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INTRODUCTION

Innovation in language learning and teaching – Online Intercultural Exchange

Tim Lewis^a, Breffni O'Rourke^b and Melinda Dooly^c

^aCentre for Research in Education and Educational Technology, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK; ^bSchool of Linguistic, Speech and Communication Sciences, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland; ^cDepartment of Language and Literature Education and Social Science Education, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

From October 2011 to February 2014, the INTENT project, with funding from the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme, brought together practitioners and researchers from seven European countries, under the leadership of Robert O'Dowd of the Universidad de León, to support the integration of telecollaborative exchanges (also known as Online Intercultural Exchanges) into university language education in Europe. Among the major achievements of the project were the most comprehensive survey to date of telecollaborative practice among university educators in Europe, *University Language Classes Collaborating Online* (see Guth, Helm, and O'Dowd 2012), the establishment of a website, <http://uni-collaboration.eu/> aimed at bringing together and supporting telecollaborators and the staging of a three-day conference in León on 12–14 February 2014, *Telecollaboration in University Foreign Language Education*, which attracted over 100 participants from around the globe. The knowledge generated by the INTENT project is being shared in a number of ways. This special issue of

Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching, co-edited by three members of the INTENT project team, is one of them.

All the articles contained in the special issue were developed from papers delivered at the INTENT final conference. These articles are predominantly the work of young scholars in the field, several of whom are either doctoral candidates or have recently obtained their Ph.D.'s. In their own way, they all touch on the key concerns of the INTENT project. They mark the maturity of online intercultural exchange, as an approach to the learning of languages and cultures and offer hope for its future. In the early adoption phase of telecollaboration, many publications were – understandably – devoted to project description, advocacy, or practical advice. By contrast, these articles report research. Some do so in response to clearly articulated research questions. In others, the questions may be framed more implicitly, but are nonetheless investigated systematically. All four have been authored by researching practitioners who have used a range of established approaches, methodologies and instruments to collect and analyse data, including case studies, corpus compilation and analysis and an online survey. All are informed by reference to coherent theoretical frameworks in, for example, sociopragmatics (see Van Compernelle 2011) and social-interactionism (see Hall, Hellermann, and Pekarek Doehler 2011).

Types of exchange

Three of the articles (by Cappellini, El Hariri and Zakir, Telles and Funo) report on bilingual partnerships, while one (by Morollón Marti and Fernández) deals with a monolingual exchange. In this, they are broadly typical of the overall pattern of language use discernible in telecollaborative exchanges, as revealed by the survey of telecollaboration in Europe conducted by the INTENT project team. It

CONTACT Tim Lewis ✉ timothy.lewis@open.ac.uk

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