

A Spanish-Finnish telecollaboration: extending intercultural competence via video conferencing

Ruby Vurdien, White Rose Language School, Spain

Pasi Puranen, Language Centre, Aalto University, Finland

EUROCALL 2016, Limassol, Cyprus

Video conferencing

- Video conferencing can be **defined** as “synchronous audio and video communication through computer or telephone networks between two or more geographically dispersed sites” (Lawson *et al.*, 2010, p. 295)
- It **provides** instantaneous interaction
- It has an **impact on cultural awareness** through connection with different countries (Lawson *et al.*, 2010; Comber *et al.*, 2004; Gage *et al.* 2002)
- It **increases** student motivation

Intercultural competence

- Intercultural competence **refers to** “the ability to interact effectively with people with different cultures other than one’s own” (Byram, 2000, p. 297)
- Successful intercultural speakers should possess the following **five key components** of IC:
 - (a) knowledge, (b) intercultural attitudes, (c) skills of interpreting and relating, (d) skills of discovery and interaction and (e) critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997), in addition to linguistic competence (Byram, 2009)

Benefits of Telecollaboration

- Telecollaboration **can foster intercultural competence** (Chun, 2011; O'Dowd, 2003), especially in higher education, prior to travelling abroad on study programmes
- Students are provided with a **more authentic type of knowledge** different from the majority of language courses, curricula and textbooks
- Telecollaboration can lead to the development of '**critical awareness**' (Guth & Helm, 2010) since students can engage in negotiation of meaning

Benefits of Telecollaboration

- Telecollaboration can appear in the **form of text, audio or video** – one example being Skype or desktop videoconferencing (Tian & Wang, 2010; Wang & Tian, 2013; Develotte, Guichon & Vincent, 2010).
- More sophisticated **communication platforms**, such as *Adobe Connect*, *Elluminate* or *Visu* (Guichon, 2010; Jauregui & Bañados, 2010; Canto *et al.*, 2013)
- Telecollaboration can involve **global networks** of students (Guth, Helm & O'Dowd, 2012)
- More than two languages can be shared (Fratter, Helm & Whigham, 2005) or a lingua franca can be established (Guarda, 2013; Helm, Guth & Farrah, 2012)

The project

- Length – 6 weeks
- N = 28 participants (11 Spaniards and 17 Finns)
- Levels:
 - English (C1 & C2 CEFR) Spaniards & Finns
 - Spanish (B1 & B2 CEFR) Finns
 - Spaniards - native speakers
- Platforms used: Movenote video recording, Adobe Connect – videoconferencing & Facebook
- Tasks assigned every week

Online Tasks

1. Introducing themselves via Movenote.

Introducing themselves to their foreign partners.

2. Leisure activities/sports that are popular at university.

Discuss in groups what they do and how often they do/play them. What impact do they have on their performance at university? What kind of facilities does the university offer them? Etc.

3. Choose a newspaper article that relates to an important issue in their country.

In their group they should read it and talk about their reactions to the issue. How can it affect them or their country? Compare their views.

4. Watch a film of their choice and later discuss their views in their respective groups.

What they've enjoyed most and least about it and if they would recommend it.

5. A festival/tradition that is popular.

Discuss it in detail and say how important it is to them and what people think of it abroad.

6. Stereotyped ideas about their respective country.

What are the reasons for such ideas? What do they think could be done to dispel these stereotypes? Compare their views.

An example: Task 1



Ruby Vurdien

25 de octubre de 2015

Dear All,

We're ready to start. Here's task 1. You have to introduce yourself to each other. As this project is about oral production, you're expected to record yourself by using the Movenote app (www.movenote.com) It's user-friendly, so you won't have any problem in using it. You should talk about what you do, your family, your interests and hobbies and your future goals. You have until next Saturday 31st October to complete your task. On Sunday 1st November I'll post your next task. You can see Pasi's and my video as an example. You should speak for at least 2 minutes. Good luck!

[Ver traducción](#)

Movenote

Movenote is a one-of-a-kind video presentation tool online and on your portable devices. Movenote is incredibly versatile and is being used in education for blended and flipped learning, in sales and marketing and in everyday messaging. Recording your

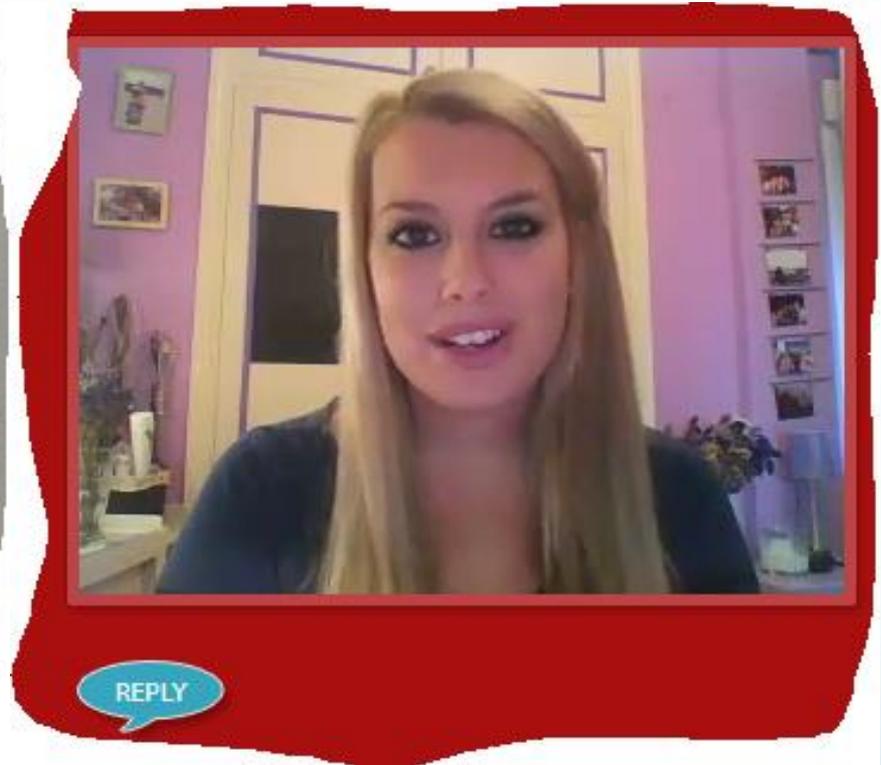
MOVENOTE.COM

Me gusta

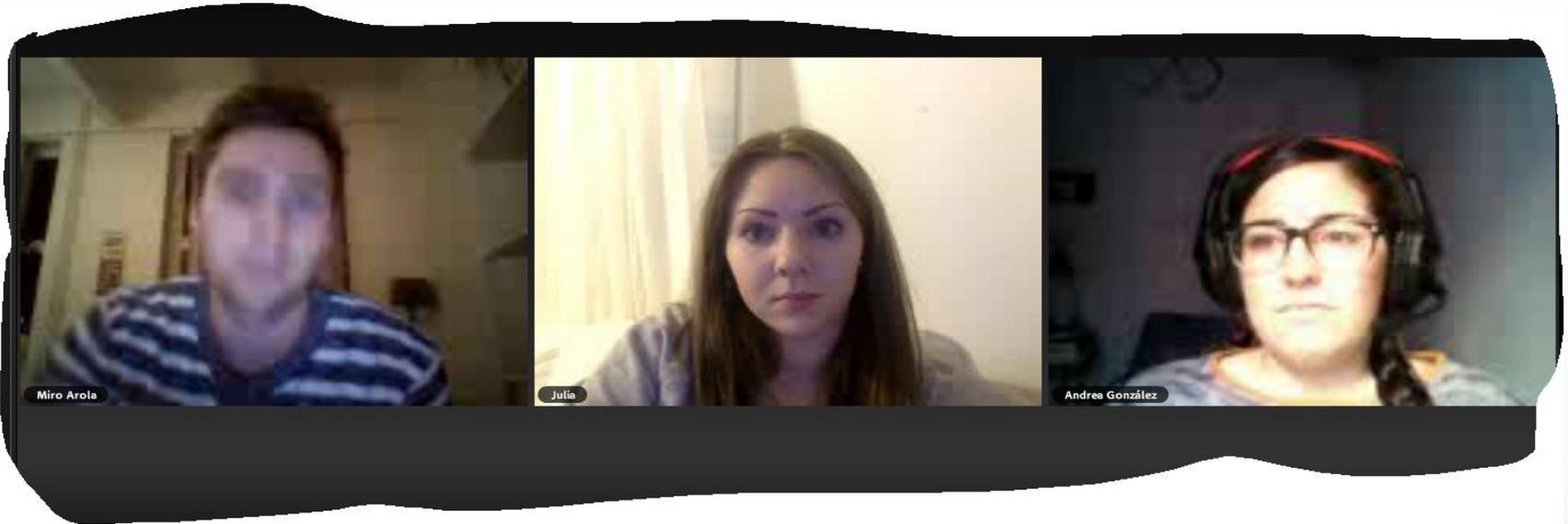
Comentar

Compartir

Introduction via Movenote



Group task 3



Data collection and analysis

- Qualitative approach
- Data gathered from several sources:
 - Movenote / Adobe Connect videos
 - Questionnaires (beginning and end of project)
 - Individual interviews
 - Survey questionnaire (five-point Likert scale (1= I strongly disagree and 5= I strongly agree))

Research Questions

- To what extent does **intercultural competence** take place in students' interaction via video conferencing?
- What do the participants consider to be **the most important learning outcome** in this intercultural project?

Results 1/6

- **Positive** overview of learning experience
- **Curiosity** and **willingness** to learn about each other's culture
- Increased **motivation** to interact and share views via videoconferencing

Results 2/6

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
1. I enjoyed exchanging views with my peers via video conferencing.	4.04	4	0.64
2. I was curious to learn about my peers' culture.	4.25	4	0.70
3. I felt motivated to interact with my peers online.	3.68	3.5	0.86

Results 3/6

- No major differences in views



- Finns slightly more critical in feedback and assessment
- Similarities and differences between cultural traits



- Spaniards more family-centred – Finns more independent
- Spaniards tend to live with parents – Finns usually live by themselves
- Similarities in terms of customs, values and hobbies

Results 4/6

	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation
4. I found the issues we discussed interesting.	3.64	4	0.78

“The tasks were interesting, especially the one about national celebrations.”

“Tasks were fine. I liked especially the movie task.”

Results 5/6

- Short duration of project – issues not explored enough for full understanding of cultural traits (Finns)
- Online interaction – enhancement of cultural traits (Spaniards)
- Developing relationship – videoconferencing – body language facilitates interaction
- Online relationship - too distant compared with face-to-face friendship

Results 6/6

- **Do you think that this kind of project can help to build friendship between students of other cultures? The answers were generally positive** (Questionnaire 2, at the end of the project)
- ✓ *“I believe so. I guess any interaction with persons will help to build up friendship, but especially videoconferencing, where you can see and talk to another.”*
- ✓ *“Yes, when both participants are interested in each other’s culture and share a genuine interest to help the other person learn a language.”*
- But not all participants shared this positive attitude.
- ✓ *“No. The relationship is too distant. Much easier to build up friendship if we are at the same place, not discussing via computer.”*

Suggestions 1/2

- Length of project is of utmost importance – sufficient time should be allotted for each task

What did you like most and least about the project? (Interview question #3)

- ✓ *“Most I like about this project was that it was very useful in the sense of learning Spanish. However the workload was quite intensive. All the practicalities of when to have the meeting but also the fact that you needed to speak 30 minutes demanded a lot of time. Preparation for the assignments also took time. Overall, I think that there were too many assignments in this project.”*
- ✓ *“Most I liked to get to know a new person and get to try my Spanish skills with her although it was a lot harder than I thought it would be. The least I liked about scheduling the meetings. We usually found time only in the late evenings or early mornings that was some times exhausting”.*

Suggestions 2/2

- Tasks should be **carefully chosen** and geared towards specific aims, e.g. developing relationship
- **Student feedback** and assessment of intercultural learning would be useful
- A high degree of **motivation** is crucial for intercultural development

Conclusion 1/2

- **Increase** in motivation due to the dynamic nature of the online interaction through videoconferencing
- Students' **enhancement** of their understanding of each other's cultural traits through spontaneous exchange of views via video conferencing
- The tasks afforded them the opportunity to **reflect** on both their own and their peers' thoughts to attain the goal of intercultural learning
- Videoconferencing seems to be an appropriate tool to **assist** students in discussing and sharing their thoughts as well as to construct knowledge together
- However, due to the small scale of this study, the data cannot be generalised and, hopefully, further research in this area will benefit the learning process

Conclusion 2/2

Has group work helped you to consolidate your learning and exchange your ideas better? (interview question #9)

- ✓ *“It was a good learning experience to practice speaking and also as a discussion instead of doing solo tasks or presentations because it is more difficult to prepare for a conversation but you still need to learn how to deal and cope with situations when you don’t remember all the words or don’t understand what others are saying.”*

Thank You! Gracias!

Ruby Vurdien, whiterose_va@yahoo.es

Pasi Puranen, pasi.puranen@aalto.fi