

AAUSC Issues in Language  
Program Direction

Internet-mediated Intercultural Foreign  
Language Education

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Julie A. Belz  
Steven L. Thorne  
**Editors**



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Library of Congress Control Number: 2005935615

ISBN-13: 978-1-4130-2992-5

ISBN-10: 1-4130-2992-2

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Printed in the United States of America  
2 3 4 5 6 7 14 13 12 11 10

# Chapter 1

## Pedagogical and Praxiological Lessons from Internet-mediated Intercultural Foreign Language Education Research

Steven L. Thorne

### ***Abstract***

*This essay describes research findings, pedagogical methods, and theoretical frameworks emerging from and contributing to Internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education (ICFLE). ICFLE emphasizes participation in intercultural dialogue and development of the linguistic and meta-communicative resources necessary for doing so. Various models of ICFLE are described and ICFLE studies that address processes of intercultural communication from linguistic, interpersonal, and developmental perspectives are reviewed. A number of exigent dimensions of ICFLE are also presented, in particular the challenges of implementing successful ICFLE projects, issues of cultural contestation, and variability in the cultures-of-use of Internet communication tools used to mediate ICFLE interaction. Throughout, the aim of this chapter is to introduce ICFLE to new audiences and specifically to address the concerns of language program directors and instructors. In conclusion, a case is made for the potential of ICFLE to re-orient foreign language education from a focus on communicative competence to a focus on intercultural competence.*

### **Introduction**

The start of the twenty-first century is an exciting, if not tumultuous, era in which to be a language educator. Discourses and material effects associated with globalization, itself a contested construct (Giddens 1999; Harvey 2000), have come to inform applied linguistics (Canagarajah 1999; Pennycook 2001), foreign language education (Cameron and Block 2002), and the use of global communication networks for foreign language learning (Kramsch and Thorne 2002). Within affluent regions of the world, and more generally for Internet users everywhere, everyday communication and information practices are markedly different today from those of even a decade ago. There now exists a plethora of established, as well as emerging, genres of Internet-mediated communicative activities, many of which vary substantially from pre-digital epistolary conventions (e.g., Crystal 2001; see also Goodwin-Jones 2005; Thorne 2003a; Thorne and Payne 2005, pp. 381–387).

This chapter and volume focus on the use of Internet information and communication tools to support intercultural dialogue, debate, collaborative research, and less structured social interaction between (typically) internationally dispersed

groups of learners who are members of different linguistic and cultural groups. Rather than imposing an existing label onto the diversity of approaches in this area, which could be seen as biased toward one model or unrepresentative of others, the non-sectarian umbrella term used in this chapter (and as the title of this volume) is Internet-mediated intercultural foreign language education (hereafter ICFLE).<sup>1</sup> The rationale for this choice has three components. The first is that while other labels already exist for Internet-mediated intercultural FL projects, such as “tandem learning” and “telecollaboration,” and relevant studies are also described more generically as “network-based language teaching” or “computer-mediated communication,” each of these terms leaves unmentioned the *intercultural* aspect of the approach advanced in this volume (see Belz and Thorne, this volume). The second is “tandem learning,” “telecollaboration,” and “intercultural communication” alone do not reflect a focus on foreign language education *per se*. Lastly, the decision to end “ICFLE” with the word “education” indexes a broader humanistic tradition than would alternatives such as “teaching,” “learning,” or “acquisition” (see Kramsch 2000).

The use of Internet technologies to encourage dialogue between distributed individuals and partner classes proposes a compelling shift in second (L2) and foreign language (FL) education, one that ideally moves learners from simulated classroom-based contexts toward actual interaction with expert speakers of the language they are studying. As Kinginger (e.g., 1998, 2004) notes, the most salient element to ICFLE is the inclusion of other people. The conceptualization and use of FL learning as foremost a process of intercultural communication, in both online and offline contexts, has received significant attention in recent years (e.g., Belz 2002; Brammerts 1996; Byram 1997; Furstenberg *et al.* 2001; Kinginger 1998; Kinginger, Gourvés-Hayward, and Simpson 1999; Kramsch 1998; O’Dowd 2003; Sercu 2004; Tella 1991; Thorne, 2003b). ICFLE-related articles now regularly appear in prestigious venues such as *The Modern Language Journal* (e.g., Belz and Müller-Hartmann 2003; Kinginger 1998; von der Emde, Schneider, and Kötter 2001; Ware and Kramsch 2005), in journal special issues (e.g., *The CALICO Journal* volume 23 issue 3; *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes* volume 62 number 1), and in a journal special issue focused solely on this topic (*Language Learning & Technology* volume 7 issue 2). A review of this research will show that the goals of ICFLE projects are diverse, but generally include aspirations of linguistic and pragmatic development as well as increasing awareness about one’s own cultural background, those of one’s interlocutors, and the processes involved in carrying out extended, productive, and ultimately meaningful intercultural dialogue. While correspondence with expert speakers of the language of study is a pedagogical method with a long history, the recent surge in pedagogical and research efforts in this area suggest that ICFLE is beginning to exert a significant and broad-based influence on the character, processes, and perhaps even goals of mainstream foreign language education (FLE).

As we are well into the second decade of Internet-mediated language learning activity, there has been the suggestion that interculturally oriented “distance collaborations” constitute a “second wave” of L2 pedagogy (Kern, Ware, and

Warshauer 2004, p. 243). This second wave of computer-mediated L2 learning, according to Kern, Ware, and Warshauer (2004), emphasizes three major shifts, which I liberally interpret and build upon in this review article: 1) an emphasis on embedding discrete language learning within the frameworks of intercultural competence and pragmatics; 2) a broadening of the context of instructed language learning from classroom-based, local activity to inter-community and international interaction; and 3) a problematization, or perhaps complexification, of conceptualizations of communication and culture within L2 pedagogy and research. Like a complex Venn diagram, ICFLE research and pedagogy have many overlaps and adjoining borders with other areas of language research such as pragmatics, intercultural communication and communication theory, computer-mediated communication, critical theory and cultural studies, and, of course, second language acquisition and language pedagogy. While research and theory are explicitly addressed in this chapter, its main purpose is to distill significant pedagogical implications from the ICFLE research literature and to describe a set of praxiological lessons aimed primarily at the concerns of FL instructors, coordinators, and program directors working in institutional and instructed FLE contexts.

## **ICFLE History and Contemporary Foci**

Internet-mediated intercultural communication used to promote L2 learning has antecedents in earlier traditions, perhaps the most direct being the educational model developed early in the twentieth century by French educator Célestin Freinet (1994). Freinet's pedagogy included presciently modern methods such as cooperative group work, service learning, inquiry-based learning, and encouraging students to publish their work in the form of classroom journals and school newspapers; each of these methods would be quite innovative even by contemporary standards. Freinet's particular insight, however, was to recognize the power of embedding the entirety of learning processes in correspondence activities with other school children in France and around the world. The school newspapers (*Les Journal Scolaire*), for example, were exchanged among participating elementary schools first in France and later internationally. What is now known as the *Freinet Movement* remains vibrant to this day and has directly influenced some ICFLE projects (see Lomicka 2001).<sup>2</sup>

Contemporary ICFLE research is premised on the notion that dialogue and other forms of interaction can foster productive, and perhaps even necessary, conditions for developing intercultural communicative competence. ICFLE emphasizes the use of Internet communication tools to support dialogue, debate, collaborative research, and social interaction among geographically dispersed participants. But the goal is loftier than social interaction *per se* and builds on the hypothesis, developed by communication researcher Joseph Walther (1992, 1996), that Internet-mediated relationships have the potential to be as, and sometimes more, intensely personal than those which occur in face-to-face settings.

This potential of computer-mediated communication (CMC) lies at the heart of most ICFLE projects — the aspiration for participants to develop meaningful relationships with one another and to use the language they are studying to do so. Although ICFLE can produce tension and frustration (e.g., Belz 2003, 2005; Kramersch and Thorne 2002; Schneider and von der Emde, this volume; Ware 2005) as well as camaraderie and intimate friendship (Thorne 2003b), embedding the learning of a new language in the larger context of significant relationship development has demonstrated considerable learning outcomes, especially in the areas of pragmatics and critical reflexivity (Belz 2005; Kinginger and Belz in press).

Foundational to ICFLE pedagogy is the desire to cultivate conditions for the development of intercultural competence. In the following section, the term “intercultural competence” is unpacked and references to relevant research are provided.

## **Intercultural Competence (and Why We Should Care)**

According to the *Council of Europe* (2001), communicative competence alone is no longer adequate as the sole goal of FL learning. Rather, the “objective of foreign language teaching is now . . . ‘intercultural competence’” (Sercu 2004, p. 115). Sercu continues by noting, “[s]een from the intercultural perspective, it can be said that what a foreign language learner needs to learn in order to attain communicative competence is not how to adapt to any one of the foreign cultures present, and forget about his/her own cultural identity. Rather, the task of the participants in such an intercultural situation will be to negotiate, by means of implicit or explicit cues, a situationally adequate system of (inter)cultural standards and linguistic and pragmatic rules of interaction” (2004, p. 116). Whether explicitly referenced or implicitly foundational, much (though not all) of North American ICFLE benefits from prior research in L2 pragmatics (Kasper and Rose 2002), intercultural communication theory (e.g., Scollon and Scollon 2001), and/or research that describes language and culture as essentially inseparable and mutually constructive phenomena (e.g., Agar 1994; Kramersch 1993, 1998). These perspectives will be synoptically conjoined in the following discussion.

As Kramersch has argued, language is the principle means through which we conduct our social lives; communication is a social practice that expresses, embodies, and symbolizes cultural realities (Kramersch 1998, p. 3). Further, language enables and evokes the collaborative construction of partially shared realities (what is sometimes termed “intersubjectivity,” see Rommetveit 1974; Thorne 2000a). There has been considerable scholarship establishing linkages between language and human meaning making that is highly relevant to L2 development. To list a few, these include expositions on the interdependence of language, ideology, and consciousness (Bernstein 1996; Volosinov 1973), language and its relation to thought (Gumperz and Levinson 1996; Lakoff 1987), and Vygotskian treatments of L2 language development (Lantolf and Thorne 2006; Thorne 2005).

Of particular relevance to ICFLE is Michael Agar's notion of "languaculture," a term he acknowledges is an "awkward" but also "inevitable" invention that brings together language and culture into a dialectical unity (1994, p. 60). The "langua" in "languaculture" extends beyond words and sentences<sup>3</sup> to discourse (see also Scollon and Scollon 2001). Agar helps us to understand that utterances are always produced and interpreted in relation to historically formed cultural practices and speech situations. For FL learners, perhaps especially those at more advanced levels, the growing realization of the subtle and obvious differences between their own and others' languacultures produces what Agar (1994) terms "rich points." In application to FLE, rich points can be glossed as opportunities—the opportunities to collaboratively forge a heightened awareness of self and other that is fueled by the contestations and confusions that arise during communication (explicitly "intercultural" and otherwise). Various responses to communicative breakdown are possible, such as ignoring the problem or projecting deficiency onto the interlocutor or the self. "Or," writes Agar,

you can wonder—wonder why you don't understand, wonder if some other languaculture isn't in play, wonder if how you thought the world worked isn't just one variation on countless themes. If you wonder, at that moment and later as well, you've taken on culture, not as something that "those people" have, but rather as a space between you and them, one that you're involved in as well, one that can be overcome (1994, p. 106).

Confronting oneself, as well as having others doing the confronting, as described in more detail below, is not a smooth process for many students (see also Schneider and von der Emde, this volume). Kramsch describes FL learning as the process of seeing the world through another's eyes but not losing sight of oneself, a process that may involve both "elation" and "deeply troubling" emotions (1993, p. 234). In direct reference to intercultural dialogue, Agar moves culture from the status of object to that of a process and provides the following formulation: "[c]ulture happens when a problem in language has to do with who you are" (1994, p. 48). A "problem" in the sense meant by Agar (see also Belz and Müller-Hartmann 2003) is not something to avoid or ignore; it is a resource. As has been suggested by practitioners of activity theory (Engeström 1987, 1999; Leont'ev 1981; Thorne 2004, 2005), development itself emerges from the resolution of contradictions, which in turn create conditions for future, perhaps more complex contradictions. As the research described below shows, differing languacultures and the rich points made visible through their contact have the potential to create potent conditions for learning.

In specific reference to the FL arena, Byram and Zarate (1997) describe intercultural competence as the capacity to mediate multiple cultural identities and situations. Sercu extends this characterization and suggests that "intercultural speakers are committed to turning intercultural encounters into intercultural relationships" (2004, p. 117). Of course, the outstanding problem is how conditions for developing a capacity, and perhaps even a hunger, for the challenges presented by intercultural communication can be inculcated in instructed FL

settings. The discussion of ICFLE models described below cannot address this question directly, but as with other pedagogical innovations, developing a clear and contingency-responsive pedagogical infrastructure marks a solid starting point.

## Models of ICFLE

As discussed above, ICFLE is referred to in various ways in the literature and there exist numerous models that make use of Internet-mediated interaction between learners interested in one another's expert language. International class-to-class partnerships within institutionalized settings, often termed "telecollaboration"<sup>4</sup> (Belz 2003; Kern 1996; Kinginger 2004; Kinginger, Gourvés-Hayward, and Simpson 1999; Warschauer 1996), is the model best known to North American language educators. By definition, telecollaboration occurs within instructed FL settings and offers a wide range of interactional possibilities such as pair work, small-group work, and whole class exchanges. Telecollaborative projects generally involve intensive coordination that can include aligning partner class syllabi around shared information and media (literature, films, scholarly texts) and collaborative interpretive and investigative activities. For university language program directors, instructors, and students, the telecollaboration model has a number of strengths, such as institutional support for the technologies used, the expert guidance and interpretive assistance an instructor can provide as students negotiate tasks in intercultural partnerships, and the collective generation of components of the syllabi for each partner class. This said, the high level of coordination and institutional location of telecollaborative exchanges present challenges as well. These include finding appropriate partner classes, the need for substantial pre-interaction negotiation between class instructors (see Belz and Müller-Hartmann 2003), and often a limited interaction window due to the lack of alignment in the academic calendars of partner classes. Belz notes additional constraints such as differences in socio-institutional cultures, one example of which is high-stakes end-of-year testing (the situation in Germany) versus low-stakes and frequent "evaluation scenes" such as quizzes, small projects, and homework (the American model); these differences have been linked to tensions in collaborative transatlantic working groups (see Belz 2001, p. 227–228). Accepting that all pedagogical innovations come with challenges, for language program directors wishing to instigate ICFLE projects, the telecollaboration model's institutional character makes it a reasonable choice. Scalability and implementation across multiple sections is still relatively uncharted terrain, but local teaching assistants and instructors can share general orientation sessions, syllabi and activity planning can be ameliorated over successive iterations, and, with a tolerance for mutability, the ICFLE experience can be engineered to align with curricular goals. Specific examples of telecollaboration projects are described at length in the following sections.

A second model (used extensively in Europe) is tandem learning, the pairing of individuals in complementary dyads where each is interested in learning the other's language (e.g., Appel 1999; Brammerts 1996, 1999, 2003; Cziko 2004;



Kötter 2002, 2003; O'Rourke 2005). Tandem learning is most associated with non-institutional learning configurations and usually requires partners to negotiate discussion topics and the balance between overt pedagogical and conversational activity. Support for finding partners, initiating a tandem learning relationship, and structuring the partnerships is extensive (e.g., Brammerts' *eTandem* project).<sup>5</sup> Tandem learning is reported to serve numerous communities and purposes such as seniors wishing to learn a new language or maintain one learned earlier in life; young people interested in learning and/or using foreign languages before travel or study abroad experiences; and students wishing to use a foreign language in an informal, non-institutional environment. In the context of North American FLE, tandem learning would make an ideal companion to self-paced FL study and to FL distance education programs where students have limited or minimal interaction with an instructor or other students.

Along with the notion of reciprocity (mutual benefit), tandem learning is built on the concept of learner autonomy. Learner autonomy has a significant presence in FLE in Europe and is based on principles of self-direction and intrinsic motivation (e.g., Dam 1995; van Esch and St. John 2003). In the tandem learning framework, learner autonomy is both a prerequisite for successful partners as well as a capacity that can be enhanced by the tandem learning experience. The ideal of autonomous learning is attractive with its emphasis on independence, critical thinking, and self-reliance. Of course, many teacher-facilitated instructional settings would also claim similar objectives. The significant difference between tandem learning and instructed varieties of ICFLE revolve around the perceived usefulness and function of expert guidance in the intercultural communication process. While it is beyond the capacity of this chapter to engage this issue in significant detail, researchers working within the telecollaboration model have suggested that teacher-mediation plays a critical role in facilitating more sophisticated understandings of self and other in intercultural interaction (e.g., Belz and Müller-Hartmann 2003; O'Dowd and Eberbach 2004). Further, developing an awareness of the complex relationships between culture and its linguistic expression have proven extremely challenging even with expert-teacher mediation, examples of which include varying expected genres of communication (Kramsch and Thorne 2002), exposing and working through cultural stereotypes (O'Dowd 2005), and differences in directness and pragmatics that are expressed in subtle aspects of language use (e.g., Belz, this volume). These studies would suggest that for certain types of learning goals, such as building meta-communicative awareness or performing fine-grained linguistic analyses to better understand and constructively engage in intercultural communication, tandem learning may have significant limitations. However, a reciprocal argument can also be made that generating intrinsically motivated and "authentic" activity on the part of learners is a problem within instructed educational environments. Tandem learning is predicated on the idea that the participants are genuinely invested in the process. Using tandem learning in an institutional context (see also O'Rourke 2005), Kötter presents both arguments: tandem partners may not address repeated and significant linguistic errors, and if they do, they may not be capable of providing

productive explanations. At the same time, dyadic relationships generally provide more attention than would a whole class situation, and since each participant occupies the role of both expert and learner, there is an “atmosphere of confidence and trust” (2002, p. 147) that might support the risk taking, creative expression, and unhindered negotiation that formal educational environments may stifle.

Based on a number of studies that self-describe as “telecollaboration” or “tandem learning,” however, ascertaining absolute differences between the two approaches is problematic. Kötter (2003) and O’Rourke (2005), for example, both label their approaches as “tandem learning,” but in each case, participants are students in instructed FL courses that include explicit instruction and *post-hoc* discussion of tandem learning activity. Additionally, the students in Kötter’s (2003) study were partnered with students taught by Schneider and von der Emde, both proponents of significant teacher mediation in intercultural FLE (see Schneider and von der Emde, this volume). In conclusion, the goals and processes of tandem learning and telecollaboration differ at their points of greatest divergence. In the intervening areas of the continuum, however, between fully autonomous learning and significant teacher mediation and intervention, these two approaches overlap and, in certain instances, may be functionally indistinguishable from one another.

A third and emerging ICFLE configuration is to link together local expert speakers, such as diaspora, immigrant, and heritage language populations, with FL students in organized partnerships. Blake and Zyzik (2003), to describe one example, used synchronous chat to connect Spanish heritage language students in a university language course with Spanish FL learners on the same campus. Benefits were reported for both groups. The FL learners gained access to interaction with more advanced speakers of Spanish while the heritage speakers, many of whom had expressed insecurity about their Spanish language ability, by saying that it was “not good enough” (Blake and Zyzik 2003, p. 540), occupied expert roles that helped to affirm their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Blake and Zyzik suggest that for both groups, Internet mediation decreased anxieties about negative appraisals of their linguistic performance and, correspondingly, that such “non-inhibiting” situations “may tend to increase language output” for both groups (2003, p. 540). While many institutions and regions include populations possessing heterogeneous linguistic and cultural backgrounds, these intra-community resources remain largely untapped in FLE.

A final approach to FLE that utilizes the Internet to access expert speakers is to encourage (or require) learners to participate in established and non-educationally oriented Internet communities, such as discussion forums associated with newspapers such as *Le Monde* (see Hanna and de Nooy 2003, discussed in detail below; see also Tudini 2003). While other possibilities exist for online multilingual and intercultural communication, such as informal keypal partnerships and participation in Internet-based “massive multiplayer online games,”<sup>6</sup> these configurations are currently less amenable to the needs associated with instructed language education.

## Pedagogical Approaches to ICFLE

In this section, two key elements common to many ICFLE approaches are described. The first is the use of parallel texts to structure discussion and provide overall themes and goals for the partnerships. The second element concerns systems for sharing the use of the L1 and FL within intercultural collaborations. Two project types are discussed that provide concrete illustrations of successful and continuing class-to-class intercultural interaction (the “telecollaboration” approach). The first is a composite model<sup>7, 8</sup> that has been described in the work of Belz (2002, 2003), Belz and Kinginger (2002, 2003), Müller-Hartmann (2000), and Thorne (2003b). The second example is the *Cultura* project (see also Bauer *et al.* this volume). Note that this section is intentionally descriptive rather than evaluative as it attempts to present a coherent framework for developing successful ICFLE projects. However, as O’Dowd (2005) recently described, local conditions, expectations, and learning goals make simple adoption of an existing model problematic. The descriptions that follow are meant to be generative orientations, not prescriptive declarations.

### Parallel Texts, Concrete Activities, and Phase Sequences

The primary concern in telecollaborative language learning is what to have students do and how to orient them to the invariably serendipitous process of doing it. Having students engage with parallel texts has been particularly productive and many telecollaborative projects explicitly reference Kramsch (1993) as the source for this pedagogical inspiration (e.g., Kinginger *et al.* 1999; Kinginger 2004; Müller-Hartmann 2000a). The use of parallel texts can involve literature, film, children’s stories, fairy tales, or other genres of textual and media expression. Kinginger (2004) and Belz (2002) emphasize themes of childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, family life, and university life and education that include the following parallel texts and media. For French, students on both sides of the Atlantic read, analyze, and contrast a number of *dessins animés* “graphic novels” such as *La Grande Traversée*, *The Little Mermaid*, and *Pépé le Pew*. Students are also given the choice of analyzing a variety of films and their remakes, such as *Trois Hommes et un Couffin* (1985)—*Three Men and a Baby* (1987), *Neuf Mois* (1994)—*Nine Months* (1995), and *Les Compères* (1983)—*Father’s Day* (1997), among others. For German, Belz and her partner instructor Müller-Hartmann, use Grimm and Disney versions of the *Aschenputtel/Cinderella* tale, two juvenile literature novels *Ben Liebt Anna* by Peter Härtling (1997) and *If You Come Softly* by Jacqueline Woodson (1998), and two films depicting young adulthood in contemporary middle-class families, *Nach fünf im Urwald* (1995) and *American Beauty* (1999). For both the French and German courses, parallel texts provide the primary content for the dialogue and collaborative work the partner classes carry out together.

One of the more striking intercultural interventions within FLE is that created by Furstenberg and her colleagues (Bauer *et al.* this volume; Furstenberg *et al.* 2001; Furstenberg 2003). *Cultura* is noteworthy for its significant infrastructural development of Web-based materials and activities (see

<http://web.mit.edu/french/culturaNEH/>). Students utilize CMC for asynchronous interaction (see discussion in the section “Approaches to Language Sharing,” below), but also engage one another through Web-based questionnaires in which they make word associations (creating semantic networks), sentence completions, and provide responses to culturally specific situations and circumstances (examples are available on the *Cultura* Web site, above). The responses that students produce then form the data that each partner class analyzes in an effort to notice similarities and differences and to hypothesize possible reasons for these convergences and divergences. Public opinion polls are also made available so that students can discover where their analyses align within the larger context of population-wide national-level trends and beliefs. Increasingly over the semester, students are presented with a diverse set of parallel texts, including films (e.g., French films and their American remakes), French and American newspaper articles on the same topic but that represent divergent cultural positions, and diverse academic and literary texts. The *Cultura* project’s constructivist approach supports active engagement on the part of students and instructors alike. As anthropologists have noted for decades, most of what matters in culture operates at subtle levels that are difficult to capture or even to recognize. These facets of culture are “essentially elusive, abstract, and invisible. Our challenge [with *Cultura*] was to make them visible, accessible, and understandable” (Furstenberg *et al.* 2001, p. 56). The development of multiple heuristics, material artifacts, pedagogically progressive activities, and the use of Internet information and communication technologies make the *Cultura* project particularly noteworthy as a model for instructed FL learning. *Cultura* Web materials, as well as archives of previous exchanges, are available for use by interested classes and institutions.

In a detailed overview of the telecollaborative pedagogical processes he uses in the classroom, Müller-Hartmann (2000) describes a set of overlapping and iterative phases (based in part on Candlin 1989) that provide a tested framework for putting into practice telecollaborative language learning. Note that Müller-Hartmann also uses the parallel texts approach and regularly engages in telecollaborative partnerships with colleagues in the United States and elsewhere. As it is described here, Müller-Hartmann’s phase sequence is slightly modified and combined with the system used by one of his American collaborators (Belz 2002).<sup>9</sup> In the first phase, generally beginning prior to actual telecollaborative exchanges, students construct a personal cultural identity through the production and exchange of introduction letters (or links to texts and images posted on the Web or in blogs) that act in part as cultural autobiographies (Kern 1996). A variant or complement to individual letters is to have students, typically in groups or as a whole class, construct Web sites that represent their local campus and home community experiences. The explicit goal at this stage is to tailor these compositions to anticipate the projected interests and questions of partner class peers as well as to reflect upon, and perhaps to begin to see differently, the everyday cultural settings and processes at home.

Phase two begins with an emphasis on building a foundation of personal rapport and then moves into substantive dialogue focused on the parallel texts. Müller-Hartmann (2000) places particular emphasis on the teacher’s role in

helping students to understand key themes in the FL texts as well as to facilitate reflection on their own personal and collective worldviews (see also Fuchs 2004; O'Dowd and Eberbach 2004). As an aid to this process, reading journals should be kept for recording questions and insights that subsequently can be brought up in local class discussion before being shared with the partner class. Müller-Hartmann comments that by “[m]oving into the literary text in this way, learners started working collaboratively, trying to come to terms with their partners’ and their own identities and culture(s) in the process” (2000, p. 138). Building on this individual and intra-class preparation, students then share their perceptions, challenges, and analyses with members of the partner class.<sup>10</sup> Recommended group size for phase two interactions are dyads and smaller clusters of three to five students to allow for interpersonal relationship building and the exchange of ideas. During their five-year (and continuing) collaboration, Müller-Hartmann and Belz have found that proper pairing of students is crucial and, through experience, have developed a procedure that balances teacher control and student initiative. On the American side, students are placed into initial dyads based on the teacher’s knowledge of their background and experience with them in class over the first six weeks of the semester. Once the telecollaboration begins, two or three German students chose an American dyad based on their Web-biographies. Within these transatlantic groups of four to six, each American can select one or two “special correspondents” with whom they might develop a more personal relationship. This procedure establishes a stable social infrastructure but one that is open to student initiative, a quality that may amplify personal investment in the telecollaborative process.

The third and final phase involves, in Müller-Hartmann’s words, “coordinating perspectives” (2000, p. 142). Belz provides a detailed description of what she had her students do during the third phase of telecollaborative interaction,<sup>11</sup> including the measures she employed for evaluating their final products:

The task during phase [three] was for each group to develop a Web site . . . which contained a bilingual essay pertaining to the parallel texts and a bilingual discussion of a cultural construct (e.g., “racism,” “beauty,” “family”) from multiple perspectives. In addition to discrete-point grammar, discourse grammar . . . , and content, students were evaluated on their demonstration of electronic literacy . . . as evidenced by the appropriate integration of images, video, sound, and topic-related informational hyperlinks into their Web sites (2002, p. 64).

In this excerpt, we see the culmination of approximately eight or nine weeks of age-peer interaction in the form of collaborative essays made available via the Web. Müller-Hartmann (2000) notes that the final phase can often feel rushed and incomplete. Under ideal conditions and with tight adherence to the scheduling of tasks, such as that described by Belz above, final and finished looking collaborative products should represent convergences and agreements as well as articulate ongoing differences and debates. If time is short, as often happens toward the close of the semester, it is also possible to attain some of the closure and summative

clarity a more formal project may provide by convening a series of intra-class discussions oriented toward having students express, in academic and personal terms, the significance they gleaned from the telecollaborative experience (see Müller-Hartmann, this volume, for a discussion).

### **Approaches to Language Sharing: Which Language When?**

In most ICFLE projects, electronic discussions are intended to be bilingual in nature so that each participant has ample opportunity to use both their expert language as well as the FL they are learning. Often, however, partner classes have a relative imbalance in communicative expertise, where the FL competence of one group is substantially higher than the FL competence of the other. In U.S.–Europe telecollaborations, for example, it is often the case that the European partners have a higher competence in English than the American students do in the FL (this has also been reported in Ireland–German tandem partnerships, see O'Rourke 2005). Whatever the desired balance between L1 and FL use, the language-use protocol should be explicitly presented to all participants. Additionally, partners should be encouraged to discuss and confirm language-use practices with one another during their first exchanges. If appropriate, participants can also be made aware of different approaches for language sharing. One orientation is to encourage students to produce messages in an “any code” contract, mixing languages as they wish at the clause, sentence, or paragraph levels. A second approach is to suggest that they attempt to sustain their language choice for longer discourse units, for instance to write the first half of an e-mail in French and the second half in English. There are potential benefits to both systems. Any code contract may provoke creative language use and mediate a more complex level of discourse as gaps in FL communicative capacity can be filled in with L1 words or utterances. On the other hand, promoting code-specific periods or units of activity, especially during synchronous CMC sessions, has the advantage of encouraging “pushed output” that has been hypothesized to contribute to syntactic development and which may foreground for the learners gaps in their communicative repertoires that can later be explicitly addressed (Swain 1985; Swain and Lapkin 1998).

In sharp contrast to a language-sharing approach, the *Cultura* guidelines propose that all CMC interaction, as well as responses to the Web-based questions and prompts, be produced in the participants' L1. The rationale given for this controversial pedagogical decision is that the benefit of rich input (from the partner class producing in their L1) outweighs the potential disadvantages of not having the experience of using the FL for age-peer interaction (see Bauer *et al.*, this volume). Recent ICFLE research would indicate that there are significant challenges to this method, particularly in the area of developing pragmatic competence (relevant studies are reviewed below). FL classes have many virtues, but fostering conditions that even distantly reflect the pragmalinguistic context of interaction with expert speakers is not one of them. In a study of U.S.–Spain telecollaboration that utilized a modified version of the *Cultura* model, and after a period of negotiation with the American partner class instructors (who supported the *Cultura* model), O'Dowd (2005) developed a three-part approach that involved all students using

English for some discussions, Spanish for others, and in the third, following the *Cultura* guidelines, students would write to one another only in their L1. In an assessment of each condition, O'Dowd (2005) found that there was no significant change in participation levels associated with language choice. Additionally, both student groups reported a preference for writing and reading in their FL, though they also found other of the formats satisfactory. O'Dowd (2005) notes that students involved in telecollaboration expect to be able to use their FL even when the rationale for culturally oriented L1–L1 exchanges is explained. The principle of reciprocity that informs tandem learning and most varieties of telecollaboration makes available both input from expert speakers using their L1 as well as opportunities to use the FL in situated, interpersonal dialogue. Based on the evidence available and the needs and desires of most FL student participants, a language-sharing approach would seem the superior choice for most ICFLE projects.

## ICFLE Research

### Part One: From Propositional Content to Intercultural Communication

More than a decade ago and still prophetic today, Kramersch suggested that FL teaching should be built on a philosophy of conflict, one that affirmed fault lines, engendered a tolerance for ambiguity, and where “understanding and shared meaning, when it occurs, is a small miracle” (1993, p. 2). Those working in the area of ICFLE have discovered the truth value of this formulation many times over. While small miracles do occur, Agar’s (1994) contestation-invoked opportunities for development—“rich points”—appear as or more frequently than do the small miracles of smooth interaction (e.g., Schneider and von der Emde 2003; Ware 2005; Ware and Kramersch 2005). In the discussion to follow, I will describe briefly two telecollaboration case studies that focus on disjuncture between discourse systems and then will suggest broader implications for the role of the instructor in ICFLE projects.

Motivated by the awareness that intercultural communication is certainly made more rapid and convenient by global communication networks, Kramersch and Thorne (2002) stress that characterizations of face-to-face communicative competence (e.g., Breen and Candlin 1980; Savignon 1983) may require substantial revision in the context of Internet-mediation. This study of French–American telecollaboration (see also Kern 2000) follows intra-class interaction among the Americans using synchronous CMC and then analyzes the inter-class e-mail exchanges that followed. The results illustrated that the French and American students were operating within, and expecting from the other, differing genres of communication. The French students employed a largely factual, impersonal, and dispassionate genre of writing that included supporting their positions with examples and argument building logical connectors (“for example,” “however,” “moreover”). By contrast, the American students expected the telecollaborative interactions to result in peer solidarity and mutual trust building. Especially in

early phases of the project, the phatic style of the American postings, full of question and exclamation marks (and other message elements seeking to build relations rather than exchange information), suggested a high degree of affective involvement and personal-emotional investment that, in the end, did not convert well to contentious academic argumentation. In a post-telecollaboration interview, one of the American students explained his experiences in the partnership in the following way:

**Interviewer:** It seemed like you all would ask questions, right? Didn't you get responses?

**Eric:** Sometimes we'd get long. . . . but it's true we didn't get, *it seems true that they weren't doing the same thing we were*. It seemed like, you know, we had a task. And they, it seemed like, *I didn't know what they were doing* [laughs]. . . . When we [Americans] were talking to each other, it was debate and agreement and process. But with the French, we'd ask a question and receive a statement . . . (Kramsch and Thorne 2002, p.97)

As Eric intimates, the two partner classes were operating on the different and orthogonal axes of communication as information exchange versus communication for personal engagement, forming what Bernstein (1996, p. 44) has termed a "potential discursive gap" that marks an opportunity for alternative possibilities and understandings. In the instance of this telecollaborative exchange, this gap was not adequately recognized until after the fact and so was not explored by students or instructors during the course.

In a study that imparts a complementary perspective on the issue of divergent communication styles, Belz (2003) presents a linguistic analysis of telecollaborative exchanges between one American and two German participants. Belz utilizes a variety of Hallidayan analysis called appraisal theory, a specialized approach used to analyze the linguistic elements at play in the development, negotiation, and maintenance of social relationships. Appraisal theory provides tools to examine epistemic modality and other linguistic resources that communicators use to display and negotiate feelings, judgments, and valuations (see Martin 2000).<sup>12</sup>

Belz produces a quantitative analysis of linguistic features in the asynchronous CMC interactions that illustrate that while overall rates of appraisal were similar for the three participants, there were marked differences in the distribution of positive and negative appraisals between the Germans and the American. To summarize, Belz demonstrates with fine-grained linguistic analysis that Anke and Catharina, the German partners, showed a tendency toward "negative appraisal, categorical assertions, and intensification [that] may be reflective of broader German interactional patterns of directness, explicitness, and an orientation toward the self" (2003, p. 91). In contrast, Eric, the American, exhibited "patterns of self-deprecating judgments, positive appreciation, and the upscaling of positive evaluations [that] may index broader [American] communicative patterns of indirectness and implicitness" (Belz 2003, p. 91). Belz clearly states that these differences dialectically interrelate with cultural and institutional communicative



patterns but that languacultural norms do not determine discourse in any absolute fashion. Rather, historically established languacultural systems represent social semiotic resources that inform interactional preferences.

Based on the distinctive and shared qualities of these two cases of intercultural communication, the question is, how might instructors help students to capitalize on these opportunities for intercultural learning? One method, drawing on Belz and appraisal theory, is to revisit “rich points” as they develop in intercultural dialogue and then to help students to see how the minutia of lexical choice and subtle linguistic cues create social realities that influence the flow of communication and the qualities of relationship development (see also Todaya and Harrison 2002).<sup>13</sup> Building on Byrnes (1986), the pedagogical implication to be drawn is not that students need necessarily change their discourse preferences, but that intercultural communicators would benefit from greater awareness of their own interactional style(s) and the development of heightened attunement to the communicative preferences of their interlocutors, perhaps even choosing, as a result, to occupy a position of hybridity that may complexify their interpretive capabilities as intercultural speakers. The instructor has multiple roles in this process, such as acting as a critical mediating resource and sounding board to facilitate consciousness raising and modeling what Kramsch describes as an intercultural stance (1999; Ware and Kramsch 2005). Belz provides the following description of the role of the ICFLE educator: “The teacher in telecollaboration must be educated to discern, identify, explain, and model culturally-contingent patterns of interaction in the absence of paralinguistic meaning signals, otherwise it may be the case that civilizations ultimately do clash—in the empirical details of their computer-mediated talk” (2003, p. 92–93). Put another way, the role of the FL teacher is “to prepare students to deal with global communicative practices that require far more than local communicative competence” (Kramsch and Thorne 2002, p. 100). This is, of course, a tall order for many language educators. If ICFLE continues to increase its market share in FLE, future approaches to instructor preparation will increasingly involve explicit methods (such as that used by Belz 2003) for helping students to interpolate between the familiar and the unexpected in global as well as local learning environments. Productive treatments of ICFLE-specific teacher roles and functions can be found in O’Dowd (2005) and O’Dowd and Ederbach (2004) while Müller-Hartmann (2000, this volume) and colleagues (Legutke, Müller-Hartmann, and Ditfurth in press) have come to place Internet-mediated intercultural communication at the center of their teacher-training program.

## **Part Two: Interpersonal Mediation and Language Development**

This section includes an overview of a case study illustrating interpersonal mediation as it contributes to language learning, a set of research findings addressing pragmatics, and issues of presentation-of-self in the educational uses of non-pedagogical Internet environments. While the studies reviewed here reflect generally positive outcomes, I do not wish to explicitly contrast them to the above research that described tensions and challenges in telecollaboration. Rather, what

I want to emphasize here are specific instances of language development and the contributions of intercultural social relationships to this process.

As Ray McDermott (1977) has argued, people create environments for one another. Interpersonal relationships have the potential to move a student from feelings of alienation to inclusion and vice versa, with significant implications for language learning (see Thorne 2005). This was the case for Kirsten,<sup>14</sup> a university student in a fourth-semester French grammar course participating in an ICFLE exchange with university students in France.<sup>15</sup> In a post-semester interview, the student described a transition that began with frustration over the slow start to the relationship with her keypal:

I was really upset when I didn't hear from him [French key-pal] at first. . . . I was like . . . "he didn't respond, I didn't talk to him, I'm really disappointed, I went and cried," and now I'm like "wow!", within a week I went from completely despondent and being like "I hate this, grrrrr!" to "wow, love it! Love it!" (Thorne 2003b, p. 47)

In the latter part of this excerpt, Kirsten is referring to a one-week period of extended and prolific dialogue with Oliver, her French partner, which began with an e-mail exchange but then quickly moved to another Internet communication tool, America Online Instant Messenger (IM). She reports that their first IM interaction went on for nearly six hours and included the use of both English and French. Subsequent to this, they continued interacting in 20- to 30-minute sessions, often twice or three times per day. Two issues are relevant here; the shift to IM, which is the clear communication tool of choice for peer interaction among university-aged youth in the United States, and the subordination of French language study as an educational activity to the use of French (and English) for the building of a personally meaningful relationship. Not discounting the importance of their blossoming (and flirtatious) friendship, Kirsten reported that her linguistic and pragmatic performance in French showed significant shifts. Through interaction with and goading from Oliver,<sup>16</sup> Kirsten eventually gained command of appropriate *tu/vous* (hereafter T/V) pronoun use, a facility that had eluded her throughout years of French study (see also the discussion of T/V use in Belz and Kinginger 2002, 2003, below). More dramatically, Kirsten had always thought of herself as "horrible" at French grammar and had little confidence in her capacity to carry out meaningful communication in the language. When asked about the specific linguistic gains arising from her interactions with Oliver, Kirsten made the following remarks:

**Interviewer:** What else beside the *tu/vous* stuff did he help you with?

**Kirsten:** Usage of "au" versus "en" versus "dans" versus "à" versus, you know, that kinda stuff. A more in-depth vocabulary, for sure. . . . it's kind of nice to have a human dictionary on the other end too . . . I was like "how am I supposed to say?" like for example. . . . So the "de" and "à" thing, "de la campagne," "à le cité," whatever, stuff like that. I was like "wow," you know, eeeeeee [vocalization of glee; laughs]. Because I couldn't get that from a dictionary.

**Interviewer:** That's something you have to have a little help with, yeah?

**Kirsten:** Yeah, yeah, and how am I supposed to learn it? That's not in the grammar books, you know [laughing], expressions like that, and other things. It was fun. (Thorne 2003b, p. 50-51)

In these excerpts, Kirsten describes the interaction that allowed her access to the French prepositional system that she allegedly “couldn't get . . . from a dictionary” and that is “not in the grammar books.” Many French language students have successfully developed the ability to use French prepositions of location from grammar texts or instructor-provided grammar explanations. Kirsten, however, seemingly required interpersonal mediation, specifically from a desirable age-peer who was willing to provide immediate corrective feedback as part of an ongoing social relationship. Her reflections and IM transcript data suggest the following developmental sequence. In the initial IM conversation with Oliver, she crossed a threshold that marked the first time she was consciously aware of her capacity to communicate meaningfully in French. Kirsten realized this increasing capacity when she states, in reference to this first IM conversation, “that was the first time that I was like, ‘I made a connection in French.’ I was so proud. It was like, ‘wow, that's me, in French, and he understood me!’” (Thorne 2003b, p. 53) After this point, she was able to benefit from Oliver's explicit linguistic assistance and to participate in extended and unrehearsed dialogues in French, largely through his confidence-building enthusiasm for the content of her ideas (this is clearly expressed in the IM transcript data). This brief case study suggests that interpersonal dynamics construct differing capacities to act, which in turn are associated with a range of possible developmental trajectories.

The power of social relationships also has a hand to play in one of the strongest examples of pragmalinguistic learning outcomes reported in ICFLE research. In a series of studies on telecollaboration, Belz and Kinginger (2002, 2003) and Kinginger and Belz (to appear) described the development of address forms used in French and German (T/V).<sup>17</sup> Current sociolinguistic research indicates that T/V usage has become destabilized in the French and German languages (Morford 1997; Wylie and Brière as cited in Belz and Kinginger 2003). Additionally, there is considerable, if also understandable, simplification of the sociopragmatic ambiguity around T/V usage in the restricted contexts of textbooks and classroom discourse. In this sense, T/V use is not simply rule-governed but is instead embedded in a system of meaning potentials that are realized in particular social interactions. Nearly all of the American participants in these interactions exhibited free variation of T/V at the start of the intercultural communication process. Belz and Kinginger tracked usage over time in both e-mail and synchronous CMC sessions and found that after critical moments within exchanges with expert speaker age-peers, the American participants began to systemically modify their usage. These critical moments included explicit feedback and rationales for T-form usage from German and French peers. Additionally, the American students had myriad opportunities to observe appropriate pronoun use by native speakers across synchronous and asynchronous CMC modalities. In this way, pragmatic

awareness of T/V as an issue (i.e., “noticing,” see Schmidt 1993) led to the approximation of expert speaker norms in most cases. Belz and Kinginger argued that the American students’ desire to maintain positive face (in essence, wanting to be liked) with age-peers helped to focus their attention on the role of linguistic form in the performance of pragmatically appropriate communication. In further research, the importance of the social relationships built in these transatlantic partnerships have been linked to positive development of other grammatical and morphological features, namely *da*-compounds in German (Belz 2004, this volume), modal particles in German (Belz and Vyatkina 2005a, 2005b), and lexical and morphological development in Spanish (Dussias, this volume).

This section concludes with a discussion of a different sort of ICFLE project. Hanna and de Nooy (2003) report on four students studying French who participated in public Internet discussion forums associated with the Parisian newspaper *Le Monde* (see also Tudini 2003). The authors present a strong rationale for opting to use public discussion forums rather than more conventional telecollaboration partnerships.<sup>18</sup> While it is a debatable point, Hanna and de Nooy argue that while telecollaboration has many virtues, students are still “safely within the classroom, virtual though it might be” (2003, p. 73) and limited by the fact that they occupy, and predominantly speak from, the institutionally bounded subject position of student or learner. *Le Monde* discussion forums, by contrast, exist to support argumentation and debate about mostly contemporary political and cultural issues. One forum in particular, labeled *Autre sujets* (other topics), included a wide range of participants and topics and was selected as the venue for the study.

The French language learners in Hanna and de Nooy’s study were David and Laura, both American, and Eleanor and Fleurie, who were English. Hanna and de Nooy examined their opening posts to the *Autre sujets* forum and then tracked the number and content of the responses they received. Each of the four students opened with a gambit that positioned them as learners of French, but they differed in their tone and effect. Eleanor and Fleurie opted to create new, standalone messages on the forum, with the respective subject lines *Les Anglais* (“The English”) and *Une fille anglaise* (“An English girl”). In the content of their posts, Eleanor and Fleurie each made explicit requests for conversational partners to help them improve their French. They received a few cordial as well as abrupt replies, each of which suggested that they actually say something or take a position in the ongoing discussion. Neither did and both disappeared from the forum.

David and Laura, in contrast, both opened with a response to another message, *de facto* entering into a turn exchange system as their messages were marked by the subject line header of the message they had responded to (e.g., *Réf: Combattre le modèle américain*—“Fight the American model”). They also each began by apologizing for the limitations of their French language ability. Hanna and de Nooy interpret this as a sagacious strategy that “reinstates certain cultural borders” and that provided them with “a particular speaking position” (2003, p. 78) that may have yielded advantages in the debate culture of the forum. It is also salient that, immediately following their language apology gambits, they each contributed position statements on the themes of racism and cultural imperialism.

David, in fact, primarily used English in his posts, but with coaching and support from forum participants, he maintained an accepted and significant presence on the forum. Hanna and de Nooy interpret this as an indication that “neither politeness nor linguistic accuracy is the measure of intercultural competence here” (2003, p. 78). Rather, in the circumstances of *Le Monde* discussion forums, participation in the genre of debate is the minimum threshold for membership. The primary take-home message from this delightful study is clear. Framed in vernacular language, it goes something like this: If you want to communicate with real people, you need to self-present as a real person yourself. This suggests an ICFLE agenda that would orient students toward how to recognize genres, and subsequently, how to engage in discussion that does not ultimately revolve around “the self . . . as the exotic little foreigner/the other” (Hanna and de Nooy 2003, p. 73).

## Recognizing Technologies as Cultural Artifacts

By definition, ICFLE is made possible through technological mediation. However, in the arena of Internet-mediated language education, the cultural dimensions of the technologies themselves are generally neglected, and neglected at a cost to the quality of ICFLE interaction (Thorne 2003b). To begin, a larger frame of reference is described to help contextualize the critical issue of communication tool choice to mediate ICFLE projects.

The Internet has enabled multiple new opportunities for information gathering, enhanced possibilities for producing and disseminating information to others, and has provoked changes in the granularity of information sharing between spatially dispersed co-workers, friends, and family members. As the research of Jones (2004), Miller and Slater (2000), and Scollon and Scollon (2004) make clear, a dichotomized view of face-to-face and Internet-mediated life, and certainly the distinction between “real” and “virtual,” completely dissolves under close examination of lived communicative practice. Especially among the digital native generation (Presky 2001), a descriptor for individuals who quite literally grew up with (and through) the use of Internet information and communication tools, it is apparent that social as well as academic communication is mediated by participation in digital environments such as facebook ([www.thefacebook.com](http://www.thefacebook.com)), blog networks, instant messaging, and voice and text messaging over cell phones (see Thorne and Payne 2005, pp. 381–386). This increase in mediated communication in the service of community building and maintenance suggests that for many students, performing competent identities in second and additional language(s) may now involve Internet-mediation as often as or more often than face-to-face and non-digital forms of communication.

It is also clear that, unlike CMC L2 use during the 1990s when the Internet was often treated as a proxy or a heuristic environment to assist with the development of face-to-face communication and non-digital epistolary conventions, Internet-mediated communication is now a high-stakes environment that infuses

work processes, educational activity, interpersonal communication and, not least, intimate relationship building and maintenance (Castells 1996). However, the Internet does not exist generically as a neutral medium. Rather, Internet communication tools are, like all human creations, cultural tools (Cole 1996) that carry interactional and relational associations, preferred uses (and, correspondingly, inappropriate uses), and expectations of genre-specific communicative activity. Kramsch and Anderson note that information and communication “has become more mediated than ever, with a mediation that ever more diffuses and conceals its authority. The role of education, and FLE in particular, is precisely to make this mediation process visible” (1999, p. 39). Cultures-of-use of Internet communication tools build over time in relationship to use in particular discursive settings and to mediate specific social functions. The suggestion is that technologies, *as culture*, will have variable meanings and uses for different communities. While Internet communication tools carry the historical residua of their use across time, patterns of past use do not determine present and future activity, just as gender, mother tongue, or social class do not determine present and future activity. Rather, the cultures-of-use framework provides another axis along which to perceive and address intercultural variation and similarity (Thorne 2000b, 2003b).

To explicate this point with an example, participants in a recent telecollaborative exchange reported that e-mail was a constraining variable in the intercultural communication process. Not only did many of the e-mail interactions fall flat, in a number of cases they simply did not happen at all. This was due, in part, to the fact that the communication tool decided upon by the project coordinators and instructor, e-mail, was perceived by students as a medium well suited for vertical communication across power and generational lines (professors, parents, employers, and for organization communication), but one that was inappropriate as a tool to mediate interpersonal age-peer relationship building (Thorne 2003b). In an extended ethnographic interview, one student, Grace, reported her conviction that e-mail was such an unsuitable tool for age-peer interaction that it overpowered the coercive force of a graded directive given by the instructor to continue the e-mail exchanges. Although this student liked her keypal and enjoyed the project generally, she chose not to participate because e-mail seemed to be the only modality option.<sup>19</sup> Grace’s perspective was not unique—approximately half of the students interviewed (in a class of 24) expressed broadly similar views though usually in less extreme terms (see Thorne 2003b). The fact that other ICFLE research illustrates that e-mail is suitable for all manners of communicative activity (e.g., Fuchs 2004) underscores the point that different populations variably configure Internet communication tools. And these cultural configurations and associations are always transforming as histories of use collide with the exigencies of present needs and contexts. For students like Grace, for example, it is entirely possible that with more explicit or constructive mediation, she might have been able to transform e-mail into a different cultural tool, one that would have better been able to serve her communication needs.

## Conclusion

In contrast to approaches to FLE that focus predominantly on language in relative isolation from its use in interpersonal interaction, ICFLE emphasizes participation in intercultural dialogue and development of the linguistic and meta-communicative resources necessary for carrying out such processes. In this essay I have reviewed research that addresses intercultural communication from linguistic, interpersonal, and developmental perspectives, as well as studies describing issues of cultural contestation and the cultures-of-use of Internet communication tools used to mediate ICFLE interaction. This chapter has attempted to describe a variety of practical and theoretical resources relevant to developing interculturally focused pedagogical innovations.

A variety of options exist for incorporating Internet-mediated intercultural communication into curricula. Four models of ICFLE were described, the primary of which was telecollaboration, defined as international class-to-class partnerships within institutional settings. Telecollaboration practitioners tend to formally align their course activities, structure collaborative tasks, and often utilize parallel texts to provide the catalysts for dialogue, cross-cultural analyses, and critical reflection on one's home culture(s). Telecollaboration models are administratively intensive to initiate and maintain due to the high level of coordination between partner classes (e.g., Belz and Müller-Hartmann 2003). However, class-to-class partnerships arguably provide the strongest support for developing sophisticated understandings of intercultural communication through careful design of student-initiated investigations and the explicitly designated role of the instructor as critical mediator and resource. A variant of the telecollaboration model involves connecting FL students with heritage speakers on the same campus, a format that Blake and Zyzik (2002) suggest holds significant promise for language development. Also discussed were open Internet communities such as discussion forums (chat networks and social formations associated with online gaming are other options) that provide the possibility of entering into ongoing, non-educationally oriented discourse communities. The use of interaction in online communities as component parts of instructed FL courses has been shown to provide opportunities for negotiation of meaning (Tudini 2003) and to situate foreign language use in non-educational social contexts (Cononelos and Oliva 1993; Hanna and de Nooy 2003).

Tandem learning has also proven to be a highly productive model that emphasizes dyadic collaborations based on the two principles of reciprocity and learner autonomy. This model illustrates its flexibility by the fact that it is used in formal education settings (e.g., Kötter 2003; O'Rourke 2003) as well as provides thorough and thoughtfully designed infrastructural support for anyone interested in participating in a tandem exchange (Brammerts' *eTandem* project). It was suggested that tandem learning networks could be used to complement FL self-study and distance education formats, or as an accompaniment to conventional FL courses, to provide otherwise limited opportunities for meaningful relationship building through use of the FL. While it is tempting to draw discrete boundaries between tandem learning and telecollaboration, I have made the argument that there is a

substantial middle ground shared by both approaches. At the extreme ends of the continuum, the differences are marked, with tandem learning offering support for non-institutional and autonomous dyadic partnerships that may last weeks or years, while telecollaboration is institutionally based, bound to academic calendars, and places emphasis on the teacher's role to facilitate critical reflection (see Müller-Hartmann, this volume; Schneider and von der Emde, this volume) and awareness of the complex relationships uniting linguistic form with intercultural pragmatics, genres, and broader languacultural issues (see Belz, this volume).

At its core, ICFLE approaches are oriented toward two entwined goals. The first is to create conditions to support the development of significant social relationships between persons who have been socialized into varying and varied languacultural viewpoints. The second goal is to make visible and available the conceptual, linguistic, and cultural tools necessary for negotiating what is always and everywhere intercultural communication. A re-orientation of FLE from a focus on communicative competence to a focus on *intercultural* competence (e.g., Sercu 2004) brings with it opportunities to re-assess the processes, objectives, and central value of FLE. It is not an over-bold statement to suggest that the burgeoning research and pedagogical interest in ICFLE approaches are catalyzing a new alchemy within foreign language education, one in which linguistic precision and discourse competence continue to play roles, but in the service of cultivating the capacity to make collectively relevant meanings in the inherently intercultural contexts of everyday life.

## Notes

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1. I wish to thank an anonymous reviewer for challenging the need for (yet) another acronym and for requesting a rationale for the use of ICFLE.
2. For information on the still vibrant Freinet movement, see <http://www.freinet.org/icem/bistory.htm>
3. "Sentences," in opposition to "utterances," for example, are an epiphenomenon of written literacy and have only variable relevance to verbal communication, and for that matter, to synchronous CMC (see McCarthy 1998).
4. Defined by Belz, "*Telecollaboration* involves the application of global computer networks to foreign (and second) language learning and teaching in institutionalized settings. In telecollaborative partnerships, internationally-dispersed learners in parallel language classes use Internet communication tools such as e-mail, synchronous chat, threaded discussion, and MOOs (as well as other forms of electronically mediated communication), in order to support social interaction, dialogue, debate, and intercultural exchange" (2003a, p. 2).
5. For information on the *eTandem* project, visit <http://www.slf.rubru-uni-bochum.de/etandem/>
6. Technologies and online social and cultural formations are constantly evolving. To take one quite speculative example, massive multiplayer online games are immensely popular (see Gee 2003) and are already "educational" in the sense players must learn to negotiate the rules of the game as well as other players. Increasingly, large areas of these online worlds are non-English. For the growing



number of students participating in online gaming cultures, the international, multi-lingual, and imminently task-based qualities of these social spaces, where language use is literally social and material action, may one day make them *de rigueur* sites for language learning (or perhaps, somewhat ironically, students will study FLs to enhance their gaming skills and interactional capacity in these language-driven action-scapes).

7. Beginning in the fall of 1999, a number of Penn State colleagues collaboratively developed a multi-year, grant-funded research and pedagogical innovation project to examine the effects of telecollaboration in university-level foreign language classes. The funded research arm of the project ran from 2000 to 2004, but ICFLE courses continue to be taught.
8. *The Penn State Foreign Language Telecollaboration Project* was funded by a United States Department of Education International Research and Studies Program grant (CFDA No.:84.017A). The author was a co-principal investigator on the grant.
9. In particular, I have consolidated Müller-Hartmann's phases two ("project based exchanges") and three ("intensive reading") into one reading and interaction phase.
10. Müller-Hartmann provides the following example of a telecollaborative task developed by one of his American collaborators: "I had each student highlight a moment from the book that impacted them. In the second paragraph I had them make a parallel with our community. The third paragraph (if they had time) was to personalize the message with a 'social' comment or two" (2000, p. 138).
11. In the telecollaborative exchange reported on in Belz (2002), Müller-Hartmann, her collaborator in Germany, had his students engage in an additional phase that involved discussing the telecollaborative process in theoretical and practical terms.
12. Appraisal focuses on three areas: 1) Attitude, covering affect, judgment, and appreciation; 2) Graduation, the linguistic resources speakers use to intensify or mitigate semantic categories; and 3) Engagement, the interactional and linguistic resources speakers use to align or disalign themselves from "the socio-semiotic realities or positions activated and referenced by every utterance" (White 1998, p. 78, cited in Belz 2003, p. 73).
13. Todoya and Harrison (2002), in a telecollaborative partnership linking advanced proficiency Japanese learners with native speakers, found that having students carefully review synchronous CMC transcripts of their interactions helped them learn to analyze complex syntactic structures, interpolate between word level and discourse properties of the communication, and develop strategies for improving their performance in synchronous CMC dialogue.
14. This and all learner names reported in this chapter are pseudonyms.
15. Students of French at *The Pennsylvania State University* interacted with engineering students at the *Ecole Nationale Supérieure de Télécommunications de Bretagne* during the Spring of 2002.
16. In an e-mail, Oliver ended his message with "Bon je garde le 'vous' mais, de grace, utilize 'tu' avec moi!!" [Okay, I get the 'vous' but please use 'tu' with me!!]. In interview, Kirsten, pointing to her e-mail response to Oliver, said "See, I do learn. I changed it!" In the final line of her e-mail, Kirsten had written, "J'attends impatiemment ton réponse!" [I impatiently await your [informal pronoun] response!"]
17. This research was supported by a United States Department of Education International Research and Studies Program Grant (CFDA No.: 84.017A).

18. See Sawchuk (2003) for a discussion of informal learning in computer environments. Sawchuk's study suggests that informal learning activity, because it hovers at the margins of institutional authority, has the potential to catalyze transformative rather than reproductive developmental processes.
19. The focal student discussed in this example, Grace, described her views on e-mail this way (Thorne 2003, p. 56).

**Interviewer:** Do you e-mail much?

**Grace:** Not not that much. Just mostly for communicating with professors.

**Interviewer:** And for your key-pal?

**Grace:** I just e-mailed him a couple of things in English . . . and then I was like, I'm not talking to him any more except in the NetMeetings. And then [the Instructor] was saying how like we have to do that, but then I didn't [laughs]. I didn't e-mail him any more. . . . Like I just, it just wasn't very convenient I guess. Like if you had AOL Instant Messenger I would just, you know, type in something every so often or whatever, but it's different than e-mail. . . . It's like, "Oh God, I have to write an e-mail now." Like it's just like, you don't want to, it's like an effort.

**Interviewer:** So how many times a week do you e-mail friends?

**Grace:** Never.

**Interviewer:** Never?

**Grace:** Never.

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## Acknowledgments

This chapter benefited tremendously from the critiques and comments of colleagues, both known and unknown. In particular, I would like to thank Julie A. Belz and anonymous referees for their extensive feedback, suggestions, and challenges. While any shortcomings are my responsibility alone, many of this chapter's strengths were catalyzed by the perceptive commentaries of others.