Addressing Power Imbalance in Telecollaboration to Promote Attitudes of Intercultural Competence

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Abstract:
Internationalization-at-home (IaH) can benefit all types of students, and its value has become more evident in the long aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic. This paper reports on a virtual exchange initiative: Students of English as a foreign language in Brazil and English composition in the US engaged in an international telecollaboration project. Our objective was to understand whether students who participate in telecollaboration projects develop attitudes that lead to intercultural competence once issues related to the power imbalance between native speakers and non-native speakers of English are addressed. To determine whether the two groups of students developed attitudes of tolerance, respect and curiosity for other cultures as well as attitudes of trust towards each other, we asked them to complete a questionnaire at the end of the project. Results show that the telecollaboration stimulated students' interest in other cultures, a crucial first step towards the acquisition of intercultural competence. The students collaborated effectively because the two groups trusted each other's linguistic competence. Our study confirms that telecollaboration is one of the most pedagogically sound initiatives within the sphere of IaH. More instructors should prepare students to communicate and collaborate effectively in cross-cultural teams through this type of experiential learning.

Keywords:
Internationalization at home. Intercultural competence. Telecollaboration.

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INTRODUCTION

Internationalization is "the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education" (KNIGHT, 2003, p. 2). Rumbley, Altbach and Reisberg (2012, p. 6) identify key manifestations of internationalization in the increasing number of internationally mobile students and scholars, the growing interest in preparing students to succeed in an interconnected world, the consolidation of English as a lingua franca for higher education, the increase in the commercialization of international education, and the growth in cross-border educational provision (proliferation of sister institutions, branch campuses, and collaborative arrangements; growth of distance learning). As concerns the rationales that drive internationalization, we can distinguish four groups: social/cultural, political, academic, and economic. As Knight (2012) reports, worldwide surveys conducted by the International Association of Universities in 2003, 2005 and 2009 show that for heads of institutions the top rationale (for 2005 and 2009) was the fostering of intercultural competence and an interest in international issues.

In an effort to understand how US administrators and intercultural scholars understand the concept of intercultural competence, Deardorff (2006, 2009) conducted a study that shows how the participants were able to reach consensus on 22 essential elements of intercultural competence. Deardorff organized these elements in a pyramid model that includes four stages. Stage one poses attitudes as a fundamental starting point. Individuals need to appreciate the values of respect for other cultures, openness to intercultural learning, curiosity, and discovery. Once these requisite attitudes are acquired, individuals can move to stage two: the acquisition of knowledge and skills while maturing cultural self-awareness and sociolinguistic awareness. Stage three includes four desired internal outcomes: adaptability, flexibility, ethno-relative view, and empathy. These internal outcomes lead to stage four: The external outcome of "behaving and communicating effectively and appropriately (based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) to achieve one's goals to some degree" (DEARDORFF, 2006, p. 254).

Deardorff's model partially overlaps with Byram's influential model (1997), which includes five interdependent components: attitudes, knowledge, skills of discovery and interaction, and skills of interpreting and relating. In Byram's vision, the interplay of these four components leads to critical cultural awareness, the fifth component. Although there are many other conceptualizations of intercultural competence, several models emphasize the importance of attitudes. The interculturally competent speaker is often constructed as a person who can transform an intercultural encounter into a relationship by showing a commitment to understanding an unfamiliar culture while also inviting the 'stranger' into their own culture.

Considering the importance of internationalization of higher education as a movement to promote the fostering of intercultural competence, this paper reports on a project conducted by a teacher from an American university and two intern teachers from a Brazilian university. Students from both institutions engaged in a telecollaboration project in which they worked as authors and reviewers. Our

objective is to illustrate how students who participate in telecollaboration projects develop attitudes that will help them gradually develop their intercultural competence and an ability to collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds. To achieve our pedagogical goal, we agreed that we had to address issues of power imbalance between native speakers of English and non-native speakers. The latter are often implicitly positioned as learners who cannot teach anything to native speakers and whose role is to imitate speaking and writing models that are typical of native English.

Our project is an example of how to operationalize Internationalization at Home, a framework of teaching and learning initiatives that will be discussed in the first section of this paper. Section two will present an overview of transnational virtual exchange before illustrating our own telecollaboration project. Sections three and four will present and discuss our findings. The conclusion will offer our final considerations on the acquisition of attitudes of intercultural competence through telecollaboration.

INTERNATIONALIZATION AT HOME

Institutions of higher education that place a high value on intercultural competence conduct internationalization efforts that include several types of mobility and exchange programs. These programs include: the recruitment of international faculty and students, the export of academic systems that may include cross-border delivery of programs, and the internationalization of the curriculum. The term typically used to designate all forms of education across borders (mobility of people, projects, programs, and providers) is Internationalization abroad. In contrast, the term Internationalization at home (IaH) designates curriculum-orientated interventions designed to engage students in activities that develop global understanding and intercultural skills. There are many definitions of IaH: older ones are rather broad (CROWTHER et al., 2001). Newer ones tend to be more specific. Beelen and Jones (2015, p. 69) define IaH as the "purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments".

Traditionally, the emphasis has been on internationalization abroad and, in particular, student mobility, but the decade 2010-2019 has witnessed a shift towards the idea of comprehensive internationalization, discussed at length by Hudzik (2011, 2015). International and comparative perspectives, according to Hudzik, should be "infused" throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education. Internationalization cannot be simply a desirable component of higher education. Rather, it should shape the institutional ethos of world universities (HUDZIK, 2011, p. 6). Traditionally, mobility was the most publicized and attractive component of internationalization policy and practice, but the situation has started to change in the last ten years (DE WIT; HUNTER, 2015) and the Covid-19 pandemic has stimulated further reflections on the value of IaH.

Assuming that international travel can be restored to its full glory, mobility programs will still appeal to the small number of students who can afford the costs of these programs. An Open Door survey published in 2017 (IIE, 2017) revealed that only about 10 percent of all US undergraduate students will study abroad by the time they graduate. Other factors that may discourage students from spending time at partner universities abroad are tightened visa requirements and the availability (and expanding role) of distance education (ALTBACH; KNIGHT, 2007). When compared to mobility programs, IaH is a more equitable approach to internationalization that can benefit all types of students (DE WIT et al., 2015). Research shows that IaH activities can stimulate the development of students' intercultural competencies as much as much as – if not more than – traditional study/travel abroad (SORIA; TROISI, 2014). Hence, there is no reason to consider IaH as the poor sister of mobility programs. With Whitsed and Green, we believe that internationalization "must be for all students at all levels across all disciplines" (WHITSED;

GREEN, 2016, p. 288). It is time to go beyond mere rhetoric to find more ways to operationalize internationalization in teaching and learning (OTIENO, 2020).

The main component of IaH is the internationalization of the curriculum that means incorporating "an international and intercultural dimension into the preparation, delivery and outcomes of a program of study" (LEASK, 2009, p. 209) to help students develop international and intercultural perspectives as global professionals. Guimarães et al. (2019) recently queried Google Scholar to identify patterns in the use of the "internacionalização em casa" or "internationalization at home" or "ensino superior" OR "higher education" in the last ten years. They found a significant increase in the publications about this topic both in English and Portuguese. Among the most renowned IaH programs are the Collaborative Online International Learning or COIL developed at the State University of New York (RUBIN, 2016), the Trans-Atlantic and Pacific Project or TAPP (MAYLATH; VANDEPITTE; MOUSTEN, 2008; MOUSTEN, MOUSTEN et al., 2010), and UNIcollaboration (O'DOWD, 2018). These programs rely on the gradual development of complex networks of teachers who connect geographically distant partner classes to implement several types of collaboration between cross-cultural virtual teams (CCVTs).

Virtual exchange and Telecollaboration

Over the years, the development of new Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has promoted new ways of interaction for translocal groups of students and CCVTs. For English language instructors who place emphasis on cultural aspects of language acquisition and communicative competence, the increasing usage of ICT has had a significant impact on syllabus planning and practice. However, instructors should always integrate technology in the classroom with a critical mindset. Although telecommunication applications and platforms for collaboration like Google Docs can be very helpful in the classroom, it is important to consider that for their successful application in language courses educators need to reflect on their affordances and limitations so that technologies can be coherently integrated with the goals of teachers and students (SALOMÃO, 2017). Instructors also need to be aware that technology and online learning are not culturally neutral (REEDER *et al.*, 2004). Most of the Web 2.0 technologies used in telecollaboration (social networks, wikis, blogs, and video-conferencing software) were created in Western contexts and reflect the values of Western cultures (GUTH; HELM, 2010).

Two terms used to describe international projects that link college courses in two (or more) different countries are *virtual exchange* and *telecollaboration*. In foreign language education, *telecollaboration* designates a project in which groups of learners from distinct locations and cultural contexts engage in intercultural exchange via online interactions in educational settings (DOOLY, 2008). Guth and Helm define *telecollaboration* as "internet-based intercultural exchange between people of different cultural/ national backgrounds, set up in an institutional context with the aim of developing both language skills and intercultural communicative competence (as defined by Byram, 1997) through structured tasks" (GUTH; HELM, 2010, p. 14). As Helm (2013) illustrates, key learning outcomes include the development of language skills, intercultural communicative competence, online literacies, and work-related competences such as translation and professional communication. Following Byram's model of intercultural competence (BYRAM, 1997), Belz (2003) convincingly argues that the intercultural speaker rejects all forms of prejudice; respects different cultural beliefs and traditions; and shows curiosity and openness for other cultures.

Although the meanings of *telecollaboration* and *virtual exchange* overlap in theory and practice, *virtual exchange* is often used as an umbrella term for international projects conducted remotely. According to O'Dowd (2018, p. 1), virtual exchange should be used to "refer to the engagement of groups of learners in online intercultural interactions and collaboration projects with partners from other cultural

contexts or geographical locations as an integrated part of their educational programmes".

In 2016, at the Second Conference on Telecollaboration in Higher Education at Trinity College in Dublin, UNIcollaboration – the Cross-disciplinary Organization for Telecollaboration and Virtual Exchange – was launched. According to O'Dowd (2018), the choice for the organization's name recognizes the considerable number of studies that have used the term *telecollaboration* to refer to international projects that link courses in two or more different countries. At the same time, the organization's name contributes to the establishment of *virtual exchange* as an umbrella term. Virtual exchange includes projects that follow different models and approaches to international collaboration both within and outside the field of foreign language education: for example, e-tandem/teletandem, COIL, and telecollaboration.

During the development of the project illustrated in this paper, the participants in the US – instructor and students – would refer to it as a virtual exchange practice, while in Brazil, the two instructors and their supervisor would use the term telecollaboration. The usage of both terms by instructors and participants shows that their meaning still tends to overlap. However, the divergence in the use of the terms by the two groups did not represent a problem at the stages of planning, execution, and evaluation of the project.

The extensive literature on telecollaboration projects conducted by instructors affiliated with the TAPP (see, e.g., MOUSTEN *et al.*, 2018; VERZELLA; ARNÓ; MAYLATH, 2021) shows that students involved in these projects do not simply learn skills. Rather, they develop attitudes of curiosity for difference and an ability to accommodate others by resorting to linguistic mediation. Through exchange and collaboration, students appreciate the importance of using a wide range of communicative resources to accommodate audiences in translocal and computer-mediated contexts of interaction.

Our Telecollaboration Project

The partnership to conduct the project was established by a teacher of English composition at Penn State Erie, The Behrend College (henceforth Behrend) and two PhD students and intern teachers at São Paulo State University (henceforth UNESP) during the fall semester of 2019. Two English composition courses at Behrend and one in Brazil were engaged in an international project designed as a telecollaboration between CCVTs.

To avoid establishing unequal and asymmetrical relationships and diminish the power position of native speakers (HELM; GUTH; FARRAH, 2012), the two institutions and the two groups of students involved in the collaborative project were presented as symmetrical partners in mutual exchanges. We never presented writing produced by students in the US as a model for the students in Brazil, and we never posited idiomatic American English as the language to be used in the writings produced by the students in Brazil. In other words, the students in the US were not presented as the authoritative language experts whose main role was to coach or tutor the Brazilian students. Following Helm, Guth, and Farrah's (2012, p. 118) invitation to avoid positioning non-native speakers solely as language learners, we emphasized their expertise as users of English as a lingua franca (ELF). We agree with Canagarajah (2007) that speakers of ELF should never be reductively considered as incompetent. They can certainly develop their proficiency further, but this is also true for native speakers, who can always develop their proficiency in English (especially written English) and their understanding of communication in ELF.

The present study draws from critiques to the idea of the native speaker as the norm-providing ideal (COOK, 1999; SEIDLHOFER, 2001; JENKINS, 2006; VERZELLA 2017, 2019) and native speaker ideology (RAMPTON, 1990; KRAMSCH, 1997; CANAGARAJAH, 2007; PENNYCOOK, 2007) to present spoken or written interaction in a lingua franca as a communicative situation that requires all types of speakers to adjust their use of language and rhetorical strategies to negotiate meaning-

making. In many contact situations, "it is an ethical duty of proficient speakers to embrace hospitable communication practices that make strangers, foreigners, and outsiders feel welcome and respected in a new social environment" (VERZELLA, 2019, p. 10).

Student Groups, Tasks, and Goals: UNESP

Groups

Two UNESP groups participated in our telecollaboration project. Both groups were composed of undergraduates majoring in Letras (Languages and Literatures) and enrolled in the course Compreensão e Produção Escrita em Língua Inglesa (Comprehension and Written Production in English Language).
• Group 1, taught by Vivian Nádia Ribeiro de Moraes Caruzzo, consisted of 39 third-year students who attended classes in the morning.

• Group 2, taught by Tamiris Destro Costa, consisted of 21 third-year students and two first-year students who attended classes in the evening.

Tasks

First, UNESP students had to respond to a video created by their Behrend partners using VoiceThread, a collaborative, multimedia slide show that holds images, documents, video, and narration. Second, UNESP students were randomly assigned to compose either a review or an explanation and share their texts with their Behrend partners using Google Docs. Third, they had to offer feedback on the texts (a review or an explanation) composed by their Behrend partners to evaluate their readability for a global audience. Finally, they had to complete a post-learning questionnaire to reflect on the project

Goals

What characterized our project as a telecollaboration is the diversity of learning goals for the courses involved at the two universities (O'DOWD, 2018). While we expected all students to acquire attitudes of openness and curiosity for other cultures, additional goals for UNESP students were to develop foreign language competence and intercultural communicative competence. The instructors in Brazil reassured their students that the fact of being non-native speakers of English would not pose obstacles to the successful completion of their projects as long as they remained always mindful of how cultural and social differences (in the understanding of politeness, for example) may cause miscommunication and misunderstanding. In addition, the instructors invited their students to see themselves as expert users of ELF.

Student Groups, Tasks, and Goals: Behrend

Groups

Two groups of students participated in our telecollaboration project:
• 24 first-year students enrolled in English Composition, a first-year writing course. These students were majoring in a variety of disciplines ranging from business to engineering.

• 24 third- or fourth-year students enrolled in Writing in the Technical Profession, an upper-level writing course for students in STEM disciplines. Most of these students were engineering majors.

Massimo Verzella taught both courses.

Tasks

Behrend students had to complete the same tasks assigned to the UNESP students: Create and share a VoiceThread, develop and share reviews and explanations, offer feedback on texts composed by their project partners, and complete the final questionnaire.

Goals

The primary goal for the Behrend students was to develop an attitude of curiosity for other cultures and rhetorical traditions. A related goal was to explore how non-native speakers use ELF in spoken and written communication. The instructor often reflected on the concept of accommodation with their students to invite them to consider how to achieve mutual understanding with emergent users of English. In general, US students do not have many opportunities to communicate with speakers of other languages. For this reason, they are not always prepared to adjust their use of English when they interact, in speaking or writing, with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Current research on ELF (PITZL, 2005; COGO; DEWEY, 2006; MEIERKORD, 2006; COGO, 2009; KAUR, 2009; HOUSE, 2010; MAURANEN, 2012; COGO; HOUSE, 2018) shows that non-native speakers can resort to many pragmatic strategies to accommodate interlocutors. Native speakers need to be introduced to these strategies more explicitly to avoid *unilateral idiomaticity* (SEIDLHOFER, 2002, 2009), a type of miscommunication that occurs when a speaker fully embraces native speaker norms in contact situations that call for linguistic accommodation and the use of ELF.

Organization of the Telecollaboration

This section provides an account of how we organized the online partnership between the two groups of students at Behrend and the two groups at UNESP. The partnership was conducted during the fall term of 2019 (between September and November). It was organized in the following phases:

• September 3rd: Students at Behrend were paired up with UNESP students.

• September 3rd-10th: Students and instructors at both universities discussed how to develop VoiceThread presentations.

• September 10th: Students at Behrend completed VoiceThreads and shared them with their assigned project-partners at UNESP.

• September 10th to 15th: UNESP students added comments to the VoiceThreads developed by Behrend students and developed their own VoiceThreads.

• September 16th: UNESP students shared their texts (reviews and explanations) with Behrend students using Google Docs.

• September 17th and 19th: Behrend students offered feedback on the texts shared by their project partners at UNESP.

• October 3rd: Behrend students shared their texts (reviews and explanations) with their project partners at UNESP.

• October 8th: UNESP students offered feedback on the texts shared by Behrend students.

• October 15th: Instructors at both universities asked students to complete a questionnaire on the telecollaboration project and moderated final class discussions.

Students were invited to socialize by watching the VoiceThread presentations created by their project-partners and adding comments to these presentations. Some students went beyond this basic requirement and exchanged telephone numbers to use WhatsApp. Students were also asked to collaborate with their project-partners using a mix of synchronous (Google Docs instant messaging function) and asynchronous (the comment tool in Google Docs and emails) tools.

Task 1: The VoiceThread Presentations

Before completing the writing tasks assigned to them, participants in telecollaboration need to socialize and establish trust in the relationship (JARVENPAA; LEIDNER, 1999; JOHNSON; CULLEN, 2002; ZAKARIA; AMELINCKZ; WILEMON, 2004). For this reason, we asked all students to develop a VoiceThread presentation to introduce themselves and share information on their communities. The two-minute presentations had to include pictures accompanied by audio comments, but also short videos and text boxes to add information on pictures or videos. The VoiceThreads had to be shared with project-partners and all the instructors with permission to view and comment to stimulate sustained interactions.

Task 2: The Written Assignments and Peer Reviews

The Behrend students enrolled in the first year composition course and their UNESP partners had to develop a written review on a topic of their choice; a film, for example, but also a music album, a restaurant, a video game, a consumer product, and so on. This genre was assigned because reviews tend to be idiomatic and contain many cultural references that are likely to stimulate conversations between peers. We imagined that students would need clarifications to better appreciate their peers' writing. To address the problem of the power imbalances that can be observed when native and non-native speakers are involved in telecollaboration (TRAIN, 2006), we asked the UNESP students to develop reviews on topics related to life in Brazil. In this way, they could assert their role as experts.

Both groups of students also developed explanations of technical concepts. While students at Behrend wrote explanations on topics mainly related to different fields of engineering, e.g. plastic injection molding, turbocharger components found in automobiles, elements of supply chain management, and so on, UNESP students developed explanations on topics related to linguistics, e.g. accents and prejudice, phonetics and phonology, translation theory, linguistic variation in Brazil, cross-border language, and so on. Once again, the UNESP students were able to present themselves as subject matter experts in the field of linguistics.

Besides producing texts, all students had to provide feedback on their project-partners' VoiceThread presentations, reviews, and explanations. What this means is that all students who participated in the telecollaboration took on two roles: They acted both as authors and reviewers. Not only did they have to carefully reflect on how to create texts for readers from different lingua-cultural backgrounds, they also had to reflect on how to provide constructive and helpful feedback to their project-partners.

The Questionnaire and Our Research Questions

Our investigation took the form of an exploratory case study. A case is defined in the literature as a "bounded instance" (STAKE, 1988) that investigates phenomena within the real-life contexts in which they occur (YIN, 1984). In this study, the bounded instance was the collaboration between two

groups of students enrolled in two different courses offered at two different universities. The case study approach was adopted given the necessarily exploratory nature of the research.

Our data collection tool was a questionnaire that students completed at the end of the project. We created one single questionnaire even if some questions were phrased differently. For example, UNESP students answered the question: "Does the fact of your partner being a native speaker of English influence your trust on their feedback?" Clearly, the question was modified for Behrend students to ask them if they trusted feedback received from non-native speakers. The questionnaire was composed of 26 questions that were directly related to the telecollaboration project. We included a mix of multiple-choice questions (20) and open-ended questions (6). For nine of the multiple-choice questions we asked students to justify their answers.

The key questions that we asked students were used to test hypotheses. The questions on attitudes, for example, were formulated to yield support to claims that students who participate in telecollaboration projects develop attitudes of openness and curiosity for other cultures. The questions on issues of trust between the two groups of students assumed that non-native speakers would trust feedback from native speakers with few or no objections compared to native speakers. However, some of our questions were also informed by findings that emerged during the telecollaboration as we reflected on distinct aspects of the project with our students. We did not formulate all the questions *a priori*, before starting the project. We created new ones or revised the phrasing of old ones based on our observations and discussions.

Bearing in mind that our study is focused on student's attitudes, we agree with Robson and McCartan (2011, p. 248) that questionnaires can be a valid research instrument since they "provide a relatively simple and straightforward approach to the study of attitudes, values, beliefs and motives". We also agree with Barcelos (2001, p. 78) that "questionnaires are less threatening than observations and are useful if the researcher has limited resources and short time". Since our research was carried out within the context of short-time courses, for which students had to engage in other activities besides the ones directly related to our study, the questionnaire was the most appropriate choice for our data collection purposes. Finally, Vieira-Abrahão (2006, p. 222) promotes the use of questionnaires in contextual studies because questionnaires "allow the mapping of perceptions and beliefs from the ones involved in the process".

Our first research question (RQ1) was: Will telecollaboration help students develop attitudes of intercultural competence?

The other research questions focused on the issue of trust and the problem of power imbalance between native and non-native speakers of English:

RQ2 was: Will students trust the feedback offered by their peers abroad?

RQ3 was: Will students trust feedback on grammar received by peers, rather than instructors?

RQ4 was: Will students consider whether their peers are native or non-native speakers of English when offering feedback?

Results

RQ1

When asked if the telecollaboration project contributed to stimulate their curiosity for other cultures (yes/no/somewhat scale response), 73.5% of the Behrend students and 88.1% of the UNESP students answered "yes." Students were also asked whether the telecollaboration helped them respect and value distinct cultures (yes/no/somewhat scale response). The percentages of affirmative answers were respectively 87.7% for the Behrend students and 92.7% for the UNESP students. The answer to

RQ1 is that our telecollaboration project did help students develop an interest in other cultures while also helping them value different traditions and social customs.

RQ2

Another question asked all students involved in the telecollaboration how they evaluated their partners' feedback on their reviews or explanations (4-point scale, ranging from "poor" to "excellent"). The majority of UNESP students, 57.5%, rated the feedback as "excellent;" 28.8% rated it as "good." This means that 86.3% of students found the comments on their texts useful and relevant. Behrend students were a bit more doubtful about the suggestions they received from their peers: the feedback was "excellent" for 44.9% of the students and "good" for 34.7% for a total of 79.6% of students who expressed satisfaction with the help received by their peers. The answer to RQ2 is that most of both Brazilian and US students trusted the feedback offered by their project-partners.

RQ3

A more specific question asked all students if they trusted the feedback offered by their project partners on grammar (this time we used a yes/no/partially scale response). 50% of the Behrend students answered "yes" and 39.6% answered "partially". Only 10.4% answered "no." In this case, the difference with the responses offered by the UNESP students was more significant since 78.8% of them answered "yes," 15.4% answered "partially," and 5.8% answered "no." The answer to RQ3 needs to be more cautious. It is safe to say that UNESP students trusted the feedback on grammar received by their project-partners. Behrend students generally trusted feedback on grammar but had more reservations on certain suggestions. The US instructor recalls that several students asked him to read one or two comments added to their texts to assess their value and accuracy.

RQ4

When Behrend students were asked if their feedback was influenced by the fact that the texts were written by non-native speakers (4-point scale with options "totally", "a lot", "somewhat", and "not at all"), only 10.2% answered "a lot". Most students, 51%, selected "not at all", which shows how non-native speakers were not seen as incompetent users of English who need, so to say, a special treatment. The responses offered by the UNESP students show a significant difference between the two groups in terms of attitude. Exactly half of the UNESP students answered "a lot": They were very influenced by the fact that their partners were native speakers of English. The option "somewhat" was selected by 34.6% of the students, who were partially influenced. The answer to RQ4 is that, compared to the Behrend students, who did not seem to be significantly influenced by the fact that they were offering feedback to non-native speakers of English, UNESP students could not set aside the thought that they were offering feedback to expert users of English. This was clearly a strange situation for the UNESP students; a situation that caused some anxiety because even at the end of a project in which their role as ELF experts was emphasized, they still tended to see themselves as language learners and deficient speakers of English.

DISCUSSION

Results show that the telecollaboration helped students appreciate the values of respect for other cultures, openness to intercultural learning, curiosity, and discovery. This renewed interest in

difference and diversity represents a crucial first step towards the acquisition of intercultural competence (DEARDORFF, 2006, 2009; BYRAM, 1997).

The fact that the Brazilian students appeared to be more curious about US culture and traditions can be attributed to two factors. First, we need to consider that all the UNESP students were majoring in Languages and Literatures (Letras) whereas half of the Behrend students, the 24 enrolled in Writing in the Technical Profession, were majoring in diverse engineering fields. It is safe to assume that some of these 24 students resented having to take (the course is required, not optional) a writing course towards the end of their academic journey, at a time when they would rather focus on disciplines more related to engineering. For this reason, this relatively small group of students might have struggled with motivation and a lack of enthusiasm while completing project-related tasks.

Second, the UNESP students were already familiar with many aspects of US culture – thanks to the internet, video games, social media, films, TV shows, and music – and so their interest rested on solid foundations. In contrast, some of the Behrend students were not even certain about what language people speak in Brazil. For many, the telecollaboration project marked their first 'encounter' with Brazilian culture. Considering that it takes time to develop an interest in a different culture, the fact that 73.5% of Behrend students reported developing an interest in Brazilian culture should be seen as the sign of their willingness to embrace a cosmopolitan attitude of appreciation of difference.

Results also show that the participating students collaborated effectively because the two groups trusted each other's communicative competence, albeit to different degrees. This is a key point because one would expect native speakers to distrust feedback from non-native speakers; but our results tell a different story. Native speakers generally trusted the feedback offered on their papers even if they appeared to be more cautious with suggestions on grammar. Participating in an international project helped native speakers to understand that non-native English speakers should be viewed as competent users of English as a lingua franca, rather than deficient speakers of American English (COOK, 1999; JENKINS; COGO; DEWEY, 2011; DIMOVA, 2017). They also understood that there are strategies that can be used to repair potential breakdowns and achieve intelligibility in cross-cultural communicative situations (CANAGARAJAH, 2014).

For their part, the UNESP students appeared to see native speakers almost as authority figures when it comes to grammar matters. This finding was expected considering how textbooks and diverse types of learning resources still present native English as the only variety of English that is worth studying. Telecollaboration projects like the one reported in this paper should contribute to challenge the ideology of native-speakerism (HOLLIDAY, 2006), which continues to set unattainable goals for language learners (COOK, 1999) while sending native speakers the wrong message that they do not need to make an effort to accommodate emergent speakers of English.

Importantly, the fact that UNESP students could not help seeing their peers in the US as language experts does not mean that the two groups of students established asymmetrical relationships in which native speakers take control of the collaboration (TRAIN, 2006). Because we never presented idiomatic American English as the model to follow for English learners, both groups of students accepted and even praised creative resourcefulness in the use of linguistic resources. We cannot claim that the imbalance of power was eliminated considering that the ideology of native speakerism is particularly difficult to demystify (PAVLENKO, 2003; KIM, 2011). However, we did notice that Brazilian students became more confident in their mastery of ELF while the US students appeared to genuinely appreciate how their project-partners were able to adjust their use of language and negotiate meaning (both in their VoiceThread presentations and their written exchanges) using several different pragmatic strategies.

While UNESP students realized how important experiential learning can be to develop their proficiency in English, they were also comforted by the praise received by their project-partners who appreciated all the efforts made to accommodate them. For example, the Behrend students appreciated how their peers offered background information to understand aspects of Brazilian culture, how they translated many Portuguese words (including proper names) into English and used idiomatic expressions typical of American English to establish rapport. The Behrend students also understood how their proficiency in English gives them great power in contact situations (HELM; GUTH; FARRAH, 2012), but also great responsibilities: The responsibility of adjusting their use of language to accommodate emergent users of English and make them feel welcome, respected, and valued in both professional and non-professional contexts.

Conclusion

Our results show that telecollaboration is one of the most pedagogically sound initiatives within the sphere of IaH. All the learning goals established before the project were achieved by the instructors who could also witness how engaging telecollaboration projects can be for students. Not only do our findings mirror and confirm the value of findings reported in similar studies conducted by members of the UNIcollaboration (O'DOWD, 2018), TAPP (MOUSTEN et al., 2018), and COIL networks (RUBIN, 2016; SCHULTHEIS; SIMON, 2015; TARAS et al., 2013), as well as other researchers (DE HEI et al. 2020; HYETT et al., 2018), they also provide convincing support for recent calls to develop a broader understanding of internationalization programs (HUDZIK, 2015; PROCTOR; RUMBLEY, 2018). Too many instructors in higher education tend to see mobility programs as the only type of internationalization that is worth pursuing, thus failing to consider how unsustainable these programs can be, especially in the long aftermath of a pandemic. All students need access to experiential learning and the opportunity to interact with peers from distinct cultures. All students need a chance to develop their intercultural competence and their ability to communicate effectively and sensitively in English if the goal of higher education is to form global citizens and culturally sensitive professionals.

Our findings clearly suggest that telecollaboration projects can help students develop attitudes that constitute the starting point for the acquisition of intercultural competence: Curiosity and respect for other cultures; openness to intercultural learning; tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; and acceptance and appreciation of the new, the unfamiliar (BYRAM, 1997; DEARDORFF, 2006, 2009). Our students appeared to move from defensive attitudes and a lack of interest for unfamiliar cultures to a keen desire to learn more about different traditions. They showed a genuine interest in the stories shared by their peers abroad. In addition, our students matured an understanding of communication as a process of mediation that requires sensitivity and a willingness to constantly adjust the use of linguistic resources. All users of English need to acquire pragmatic strategies that facilitate mutual comprehension in interactions between speakers of different languages.

We understand that our paper has limitations related to the numbers of students involved, which does not allow us to generalize our results about the acquisition of attitudes that lead to intercultural competence. It is important to bear in mind that changing attitudes towards the foreign and developing intercultural competence is a complex and multifaceted process that results from exposure, experience, and reflection (STIER, 2006). To conduct a more comprehensive and longitudinal study, we would need more data from our students with respect to their background, time spent abroad, previous experiences, and interests. In addition, we would need to develop a long-term collaboration between the two groups of students to investigate how they gradually develop their ability to communicate efficiently and their understanding, and appreciation, of each other's cultures.

But even with these limitations, our research shows that students can develop attitudes that lead to the acquisition of intercultural competence. A clear pathway for achieving this goal is through experiential real-world learning opportunities, such as those afforded by telecollaboration projects. More instructors should reflect on the value of these projects while trying to explore ways to adjust them to the mission and values embraced by their institutions and their programs, on the one hand, and their disciplinary needs, learning goals, and teaching philosophy on the other. Telecollaboration can connect several types of classes in a variety of disciplines. Students in the health sciences will have to interact with patients from diverse backgrounds. Or, to make another example, students of marketing would certainly benefit from collaborating with peers from one or more countries overseas to understand how rhetorical strategies for persuasion must be adjusted to diverse audiences.

To conclude, our study confirms that students involved in telecollaboration do not simply learn skills. Rather, they develop attitudes of curiosity for difference and an ability to accommodate others that will help them develop intercultural competence. In turn, the acquisition of intercultural competence will help students develop into professionals who can meet the demands and challenges posed by an interconnected, diverse, and rapidly changing world.

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