lingua-cultural help and feedback as needed and desired. As native speaker experts, they provide a lingua-cultural role model and act as a kind of teaching assistant. In addition, they can also practice accommodating their native speaker performance to the proficiency level of their respective exchange partner (Carey, 2010).

In a lingua franca constellation, the interacting pupils are non-native speakers of the same target language they want/have to learn; they are thus all in the same boat. From a traditional foreign language teaching perspective, this might easily be perceived as a disadvantage. However, when taking into account the communicative conditions under which non-native speakers are usually required to perform in real life, the lingua franca constellation appears quite close to reality. And what is more, communication with other non-native speakers, preferably of different lingua-cultural origins, also has the distinct pedagogic advantage of creating authentic and relevant opportunities for intercultural communication learning (Kohn, 2015).

In the school context, implementation of a tandem format is generally confronted with the organizational task of finding a matching partner class with the required opposite native/target language constellation. Because of a strong imbalance across Europe regarding required target languages, this task can be quite challenging. In addition, only around 50% of the time available for communication practice is in the pupils’ target language; the other half is in their native language. Considering the usually rather small number of hours devoted to foreign language learning, many teachers might see this as an obstacle for making tandem a substantial and sustainable part of their teaching. From a wider intercultural competence perspective, however, tandem has relevant pedagogic advantages: pupils are enabled to become aware of non-native speakers’ communication problems and needs, to develop and practice strategies for accommodating their native language performance to the proficiency level of their non-native communication partners, and to hone their interpersonal skills by using their native speaker expertise in collaborative processes of comprehension, production and conversation management.

Another challenge connected with tandem concerns the organisation of the language switch. In telecollaboration scenario A, two different language switch options were explored and tested: within a session (scenario A, unit 1 and unit 2) and between sessions (scenario A, unit 3).

(A) Within a telecollaboration session: pupils were supposed to speak German in front of a poster in German and they were asked to speak French when they came to a poster in French (scenario A, unit 1 and unit 2).

(B) Between telecollaboration sessions: only one of the two tandem languages, in our case German, was used throughout the entire session (scenario A, unit 3).

Despite very clear instructions, the language shift within the same session did not work very well. Pupils got easily confused and were often not sure which language to use; weaker pupils tended to resort to their native language instead of using the target language. Switching languages between sessions proved to create a more stable and immersive situation. Pupils were able to concentrate on German during the whole session, and the communicative exchange was more focused, more engaged and more fluent. From a pedagogic point of view, it thus seems advisable to adopt the “one session, one language” principle at least in the initial stages of pupils’ tandem telecollaboration experience. Once the tandem procedure has been sufficiently practiced and pupils are more familiar with how these things work,
switches within a session might be used, with pedagogic advantages for helping pupils develop their language flexibility.

A tandem constellation is clearly in line with the still prevailing preference of foreign language teaching for native speaker standards and conventions and communication with naive speakers. In this vein, the teacher from France emphasized that for her it was very important that her pupils communicated with native speakers.

"Ja, also diesen Kontakt mit Muttersprachlern finde ich schon wichtig. Also deswegen machen wir auch den Austausch." (Scenario A_teacher_FR)

Pupils participating in the French-German tandem in scenario A also said they liked to communicate with native speakers of their target language; and they liked their role as native speaker experts in their communication with pupils from another country.

The same teacher and three of the French pupils later participated in the German lingua franca exchange with Dutch pupils in scenario C1. It is very interesting to notice that the unfamiliar lingua franca condition positively affected and changed both the pupils’ and the teacher’s attitude. The previously sceptical teacher was surprised by the nature and quality of her pupils’ lingua franca communication. Her fears that her pupils might switch to their more familiar foreign language English were not confirmed. They rather liked to talk with other learners in German and were less worried to make mistakes.

"Also ich hatte befürchtet ja, dass sie auf Englisch zurückgreifen. Also viel mehr als das eigentlich war. Insofern bin ich total zufrieden mit dem, was passiert ist. Dass sie trotzdem sich auf Deutsch unterhalten haben. Also das fand ich sehr positiv. [...] Ja, also die Schüler fanden das auch sehr gut, sich mit anderen unterhalten können, die die Sprache auch lernen. Also die hatten, sagen sie, weniger Hemmungen, Fehler zu machen und haben sich gegenseitig helfen können. Und ja, es war für sich wirklich gut. Also was sie mir gesagt haben dazu." (Scenario C1_teacher_FR)

A pupil who participated in the German lingua franca telecollaboration between a Dutch and an English class (scenario B) commented in the feedback questionnaire that “it was nice to speak in a language that was not native for both of us so we had that common ground and I felt we were all in the same boat” (Scenario B_pupil UK1). Some pupils seemed to feel more confident and less worried to make mistakes; it was more important for them to get the message across. A pupil from the English Lingua franca discussion in BigBlueButton on new technologies and social media (scenario C, unit 2) explained:

"Man war sicherer. Ich weiß nicht, wenn ich jetzt mit einem gebürtigen Engländer, Amerikaner oder so gesprochen hätte, dann hätte ich glaube ich die ganze Zeit so gedacht: 'Oh Gott, hoffentlich ist das richtig, hoffentlich mache ich jetzt nicht total Mist!’ und so. Und jetzt halt dadurch, dass sie halt Spanisch gesprochen hat [...] und das ja auch nicht ihre Muttersprache war, war’s dann schon so: 'Okay, es ist eigentlich egal, [wenn ich Fehler mache], sie kann mich verstehen.’“ (Scenario C2_pupil DE3).

When asked whether she would have felt more uncomfortable talking to a native speaker, a pupil from the same exchange said she would probably have dared less and spoken less because she would have been much more afraid to make mistakes and the native speaker would have spoken a lot more.
Another pupil emphasized his preference for speaking with a non-native speaker on the same level of proficiency. He agreed that a native speaker could help and provide corrections, but he added that native speakers sometimes used sophisticated words, spoke fast or had a strong accent and might thus be difficult to understand. When asked whether he preferred to communicate with a non-native speaker, he confirmed:

“Yes, it is easier and we understand ourselves better because you know ... I don’t think he have such a good level as a native speaker, so we both like have same level. So it is easier.” […] “They (native speakers) can help me like correct me if you want, but sometimes they use very sophisticated words that are difficult to understand or they have their own pronunciation of the special place they were living fr <break> in. Erh they can help me but I think it is better to speak with non-native. Well, I prefer it.” (Scenario C2_pupil ES2)

Lingua franca constellations can also stimulate pupils to try to perform well. The Dutch teacher from the German lingua franca exchange between Dutch and French pupils (scenario B) said her pupils were impressed by the other pupils’ level of proficiency and made a special effort to communicate well and seriously.

„Und bei meinen war es halt schon auch der Anreiz des Niveaus. Also zu sehen, wie gut deine denn Deutsch sprechen. Und dann haben die sich schon auch hingesetzt und versucht, das gut zu machen.” (Scenario C1_teacher_NL)

In conclusion, feedback from teachers and pupils suggests that lingua franca constellations can be highly motivating for pupils since they offer authentic communication on an equal footing. Pupils are generally challenged and encouraged at the same time.

4.6 Telecollaboration tools, modes of communication, and locations

The telecollaboration tools used in TILA exchanges include BigBlueButton and OpenSim for synchronous oral conversations, Moodle chat for synchronous written communication, and Moodle forum for asynchronous written communication. User experience data collected from the pupils involved in telecollaboration scenarios A, B and C provide insights into how the respective tools are perceived and evaluated with regard to their intercultural communication and learning potential. Data from the German lingua franca exchange between French and Dutch pupils (scenario C1) shows a preference for synchronous oral conversation in BigBlueButton compared to an asynchronous forum discussion in Moodle (Figure 4).
The higher values for oral conversation correspond to one of the teacher’s feedback regarding how she perceived her pupils’ preferences. She observed that the forum was okay for her pupils but they preferred communicating in BigBlueButton, where they could see each other and were able to interact in direct contact.

"Naja, also es war schon so, dass sie lieber mit BigBlueButton gearbeitet haben. Das finden sie ansprechender, den anderen dann zu sehen und direkt reagieren zu können. Nur diese Buchstaben schreiben, das ist nicht so... ja das hat Minderwert oder Minderqualitäten. Man sieht den anderen nicht, man hat keinen direkten Kontakt. Also das fanden sie auch ok, aber sie hätten es lieber direkt gemacht." (Scenario C1_teacher_NL)

In the forum exchange, pupils also seemed to require more encouragement to participate, whereas pupils in BigBlueButton were more motivated to continue on their own once they had made an appointment with their partner.

"Sobald der Kontakt gekommen war, brauchte ich bei BigBlueButton nichts mehr zu machen. Dann waren die da echt motiviert, um das selber zu regeln. Aber bei diesem Forum, da musste ich echt auch hinterher sein. Sonst hätten die da nicht genug geschrieben." (Scenario C1_teacher_NL)
The situation was slightly different in the English lingua franca exchange between German and Spanish pupils (scenario C, unit 2), in which pupils used Moodle chat as an alternative to BigBlueButton. According to their user experience data, the pupils seemed to experience synchronous written communication quite similar to synchronous oral communication (Figure 5). This might be due to fact that in both environments contact was direct with immediate replies.

![Figure 5: Comparison of BBB and chat discussion – results from 4 BBB participants and 4 chat participants from the English lingua franca exchange between pupils from Germany and Spain (Scenario C); value range: 5 = I agree and 1 = I do not agree.](image)

As mentioned above there is, however, an interesting difference between the two environments as regards performance. Whereas written chat communication was usually very much to the thematic point and focused on completing the task, oral communication in BigBlueButton was considerably richer: pupils engaged in longer turns, expanded on themes, and spontaneously switched to topics beyond the original task (also see 3.4.3).

It is important, however, not to place the various tool environments in competition with each other. They should rather be seen as complementary options. Foreign language learning in school generally aims to cater for a fairly broad and comprehensive range of learning objectives including all relevant skills dimensions from reading and writing to listening and speaking. Each of the telecollaboration tools used in TILA has its specific pedagogic affordances for enabling pupils to engage in communication modes relevant for practising and developing their intercultural communicative competence in their respective foreign language.
In addition to available telecollaboration tools and related communication modes, it is also essential to consider the physical locations from which the respective telecollaboration activities are being carried out. In telecollaboration scenario A, the French-German tandem exchanges took place during class hours in the participating schools’ computer labs. Due to limited network capacity and resulting sound problems, efficient use of synchronous spoken communication in OpenSim (and BigBlueButton) was only possible with a small number of pupils. To ensure sufficient sound quality, the number of participating pupils per school class was reduced to six and later to three.

Having only few pupils actively participating in the telecollaboration exchange, however, created a problem of pedagogic class organisation with regard to what to do with those pupils who were not actively involved in the telecollaboration activities. This was not a problem for the French teacher since she had a teaching assistant from Germany who would carry out other tasks with the rest of the class while the telecollaboration was going on. The German teacher, who did not have this kind of support, had the whole class present in the computer room. To engage more pupils in the OpenSim exchange, he asked some of his pupils to provide background support for their telecollaborating classmates. This, however, proved to be quite distracting because of the German pupils being less focused on their French partners and, more often than not, talking to their classmates instead. Other German pupils were engaged in group work activities in the same room but separate from the actual telecollaboration. All in all, the communication quality suffered significantly because of background noise from classmates who were interfering or communicating with other partners at the same time as well as because of a general lack of communicative privacy (Hoffstaedter & Kohn, 2014).

In scenarios B and C, the telecollaboration exchanges were carried out outside class hours either during pupils’ lunch break in school (scenario B) or from pupils’ home environment (scenario C). To cater for pupils’ (and parents’) technological preferences and available infrastructures and to ensure that all pupils in a class were able to participate in the telecollaboration event, a multimodal set-up was offered. Pupils were allowed, and required, to choose between different communication tools and modes from oral communication in a video conference environment, to synchronous written communication in a chat and asynchronous written communication in a forum. They were then matched in pairs by their teachers according to their choice.

The multimodal home approach, which can be seen as a manifestation of “flipped learning” (Kohn & Hoffstaedter, 2015), proved highly successful. Communicating from their home environment solved the problem of background noise from other pupils and ensured communicative privacy. Both teachers from the German lingua franca exchange between Dutch and French pupils in scenario C agreed that the home environment had a very positive effect on pupils’ communication in terms of lack of distractions and time pressure and also because of a more relaxed atmosphere without the teacher being present:

„Ja und auch die Tatsache, dass es von zu Hause war. Das fanden sie auch entspannter. Und keinen Zeitdruck, keinen Lehrerdruck. Also das war dann für sie viel lockerer und ja, es hat sich positiv ausgewirkt auf die Kommunikation.“ (Scenario C1_teacher_FR)

„Ja, auch keine Störungen. Weil sonst sind sie ja immer zu viert, zu fünft im Raum und dann gucken sie halt, was die anderen machen und jetzt war man halt alleine zu Hause. Ich meine dass jemand aufsteht und was holt, das hast du nicht, wenn du das in der Klasse machst.“ (Scenario C1_teacher_NL)
Individually arranged telecollaboration sessions outside class hours but from a school computer (scenario B) had similar advantages, but the difficulty of finding a suitable time-slot between regular class hours was quite a drawback. Pupils could only meet during lunch breaks; because of the limited time, the meetings tended to be rather short and pupils felt the time pressure. If the conditions at school are such that the pupils do not have enough free time for independent work, the multimodal home approach seems to be a better option for telecollaboration exchanges involving synchronous oral communication.

A multimodal approach should, however, not only be seen as a solution for handling different technological preferences and availabilities. It can also be successfully deployed for enabling pupils to explore and practise oral and written modes of communication under different technological conditions as pedagogically required.

It can also be successfully deployed for enabling pupils to explore and practise the full range of oral and written modes of communication under different technological conditions and to develop the required digital literacy skills (Fuchs, Hauck, & Müller-Hartmann, 2012).

5 Conclusions

This report has addressed issues of task design and pedagogic implementation for intercultural telecollaboration with a focus on (a) the interactional dimension of intercultural communication and (b) the initial stages of teachers’ and pupils’ experience. Relevant task design features were considered and analyzed with regard to their impact on intercultural communication practice as well as challenges and limitations for pedagogic implementation.

All in all, intercultural telecollaboration exchanges have a great potential for innovating and empowering the foreign language classroom. Necessary prerequisites, however, include

- blended learning integration of telecollaboration units in the regular curriculum and teaching routine,
- a multimodal approach offering telecollaboration options across physical locations and tools for pupils to choose from depending on pedagogic requirements, individual preferences, and availability,
- provision of a sufficiently strong technological infrastructure and support service in schools,
- attention to both learner preparation and continuous professional development for teachers.

Once a consolidated practice of intercultural telecollaboration has been implemented with a sufficient degree of pedagogic sustainability, the emphasis can be shifted beyond intercultural interaction to include exchanges about more specialized intercultural topics. The blended learning blend with preparation and follow-up activities will have to be adapted and expanded to ensure a common ground of thematic expertise as well as appropriate portfolio-based assessment procedures. All this may then also move in the direction of content and language integrated learning (CLIL).
References


