

Promoting 21st Century Skills through Telecollaborative Learning

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Abstract : Technology has become an integral part of our lives, aiding individuals in accessing higher order competencies, such as global awareness, creativity, collaborative problem solving, and self-directed learning. Students need to acquire these competencies, often referred to as 21st century skills, in order to adapt to a fast changing world. Today, an ever-increasing number of schools are exploring how engagement through telecollaboration can support language learning and promote 21st century skill development in classrooms. However, little is known regarding how telecollaboration may influence the way students acquire 21st century skills. In this paper, we aim to shed light to the potential implications of telecollaborative practices in acquisition of 21st century skills. In our context, telecollaboration, which might be carried out in a variety of settings both synchronously or asynchronously, is considered as the process of communicating and working together with other people or groups from different locations through online digital tools or offline activities to co-produce a desired work output. The study presented here will describe and analyse the implementation of a telecollaborative project between two high school classes, one in Spain and the other in Sweden. The students in these classes were asked to carry out some joint activities, including creating an online platform, aimed at raising awareness of the situation of the Syrian refugees. We conduct a qualitative study in order to explore how language, culture, communication, and technology merge into the co-construction of knowledge, as well as supporting the attainment of the 21st century skills needed for network-mediated communication. To this end, we collected a significant amount of audio-visual data, including video recordings of classroom interaction and external Skype meetings. By analysing this data, we verify whether the initial pedagogical design and intended objectives of the telecollaborative project coincide with what emerges from the actual implementation of the tasks. Our findings indicate that, as well as planned activities, unplanned classroom interactions may lead to acquisition of certain 21st century skills, such as collaborative problem solving and self-directed learning. This work is part of a wider project (KONECT, EDU2013-43932-P; Spanish Ministry of Economy and Finance), which aims to explore innovative, cross-competency based teaching that can address the current gaps between today's educational practices and the needs of informed citizens in tomorrow's interconnected, globalised world.

Keywords : 21st century skills, telecollaboration, language learning, network mediated communication

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