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## **STUDENT TEACHERS AND TEACHER STUDENTS – TELECOLLABORATION IN LSP TEACHER EDUCATION**

### **Abstract**

Training specialized language teachers is a task faced by educators in both pre-service and in-service contexts all over the world. Pre-service trainees (here called ‘student teachers’) and in-service trainees (‘teacher students’) have diverse needs, expectations, skills and background knowledge. The former are usually relatively well-skilled in ICT, social media and multimedia authoring, however, have little or no experience of teaching LSP and lack awareness of learner needs. The latter, on the other hand, may have a vast teaching career, with ample knowledge of available (or unavailable) LSP materials and well-tried classroom recipes.

The purpose of the paper will be to briefly introduce two different telecollaborative project designs aiming at enhancing in-service LSP teacher education. On the one hand, findings from a symmetrical student-student telecollaborative project involving Polish and Turkish LSP student teachers will be presented. On the other hand, a proposal for an asymmetrical student-teacher project with Polish students and Turkish teachers will be outlined.

### **Introduction - problems of ESP teacher education**

The process of educating teachers of languages for specific purposes in the reality of Polish modern philology university curriculum, henceforth referred to as “ESP teacher training”, is not as strictly regulated by the relevant legal acts on the national level as is the case with TEFL training. Thus, each teacher training curriculum is free to provide its own solutions (or abandon LSP teacher training altogether). A sample Teaching English for Specific Purposes class at the M.A. level, present in the TEFL course curriculum at University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Warsaw, showed a need for systematic coverage of aspects of LSP. At the same time, the evaluation of the course yielded the following results:

1. inadequate amount of training time,
2. resultant need to "smuggle in" training contents into other subjects of the FLT curriculum - Teaching Adults, Materials Evaluation and Development, Language Testing,
3. lack of organisational provisions for a practicum in LSP contexts,

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4. dispersed “specific purposes” of trainees,
5. uneven provision of LSP coursebooks in professional domains,
6. problems with access to quality ESP resources,
7. inadequate knowledge of professional domains and lack of critical awareness of trainees.

It was presumed that a solution to at least some of the above will be the implementation of a blended learning model, with a face-to-face class supplemented by a telecollaborative project. In specific, the arguments in favour of such an instructional approach are as follows:

- increased exposure to materials and resultant increased motivation (Eklund and Eklund, 1996);
- greater impact of instruction through deeper processing of input and development of transversal skills (Lamy, 2014; Guth, Helm, O’Dowd, 2012);
- better acquisition of knowledge through collaboration and negotiation of input (Warschauer, Turbee, Roberts, 1996);
- familiarity with diverse educational contexts,
- preparation for multilingual and multicultural teaching,
- integration of language development and ICT skills (Guth et al, 2012),
- enhanced interpersonal skills leading to greater employability (Krajka, 2010).

Since some of the previous studies (Krajka, 2012) showed that telecollaboration and developing intercultural competence are not among the most frequently selected purposes for CALL implementation by Polish teachers (see Table 1 below), it was believed that blending teacher-fronted f2f instruction with a trainee-managed telecollaborative project will have a beneficial impact on the development of trainees’ professional competence.

Table 1. Priority ranking of purposes for technology use in the language classroom (in percentages, N 696 of a nationwide sample of English language teachers – Krajka, 2012, p. 262).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Presentation of language material	47.01	12.82	10.54	9.54	7.69	4.27	3.56	3.70
Testing Ss' progress	4.27	14.67	12.54	11.40	10.26	12.82	16.67	16.52
International collaboration	3.99	8.12	12.68	8.69	9.97	13.68	14.67	27.35
Practice of language material	11.97	22.79	15.53	19.23	11.40	11.11	5.56	1.57
Assisting Ss' individual work	15.10	14.67	17.38	16.67	17.52	9.54	6.41	1.85
Developing Ss' intercultural competence	6.41	11.25	9.40	12.96	14.81	19.66	14.53	10.11
Documenting Ss' progress	4.70	5.70	9.26	10.11	15.10	12.68	22.79	18.80
Enabling Ss' communication	5.56	9.26	11.40	10.68	12.25	15.95	14.96	19.09

### 3. Case study 1 – student teachers and student teachers

The purpose of this particular telecollaborative teacher training project was to join student teachers from two different countries into project groups. This tandem learning project (Little, 2002; 2003; Little, Ushioda, 1998) encompassed online collaboration in asynchronous modes, mainly through email, discussion forum and video-blog based interaction, in order to extend the practical training beyond the confines of the methodology classroom. In particular, it was interesting to investigate whether post-practicum reflection of teacher trainees gets added value through the use of intercultural teacher tandems. This purpose was selected as the focus of a project since it is widely believed that practicum is a weak point of the teacher training curriculum, and especially the post-practicum reflection is either inadequate or simply non-existent.

In this 3-month study, tandems of students from Division of Applied Linguistics, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland, and Department of Foreign Language Education, Bogazici University, Turkey, were teamed up into 6-8 person groups and assigned specific methodology topics (e.g., “Errors and assessment”, “The teacher in the classroom”). The topics were explored through a variety of activities and resources within two separate

learning environments: the dedicated Moodle course “Foreign Language Teaching Methodology” and student-made videoblogs. Throughout the process, partners commented on videoblogs, posted on discussion lists, wrote individual diary entries, composed a collaborative glossary.

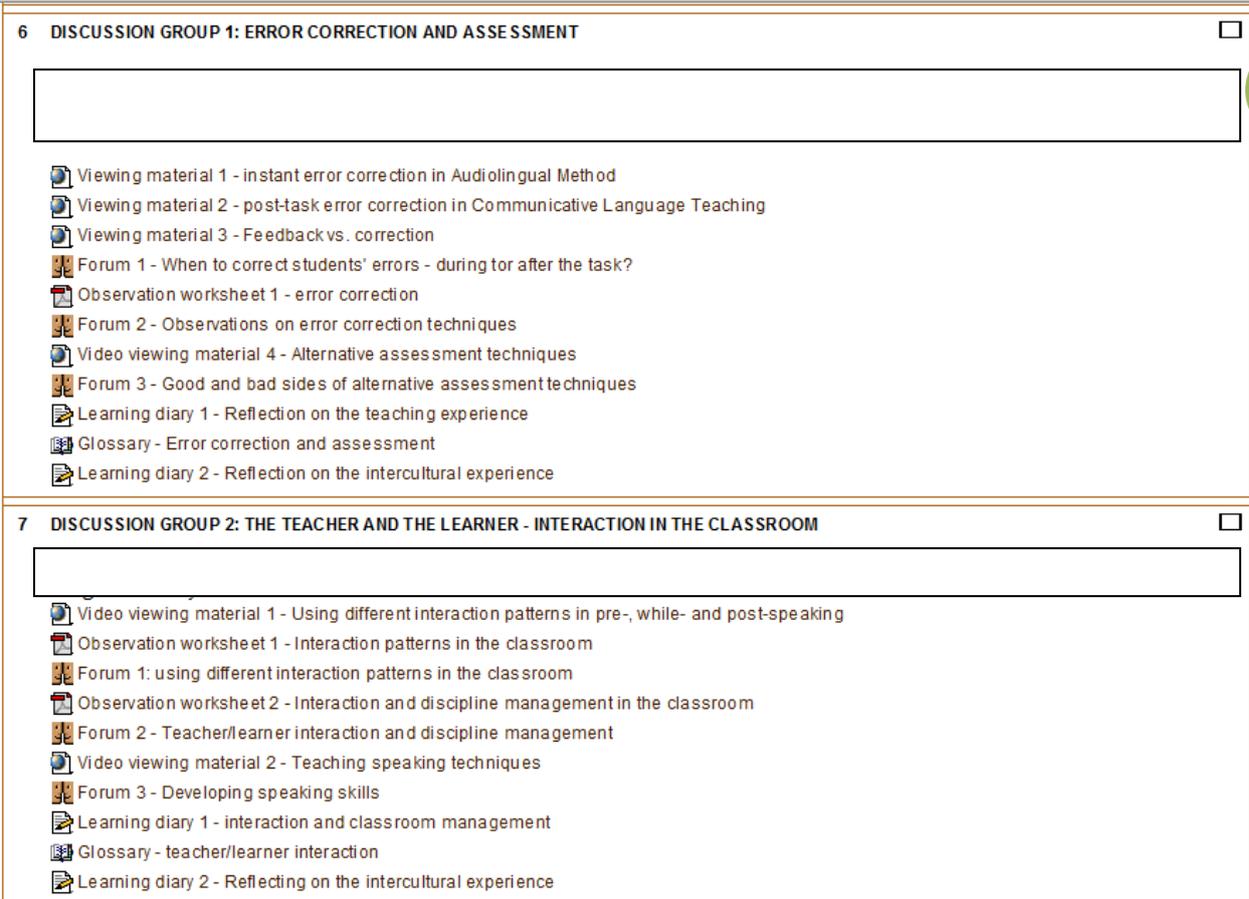
Great care was taken to make as close a match between partners as possible, so that they would fit each other in terms of as many variables as possible. This was due to the assumption that once the partners differ only (or mainly) in the home country culture, the potential learning outcomes will be attributable to the intercultural aspect of learning. Since the project was not a fully online endeavor, but rather a supplement to face-to-face methodology instruction, there was also some attempt at coordinating the syllabi of the two courses, at least in the most crucial aspects.

Table 2. The corresponding syllabi of the partners’ subjects.

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland	Bogazici University, Istanbul, Turkey
<b>LANGUAGES FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>FLED 416: SEMINAR ON PRACTICE TEACHING</b>
Teaching grammar.	Introduction and orientation.
Teaching vocabulary.	Teachers’ beliefs and reflective teaching.
Teaching pronunciation.	Technology in TEFL.
Planning lessons and curricula.	Lesson planning.
Teaching receptive skills.	Nature of language learning activities.
Teaching productive skills.	Native and non-native English speaking teachers.
Testing and assessment.	Job interviews and novice teachers.
Teaching aids and resources in the classroom.	Interaction and classroom language.
Classroom interaction and management.	Plagiarism and academic writing.
Culture and content in ESP language instruction.	European Language Portfolio (ELP) and IB Programs.
	Intercultural communicative competence for language teachers and ELT in Turkey.

Quite interestingly, the two selected learning environments were different as for the factors of authorship and ownership – the Moodle was prepared, managed and moderated by the Polish instructor, with online work being teacher-initiated and teacher-directed. On the

other hand, videoblogs were set up and maintained by Turkish students only, and they were fully in charge of the interaction that was taking place there. It seems such a dual focus satisfies somewhat divergent approaches to teacher training across cultures – the Poles are rather independent and in favour of discovering knowledge and building it for themselves, while the Turkish students are more accustomed to teacher-fronted instruction.



6 DISCUSSION GROUP 1: ERROR CORRECTION AND ASSESSMENT

- Viewing material 1 - instant error correction in Audiolingual Method
- Viewing material 2 - post-task error correction in Communicative Language Teaching
- Viewing material 3 - Feedback vs. correction
- Forum 1 - When to correct students' errors - during or after the task?
- Observation worksheet 1 - error correction
- Forum 2 - Observations on error correction techniques
- Video viewing material 4 - Alternative assessment techniques
- Forum 3 - Good and bad sides of alternative assessment techniques
- Learning diary 1 - Reflection on the teaching experience
- Glossary - Error correction and assessment
- Learning diary 2 - Reflection on the intercultural experience

7 DISCUSSION GROUP 2: THE TEACHER AND THE LEARNER - INTERACTION IN THE CLASSROOM

- Video viewing material 1 - Using different interaction patterns in pre-, while- and post-speaking
- Observation worksheet 1 - Interaction patterns in the classroom
- Forum 1: using different interaction patterns in the classroom
- Observation worksheet 2 - Interaction and discipline management in the classroom
- Forum 2 - Teacher/learner interaction and discipline management
- Video viewing material 2 - Teaching speaking techniques
- Forum 3 - Developing speaking skills
- Learning diary 1 - interaction and classroom management
- Glossary - teacher/learner interaction
- Learning diary 2 - Reflecting on the intercultural experience

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Figure 1. Two sample topics from Project's Moodle.

#### 4. Case study 2 – student teachers and teacher students

As opposed to the previous study, which was supposed to be a symmetrical collaborative design in the sense that the researchers tried to find as similar partners as possible, in the second teacher training project the focus was on making a purposeful competence gap by teaming up partners of different level of professional development. One of the findings of the earlier “Student teachers-student teachers” collaborative project was that online collaboration

was not that appealing to participants since they knew what they could expect from their partners, who represented the same level of professional competence. Thus, it was interesting to see how a telecollaborative project grouping student teachers on the one hand and practicing teachers on the other would proceed.

In this 3-month study commencing December 2013 tandems were made of students from University of Social Sciences and Humanities from Warsaw, Poland, and Turkish ESP teachers. Student teachers got divided into 3-4 person groups and selected ESP domains of their choice (e.g., English for journalists, English for international communication), for which they later created Moodle courses. Since the face-to-face class that was supplemented by the online component was “Digital Materials Development for English for Specific Purposes”, it was interesting to see how the digital resources prepared by novice teacher trainees would get evaluated by practicing ESP teachers from a different country. In the process of the study, once the Moodle courses were in the final stages of making, teachers were invited to give feedback, evaluate courses and make suggestions. Partners commented on Moodle forums and wrote individual diary entries.

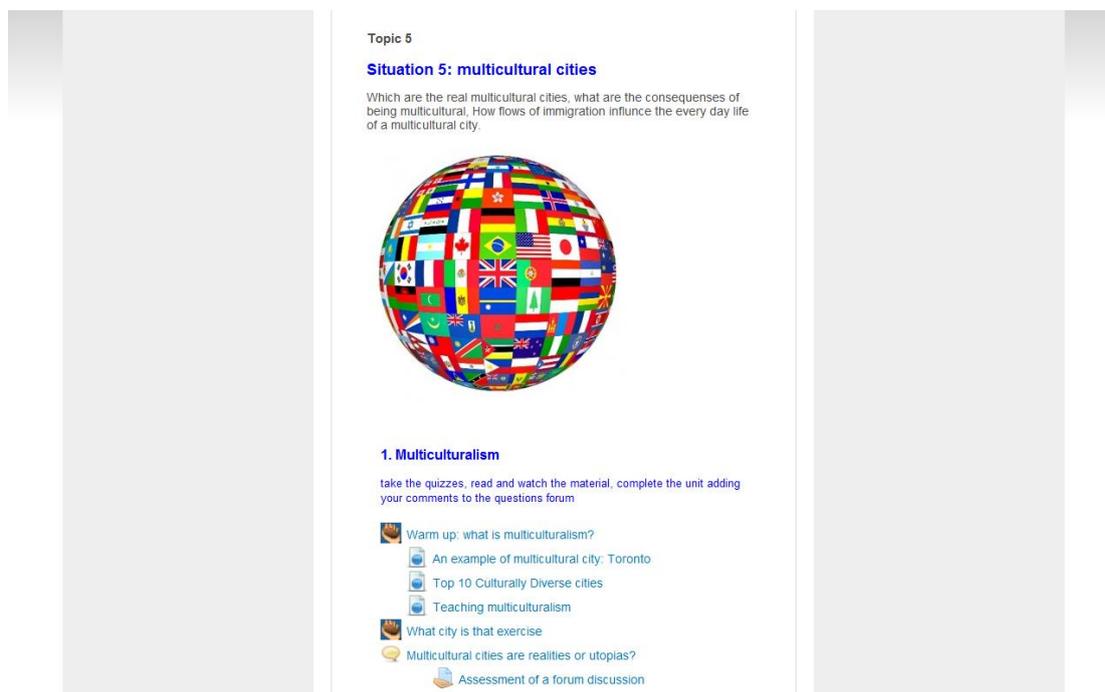


Figure 2. A sample screenshot from one of the student-authored courses.

## 5. Discussion

Throughout the studies, diverse techniques of data collection were used, most importantly a post-experience survey, mid-experience learning diaries, ongoing informal interviews as well as Moodle login statistics. In terms of interaction, the first project proved to be rather limited in the teacher-directed learning space, as the discussion forums featured few isolated, single posts, with discussions limited in the number of participants (involving 3-4). There were occasional longer exchanges where individual participants posted more than one entry. Greater interaction was observed in student-managed videoblogs, though still within the groups there was unequal participation and varying response times had a somewhat demotivating effect on some participants. In terms of collaborative products, groups produced glossaries as well as observation worksheets, and these were completed within the set deadlines.

In general, the project proved successful in that it enabled students to confront the findings of their practicum and their underlying teaching philosophies with the context of a different learner culture. Interesting differences in the amount of discussion output and willingness to collaborate were noticed across teacher-directed vs. student-managed learning environments, which might call for the latter as a preferred mode of collaborative environment setup.

The “Student teachers-Teacher students” project yielded a number of interesting findings mainly on the organization and management part. However, due to its small scale, it is to be treated as exploratory and descriptive, rather than hypothesis testing. Thus, finding partners was even more difficult than with a symmetrical exchange, since there was no clear coordination on the part of the teachers. As opposed to students, teachers did not feel that much obligation to attend the course and contribute their part, which also meant that it was hardly possible to negotiate a timeline and set deadlines. Instead, the project was divided into two phases, the authoring phase (executed solely by Polish student teachers) and the feedback phase, during which remote partners got involved.

Such a design, though working in this particular case, raises the question of level of participation of the partners. Teacher students joined the exchange in the final part of it and they did not benefit as much as student teachers did. Thus, in the further studies of that kind a need arises to come up with such a telecollaborative model in which teacher students, most likely Prensky’s (2002) ‘digital immigrants’, will benefit from digital literacy and contextual

confidence (Kessler, Plakans, 2008) of ‘digital native’ student teachers. Ideally, teacher students should be involved in the process of resource authoring (texts, recordings, videos, interactive quizzes, Moodle activities) in order to acquire the skills of preparing digital teaching aids.

At the same time, the project raised the question of quality of materials and possible copyright infringement. It turned out student teachers have a very fuzzy awareness of intellectual property protection, thus, observing copyright while producing quality materials (both in technical and methodological dimensions) will be the major aims of the follow-up project.

Finally, participation evaluation, in particular, differentiating between participation in the regular class and participation in its online supplement, will also have to be given due thought. Online appearances such as the ones in the second project are rather difficult to assess in traditional weekly/monthly terms – instead, the whole project is to be evaluated, with the process assessment perspective adopted.

## 6. Conclusion

The two models of telecollaborative exchanges, symmetrical (students-students) and asymmetrical (students-teachers), showed both didactic potential and implementational problems. Despite the latter, it can be stated that supplementing regular teacher training curriculum with online components is a viable solution for training contexts with inadequate amount of teaching time on the one hand, and too widely distributed ESP trainees’ preferences on the other. Empirical studies in the future should help decide on the applicability of particular approaches in teacher training.

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#### **Bionote**

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