

Review of *Online intercultural exchange: Policy, pedagogy, practice*

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Online intercultural exchange: Policy, pedagogy, practice

O’Dowd, R., & Lewis, T. (Eds.)

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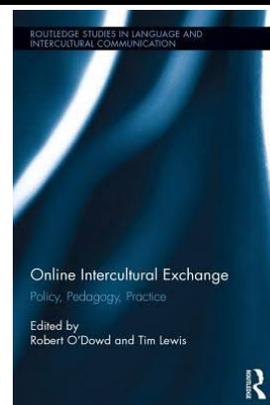
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Online intercultural exchange (OIE), also known as telecollaboration, is defined as “the activity of engaging language learners in interaction and collaborative project work with partners from other cultures through the use of online communication tools such as e-mail, videoconferencing, and discussion forums” (O’Dowd, 2007, p. 4). Research on OIE has flourished in the past 20 years, evidenced by a large number of journal articles, dedicated journal special issues (e.g., Belz, 2003; Lewis, Chanier, & Youngs, 2011), and edited volumes (Belz & Throne, 2006; Dooly, 2008; Dooly & O’Dowd, 2012; Guth & Helm, 2010; O’Dowd, 2007; Warschauer, 1995, 1996; Warschauer & Kern, 2000). Compared to other edited volumes on telecollaboration in the market, this book provides a state-of-the-art overview of OIE and focuses on its use in university education around the world.

This 17-chapter edited volume consists of five parts: an overview of OIE (Part I), the integration of OIE in university education (Part II), the pedagogy of OIE (Part III), OIE in practice (Part IV), and the future of OIE (Part V).

Part I includes two chapters co-authored by the editors of the book, Lewis and O’Dowd. The first chapter gives a brief explanation of OIE and the organization of the book. The authors identify three levels of integration of OIE into university of education: classroom-independent, classroom-dependent, and institution-integrated. The second chapter provides a systematic review of OIE in foreign language learning. Recurrent trends and commonalities emerging from the literature include linguistic development, intercultural communicative competence, ethnography, relational approaches to intercultural communicative competence development, working together through joint tasks, and learner autonomy in OIE.

Part II (Chapters 3–6) looks at the current and potential impacts of OIE at institutional levels around the globe. In Chapter 3, De Wit links two innovative trends of higher education in the past two decades (i.e., internationalization and online learning) and focuses on the significant role OIE can play in enhancing the internationalization of higher education. He argues that online intercultural learning is a logical step toward a more inclusive, innovative approach to internationalization.

The remaining three chapters of this part examine the practice of OIE in different geographical contexts

across the world. In Chapter 4, Guth provides an overview of OIE in European higher education based on survey data with a focus on programmatic or institutional issues. Through close examination of teachers' and students' perceptions and challenges as well as in-depth analysis of seven institutions as case studies, Guth urges OIE to be normalized and institutionalized in Europe. Next, Wilson focuses on the North-American higher-education context and uses two U.S.–European telecollaborative partnerships to demonstrate the consequences of contrastive top-down institutional and national policies on the implementation of OIE in higher education institutions. He highlights the need for university administrators to develop common ground between their internationalization strategies and OIE. Finally, Tudini provides a snapshot of OIE initiatives in Australian higher education based on a review of six studies involving educators in Australia as initiators or partners in an exchange project. Due to geographical isolation, OIE receives considerable attention in Australia and may develop promisingly if carefully nurtured at an institutional level.

Part III is made up of five chapters (Chapters 7–11) dedicated to the practical and pedagogical issues that one would encounter in the process of setting up a telecollaborative exchange, ranging from task design to project assessment. In Chapter 7, Müller-Hartmann and Kurek report the findings of an intercultural teacher training project using activity theory for data analysis. They specifically explore which factors impact task development in the group negotiation process and how intercultural communicative competence is developed during task-induced interactions. Chapter 8 presents a dialogic model of OIE and focuses on the role of facilitators in this form of exchange. Based on data collected from a 7-week dialogic exchange between students in the Middle East and the United States with the help of two facilitators, Helm discusses how this model of OIE can be utilized in future telecollaboration. In Chapter 9, Nissen analyzes and compares six carefully selected blended learning courses that combine OIE and face-to-face sessions, aiming at identifying common approaches to designing blended learning courses with an OIE component. Important aspects of designing such courses include choosing a lead mode, sequencing tasks, determining the teacher's role, and more. Chapter 10 focuses on exploring what makes a telecollaboratively efficient person (TEP). Dooly critically examines current intercultural competence theories, identifies characteristics that can help individuals become competent telecollaborators, and justifies the TEP set of descriptors, which fall into four main domains: online language competencies, social competencies, technical competencies, and intercultural competencies. In the last chapter of Part III, Hauck and MacKinnon recognize the challenges of sustaining participation and the significance of motivation in OIE activity. Therefore, they propose a soft certification framework as an incentive for participant engagement and task execution based on the use of *open badges*, digital images that can be displayed online as evidence of achievements.

Five chapters (Chapters 12–16) form Part IV, a section devoted to OIE initiatives and emerging models in higher education around the world. Part IV not only represents a collection of examples of good telecollaborative practice, but also directs OIE practitioners into the most recent trends of telecollaboration in university education. In Chapter 12, MacKinnon reports on the Clavier network, a large-scale exchange that puts emphasis on informal interaction with minimal intervention from instructors. In this network, students can determine the nature of the activities that they would like to be engaged in and choose communication channels to blur the boundaries between formal and informal learning. In Chapter 13, Leone and Telles introduce the Teletandem Brazil project, in which two students help each other to learn their native language through online synchronous intercultural and linguistic collaboration. Compared to many other eTandem projects focusing on written in-tandem interactions, the Teletandem project is characterized by the use of webcam images of the partners, along with synchronous voice and text interaction. Chapter 14 presents the Cultura model, a well-established and influential intercultural exchange framework developed at MIT. As Furstenberg explains, Cultura starts with the notion of cultural comparisons and offers a comparative approach that asks learners to observe, compare, and analyze parallel materials from their respective cultures. In Chapter 15, Byram reports the Cultnet Intercultural Citizenship project, which aims at establishing citizenship education as the focus of foreign language teaching and learning. This project involves a network of researchers working together in

groups of two, three, or four on seven sub-projects, while being aware of each other's work through frequent emails and a real-time collaborative editing system. In Chapter 16, Rubin describes the Collaborative Online International Learning Network created by the State University of New York system to develop online and hybrid courses with international dimensions. These courses intend to implement internationalized classrooms through team-taught learning environments, where teachers from two or more cultures develop shared syllabi that foster experiential and collaborative student learning.

The concluding section, Part V consists of only one chapter (Chapter 17), in which O'Dowd examines in detail the criticisms toward OIE raised in the literature and proposes ways in which practitioners and researchers can continue to improve the efficiency of OIE in response to these concerns. He also explores how OIE can be developed and utilized for other disciplines in future university education in addition to foreign language education.

This volume is a delightful addition to the field of telecollaboration due to its wide scope, high quality, and pedagogical orientation. First, a strength of this volume lies in its breadth and sophistication in addressing a wide range of issues related to OIE. Rather than focusing on the traditional role of OIE in foreign language teaching and learning, this volume explores OIE as a major tool for internationalization, intercultural development, and virtual mobility in universities around the globe. Second, this book is of high quality, manifested in two aspects: well-written individual chapters and sophisticatedly structured organization. All the contributors to this volume are well-established researchers as well as experienced practitioners of OIE who bring depth of discussion and unique insight to the topics discussed, a feat that would be hard to achieve otherwise. In addition, this volume is very well organized into five parts devoted to important themes (e.g., OIE around the globe and models of practice). It is worth mentioning that some parts even have their own micro substructure. For example, the five chapters in Part III (i.e., pedagogical issues of OIE) follow the sequence in which these issues are encountered in the course of conducting an OIE from task design to assessment. Third, the collection of short reports of OIE initiatives from universities around the world adds to the practical value of this book. These practitioner-authored and practically oriented overviews of newly emerging practical models of OIE provide a great potential resource for teachers who are interested in incorporating OIE in developing intercultural competencies of their students.

In spite of its high quality and unique contribution, this book has a few areas that leave something to be desired. First of all, the goal of this volume is to provide "an overview of how OIE currently is being implemented and integrated in university foreign language education around the globe" (p. 273). However, the OIE exchanges reported in this volume mainly involve Europe, the United States, and Australia, with no discussion of the practice of this activity in Asian countries. Moreover, discussions on telecollaboration involving less commonly taught languages, such as Chinese, are absent from this book. Second, although the pedagogical orientation and practical models featured in this book may, to a great extent, benefit experienced OIE practitioners, new telecollaborators may find this book less useful or even difficult to understand as this book presumes substantial prior knowledge on this topic. Third, readers who particularly look for models of empirical research on OIE may find this book disappointing. Most chapters of this book, with the exception of Chapter 7 by Müller-Hartmann and Kurek, are written in the form of pedagogical reports, theoretical explanations, project descriptions and evaluations, or reviews, rather than in the form of strictly designed empirical research.

In conclusion, *Online intercultural exchange: Policy, pedagogy, practice* is a well-organized, high-quality volume on the role of telecollaboration in worldwide university education. It is a must-have for researchers, teachers, graduate students, and policy makers interested in OIE. As research and practice in OIE continue to develop, future volumes on this topic may advance the field by delving into specific themes such as task design, assessment, OIE involving less commonly taught languages, innovative research methods, and others, instead of providing overviews. As breadth is usually at the cost of depth, each of the above-mentioned themes may deserve a dedicated volume. Another potential direction for future endeavors on OIE might be addressing what can be done to ensure that OIE has a more central role

in university education. Notwithstanding more than 20 years of research and practice, an increasing body of documented success, and the relative ease of access to Internet technology, OIE, after all, is still considered and implemented as a periphery, rather than as a mainstream component, in higher education. It is worthwhile to explore the reasons behind this and the solutions for moving forward.

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