

AN ACTIVITY SYSTEM ANALYSIS OF INTERNATIONAL
TELECOLLABORATION: CONTEXTS, CONTRADICTIONS AND LEARNING

By

OLGA BASHARINA

B.A., Yakutsk State University, Russia 1996

B.Ed., Yakutsk State University, Russia 1996

M.Ed., University of Alaska Fairbanks, USA 2000

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to provide a thick and rich description of interpretations and understanding of the complex nature of international telecollaboration, including 1) the relationship between participants, computer technologies, and contexts; 2) cross-cultural contradictions and 3) learning. To meet this purpose this study examined the long distance computer mediated communication in 4 WebCT forums which joined 52 Japanese, 37 Mexican, and 46 Russian English learners.

Sources of data consisted of the written transcripts of the online exchanges, interviews, pre- and post- project surveys, journals, and participant observations. The analysis of data was framed within my model of Intercultural Context-Embedded Telecollaborative Activity (ICETA, an expanded version of the Activity System model by Engestrom, 1987) and structured within three broad dimensions: Contexts, Contradictions, and Learning. The “Contexts” dimension included characteristics of geopolitical structures, institutional contexts, context of interaction, and students’ agency. The emphasis was on defining to what extent students shaped the environments and the environments shaped students’ participation. “Contradictions” captured the *how*, and “Learning” the *what* aspects of interaction.

The study illustrates how affordances of multiple contextual layers defined students’ participation trajectories, their objectives, motivation or unwillingness to interact, and attitudes toward each other. The Japanese and Mexican students’ participation represented an interactive learning paradigm whereas the participation of the Russian students represented a curriculum teacher-centred paradigm. Depending on their identity of deep, strategic or surface communicators students demonstrated differences in quality of their participation.

The study identified eight major contradictions attributed to students’ different cultures-of-use of the computer technologies (Thorne, 2003) and different frames of reference with

regards to their norms of language use and beliefs about learning online. The study found evidence of both learning and not learning through content and discourse analysis of interaction protocols and students' interview and survey reports.

Extending the ongoing discussion, the study emphasizes the importance of 1) students' cultures-of-use of computer technologies, mediated by instructors and by broader socio-cultural contexts, 2) students' frames of reference with regards to interaction and learning, and 3) students' agency in defining the meaning of being communicatively competent in international/intercultural online environments.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

There are a number of incentives to use computers in language education. The first incentive is related to a growing understanding of learning as a social practice, facilitated in a socially rich interactive environment. The goal to provide for increased human response and social interaction has led to an interest in using computer-mediated communication (CMC) as an additional learning space where people can engage in interaction free of time and space constraints.

The broader justification for the use of computer technologies is their responsiveness to the life-long learning and development of multiliteracies (including electronic literacy) necessary to succeed in the modern world where much communication is accomplished electronically (Carey, 2000; Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Cummins, 2000; Warschauer, 1999).

In addition, in our increasingly interconnected world, people face the urgency to communicate in a lingua franca with culturally diverse populations and to develop a sense of belonging to a global community in order to accomplish their personal, educational and career goals. Communication across cultural and linguistic boundaries is essential in the twenty-first century for resolving common global problems and potential intergroup conflicts in both the domestic and international arenas. Cummins and Sayers (1995) remind us that: “unless students cross the cultural boundaries both within and beyond... national borders... they will be ill-prepared to address the myriad social and ecological problems their generation will face” (p. 161). Therefore, computers are used to give learners access to a new environment, where they can gain intercultural communicative competence for developing a broader sense of identity associated with global citizenship (Cummins, 1994, 1996).

1.1 Background of the Problem

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) is commonly referred to as an interactive stage of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) due to its new capacity for human-to-human interaction. Before this recent development, only human-computer interaction was available in the context of language instruction when computers were used only for grammar drills and tests (Structural Approach to CALL). Then, with the development of more sophisticated software, the learners engaged in animated simulation exercises framed into various communicative situations (Cognitive Approach to CALL). In the 1990s CMC shifted the focus from the content of computer programs to the content of human-to-human interaction (Socio-Cognitive Approach to CALL). These three stages of CALL were preceded and caused by the shift in language teaching - from structural to cognitive/constructivist and to socio-cognitive approaches (Warschauer & Kern, 2000).

CMC includes synchronous (e.g.: chat rooms, Internet relay chat), asynchronous (e.g.: e-mail, bulletin board and listserv), one-to-one, one-to-many, many-to-many text and voice-based interaction. CMC is also viewed as one of the three components of electronic literacy. Two other components are Internet-based research and the construction of web-pages.

CMC introduces students to new types of reading and writing practices, radically different from conventional literacy practices (Carey, 1999a,b; Warschauer, 1999). According to Rassool (2002), electronic “texts” offer new “active” ways of seeing, hearing and experiencing the world through different forms and modes of information, which can deal with a wide variety of content at the same time. More specifically, electronic spaces provide the following affordances described by Rassool (2002):

- “The re-structured author-text-reader relationship which allows a degree of textual malleability in terms of both production and interpretation not available with print text.”
- “The flexibility of focus, ‘the infinite periphery’ that theoretically frames the availability of information.”
- “The manipulability of information evident in the ways in which texts can be edited, revised and corrected over time.”

Important for this study is such characteristic of CMC as:

- “The immediacy of interaction offered by information technology – and the possibilities that this provides for discussion of issues, and cross-cultural engagement with ideas with users located across different time zones and geographical areas (and, relatedly, the potential that this has for the shaping of trans-national, individual opinions on social, political and cultural issues)” (p. 203).

The shift of focus from single classrooms to long distance collaborative projects implements three things:

- “Expands the focus beyond language learning to an emphasis on culture (i.e. intercultural competence, cultural learning, cultural literacy).”
- “Expands the notion of context beyond the local (often institutional) setting to include broad social discourses.”
- “Problematizes the notions of its own inquiry, namely, communication and intercultural competence” (Kern, Ware and Warschauer, 2004; p. 244).

Studies focusing on intercultural aspects of CMC (I-CMC) include the exploration of the motivational aspect of online environments and the greater target language output (Beauvois, 1992; Carey, 2001, 2002; Cummins, 1998; Kelm, 1992; Kern, 1995, 1996; Meagher & Castanos, 1996; Spiliotopoulos, 2002; Toyoda & Harrison, 2002; Warschauer, 1996, 1998); the development of greater cultural awareness (Furstenberg, Levet, English & Maillet, 2001; Garner & Cullingham, 1996; Meskill & Ranglova, 2000; Thorne, 1999; Warschauer, 1999); the study of cross-cultural differences (Chase, Macfayden, Reeder & Roche, 2002; Reeder, Macfayden, Roche & Chase, 2004), as well as the influence of computer technologies on the society at large (Bowers, 1988; Castells, 1999; Ess & Sudweeks, 2001; Herring, 1996).

Earlier studies on CMC, both long-distance and within the context of one classroom, have been primarily framed within the product-oriented paradigm focusing on the most quantifiable and easily measured aspects of online communication (Chun, 1994; Kern, 1995; Ma, 1996; Meagher & Castanos, 1996; Vilmi, 1994). This paradigm has been criticized for being too narrowly focused and failing to document many factors influencing the process of learning. Instead, research design which is rather *process-oriented and qualitative* and includes the context of computer use, interaction, and multimedia networking was advocated by key scholars in the field such as Chapelle (2001) and Warschauer & Kern (2000). Proponents of investigating contexts of computer use emphasize the significance of the processes through which linguistic interaction helps to construct the meanings relevant to learning.

The most recent studies on I-CMC by Belz (2003), Chase et al. (2002), Kramsch & Thorne (2002), O'Dowd (2003), Reeder et al. (2004) and Ware (2003; in press) explore the

processes of interaction and the kinds of cultural contact afforded by the technological medium. In this dissertation I review in more details the studies by Belz (2003), Kramsch & Thorne (2002), O'Dowd (2003), and Ware (2003) only (Table 1.1), as they focus on international telecollaboration between learners in parallel classes located in different countries of the world. In particular, these studies focus on language-exchange learning in which participants are students from the USA studying European languages such as German or Spanish and their European counterparts studying English and interacting in the pedagogically structured online environments.

Table 1. 1 Comparison of Recent Studies on Intercultural CMC

	Channel and Participants	Number of messages	Research questions/goal	Research methods
Belz (2003)	E-mail structured tandem exchange German learners in USA, English learners in Germany	N/A	How can linguistic analysis help reveal new layers in interaction and students' cultural behaviour?	Interaction protocol (10 e-mails) analysis (Case study of 1 partnership)
Kramsch & Thorne (2002)	E-mail structured tandem exchange French learners in the USA, English learners in France	N/A	- To what extent does the medium itself change the parameters of communication and the nature of language use? - What kind of discourse is being promoted online: a discourse of truth or a discourse of trust?	Interaction (5 e-mails) protocol analysis (Case study of 1 partnership)
O'Dowd (2003)	English learners in Leon, Spain Spanish learners in London, UK	150 e-mails + 30 e-mail replies to researcher's questions	What characteristics of e-mail exchanges lead to intercultural learning?	Interaction protocol (10 e-mails) analysis & Interviews (Case study of 5 partnerships)
Ware (2003)	Blackboard BB structured tandem exchange 11 English learners in Germany & 9 German learners in USA	167 messages	- How do students' views of technology, language learning, and criteria for evaluating mutual participation contribute to their ability to co-construe a context for supporting (hindering) cross-cultural interaction?	Theme-based data analysis (interviews, classroom observations, pre- and post-surveys)

The research scope of these studies is based on the analysis of a few e-mail partnerships (excluding the study by Ware) within projects that generated no more than 200 messages. While the electronic texts written for e-mail and bulletin board communication are similar in nature, the differences in channels – one-to-one vs. many-to-many, shape interaction dynamics in two different ways. Bulletin board communication replicates a highly interactive model with multiplicity of voices, non-linear structure, and differs from e-mail interaction norms and communicative rules. The studies by Chase et al. (2002) and Reeder et al. (2004) reveal interesting insights into BB intercultural communication between learners located within one country and taking the long-distance course offered by the major Canadian university. Additional research is needed on how students coexist and learn in international online communities characterized by naturally occurring interaction in English among more participants, more geographical diversity (including other than American and Western European students), and more complex inter-group relationships.

Furthermore, studies in Table 1.1 focus on single aspects of I-CMC such as genre (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Belz, 2003), context (Thorne, 2003), and tension (O'Dowd, 2003; Ware, in press), thereby, providing separate “analytic cuts” (Layder, 1993, p. 108) into “the rampantly complex and multi-layered social action of telecollaborative language study” (Belz, 2003; p. 2). The need for research in the form of a larger scale analysis of patterns of participation and interaction across cultural groups was voiced by Reeder, et.al. (2004) and Ware (in press).

Studies by Garner and Gullingham (1996), Potts (2001) and Warschauer (1999) provide a larger scale analysis through the use of ethnographic methods and thick and rich description. These studies contribute to the field by demonstrating the complexity of online

environments and the multiplicity of interrelated factors that need to be taken into account in order to fully understand the nature of CMC. However, out of these three studies, only the study by Garner and Gullingham (1996) includes analysis of the long-distance intra-cultural collaboration between students from two different states in the USA – Alaska and Illinois, whereas Potts (2001) and Warschauer (1999) investigate single computer supplemented traditional classrooms. There are no studies on international long distance collaborative projects in the form of a larger scale research, based on multi-layered analysis of their complex nature.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Whereas recent studies on I-CMC illustrate how students' cultural beliefs and values (or frames of reference) impact their learning experiences (Belz, 2003; Chase et al. 2002; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Reeder et al, 2004; Ware, 2003; in press) the effects of local contexts and larger geopolitical structures in shaping students' participation and learning in online environments is not sufficiently explored. Exception is the earlier study by Belz (2002) in which she explores the broader social dimensions of telecollaborative foreign languages study and the study by Thorne (2003). The focus on the relationship between participants, computer technologies and their local, cultural and global contexts is especially important in the study of international telecollaboration. For the long-distance international learners local, global and virtual aspects are in constant flux (Ess & Sudweeks, 2001) as students interact by the rules/norms of their local contexts, but at the same time, cannot ignore the rules/norms of the online culturally-heterogeneous communities.

Recent studies also have opened up a discussion if learning in online environments takes place at all and if participation in these environments leads to any new understanding, given that they often promote phatic interaction (Kern, 2000; Kramsch and Thorne, 2002). Therefore, more studies are needed to better understand the kinds of learning promoted by I-CMC.

Studies by Garner and Gullingham (1996), Potts (2001) and Warschauer (1999) mentioned above, analyze the broad scope of data based on the emerging, often unpredictable themes. In my opinion, the approach to data analysis both grounded and embedded within a theoretical framework could be helpful in revealing insights into complex nature of online environments in a more systematic way. Given this, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (or briefly Activity Theory) (Vygotsky, 1978, Leontiev, 1981, Nardi, 1996), with its triangular model of evolving complex activity (Engestrom, 1987) and its key notions of mediation, collaboration, intentionality, development, and culture (Nardi, 1996) can be effectively applied to the study of intercultural computer-mediated communication. Within Activity Theory research itself, one of its main aspects – “contradictions” has been often ignored (Wells and Claxton, 2002). Therefore, more attention should be paid to this neglected variable given that contradictions drive changes and capture the developmental path of activities, necessary in the exploration of the telecollaboration processes.

Given all these, there is a need for research which provides multi-layered, both inductive (grounded) and deductive (theory-driven) analysis of intercultural online environments, conceptualized as a complex, evolving activity system embedded within layers of broader socio-cultural contexts, and shaped by both students and instructors.

1.3 Statement of the Purpose and Research Questions

This study is motivated by a pedagogical goal to find out how we can create better intercultural learning environments for students in the time of the spread of discourses of globalization and technological progress. It explores the international telecollaboration between 52 Japanese, 37 Mexican and 46 Russian English learners located in three universities in Canada, Mexico and Russia.

The purpose of this study is to provide a thick and rich description of interpretation and understanding of the complex nature of intercultural telecollaboration, including 1) the relationship between participants, computer technologies, local and global contexts, 2) cross-cultural contradictions/tensions, and 3) learning processes and outcomes of students' participation in the online environment.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between contexts, participants and information technologies?
2. What are the cross-cultural contradictions/tensions of International telecollaboration?
3. What kind of learning does I-CMC promote?

1.4 Significance of the Study

As this research involves three different socio-cultural contexts, I developed a new model of Intercultural Context-Embedded Telecollaborative Activity (ICETA) which is based on an Activity System model (Figure 2.3) as well as a Structure (i.e. context and

setting) and Agency (i.e. situated activity and self) framework (Figure 3.1) with the latter adapted from Layder (1993) and Belz (2002). Using the ICETA model, this study attempts to:

- Provide a holistic picture of multilayered, complex Intercultural online environments rather than focusing on a single aspect of I-CMC.
- Extend previous studies on I-CMC and contribute to better understanding of the nature of learning in intercultural online environments.
- Identify cross-cultural contradictions that future participants might come across and help educators to create less anxious learning environments.
- Test how the newly developed ICETA model (Figure 3.3) is applied to an analysis of intercultural telecollaboration.
- Help teachers, researchers, and administrators to reassess approaches for teaching intercultural communicative competence in online environments.

1.5 Personal Perspective

I was first introduced to WebCT in 2000 at the University of British Columbia when I took two bulletin board mixed-mode courses with my supervisor Dr. Stephen Carey. Before I came to Canada, I knew that technology-enhanced teaching was one of the rapidly developing, promising areas and, therefore, I had great enthusiasm to participate in such classrooms and found them very useful for my learning and development. My engagement in CMC had been constantly developing through changes which followed the changes in my own goals and strategies as well as contexts of my CMC use.

Before I engaged into CMC, I did not associate a learner-centered online interaction with academic learning. I engaged in what I imagined to be the use of computer technologies for academic purposes, when I took an entirely online course with the department of Distance Education. As that course never met face-to-face, day-by-day description of classes, reading materials, and assignments were posted online. However, the bulletin board was not a central aspect in that course; rather, the focus was on writing 3 major papers based on the reading of the online materials independently throughout the course. Although we could ask questions and interact online, there were very few interactions and the bulletin board never became a place to socialize. I learned a great deal in that course, but I was learning almost in the same way I did in the traditional classroom, interacting and receiving feedback only from the instructor and using the computer as a text-book.

Participation in both mixed-mode and entirely online courses helped me to understand that they represented two different activities – mixed-mode being learner-centered and relying on knowledge construction through CMC and the entirely online course being less interactive and more teacher-centered. This understanding helped me to appreciate CMC for offering more flexibility, agency and multiple responses from both students and instructor.

I always knew that CMC was very useful for my learning, but at the same time, I often felt the pressure of keeping up with newly posted messages. For me an online activity demanded a lot of time-investment accompanied by a constant decision making process with relation to “what to say to whom and how” which is a very productive environment for L2 development. The “participation pressure” was mainly due to the novelty of the activity and my attempt to establish credibility in the eyes of my classmates and instructor who I just met

and barely knew. I discovered that I was a person who felt uncomfortable to leave some messages unread as I wanted to know what people were talking about in all threads. This also added to the pressure.

When I again took technology-supplemented courses with the same instructor and a number of the same students who participated in previous classes, I knew what to expect from them and the pressure associated with the novelty of experience was reduced. The instructor's understanding of individual differences with regards to computer use and emphasis on quality rather than on quantity of participation also helped to significantly reduce pressure. Instead of setting the goal to read every message and respond to as many students as I could, I focused only on reading and replying to a few, the most interesting academic messages. I did not read short and personal messages, I was interested only in messages rich in content and related to my research interest. I also noticed that the bulletin board message format was subordinated to the common standards dictated by the technology itself – such as to be not longer than a computer screen size, directly address the questions asked, and be concise.

When I went to Russia, in the Spring of 2002, I participated in Dr. Carey's summer course being thousands of miles away. Compared to the Canadian context, the use of the Internet in the Russian context was closely connected to the socio-economic status of its users. Those who had enough financial means to afford the computer, the Internet and its unrestricted use, would have participated on the bulletin board actively. Participation of less financially secure individuals would have been restricted unless they were ready to spend at least one fourth of their monthly salary for the Internet use. The best time to work on the Internet was the night time when the rates of use were cheaper and no phone calls expected.

It was also important to spend time productively, knowing beforehand every step that needed to be undertaken in order to save money, as the rates were based on every minute of the Internet use. Those who did not own computers could use the fee-based Internet-cafes that were numerous in the city at that time.

It was also important to choose a reliable Internet provider from among others who offered their services. I had the most reliable Internet provider that guaranteed good quality connection set through the dial up modem. Still the speed of downloading the bulletin board was considerably slower than in Canada and took around three minutes.

In the Russian context my participation in the online interaction reduced drastically. The main reason was that this activity was not a major priority for me - I wanted to do something else after being far away in Canada. Besides, it was no longer new for me as I participated in a WebCT-supplemented course several times. In addition, I felt restricted by the concern that the Internet was expensive, there might be urgent phone calls during my Internet use, and I should use it for a maximum of an hour per day.

The course I was enrolled in was also taken by the students in Canada who I knew from previous classes. This affiliation helped me to feel a part of their face-to-face community, although we were separated by distance. When I opened the site and saw messages of students I knew, I imagined them sitting in the classroom and myself interacting with them. I was more interested in reading messages, rather than in writing. I knew from previous courses, how my fellow-students would participate and what contributions I could expect from them, so I skipped their messages. Rather I was interested in the messages of new students, and in everything unpredictable. Because time of use was always a concern, I opened the bulletin board, scrolled the messages until I saw the names of the students that

interested me, copied their messages in the word document and closed the Internet. After reading their messages, I replied in a word document and opened the Internet again just to post my replies. Through participation in this activity in Russia I realized the importance of having the sense of presence of other participants who I knew, as my imagined ties with them made me feel more comfortable working in that environment. More importantly, I witnessed how context-dependent online activity was, given that my practice of engagement in the BB activity changed under the influence of local conditions.

Speaking about learning in the online environment, CMC provided me with a community where the target language was used and the course content was scaffolded. I was doing several things at the same time 1) I practiced English, 2) learned the content of the course 3) socialized with my classmates and learned more about them as well as 4) used leading interactive technologies. By being exposed to diversity of writing, constantly reflecting on others' and my language use, and negotiating adequate communicative norms, I believe that I improved my metalinguistic awareness. I also believe that I became more communicatively competent in expressing myself in English. I feel that the knowledge I gained through participation in the bulletin board discussion have translated to my e-mail writing proficiency and communicative competence in face-to-face interaction with different people. I began to write e-mail messages much faster and in the right expressions as words came to my mind faster. I also relate the fact that I began to reflect more on my face-to-face communication under the influence of online activity when I used to reflect on my own and others' writings. In both cases I "rewound" the speech and analyzed it from the pragmatic and linguistic perspectives.

Still the issue of how to become a more competent communicator is the main one for me. Becoming communicatively competent is an ongoing process which is closely related to the knowledge of pragmatic rules, target culture, appropriateness to the contexts of interaction and awareness about preserving personal voice, as well as a high level of personal sensitivity toward interaction with other people.

My experience of participation in technology supplemented online classes in the role of a student and in the role of an instructor (the latter discussed in the Methodology section), helped me to become interested in the field. I formulated several important hypotheses which stimulated the writing of this dissertation and included the following propositions:

- The ways computer technologies are utilized depend on the broader social contexts of their use.
- Online environments will always have different social dynamics depending on the participants' agencies.
- Online environments represent the networks of social relations and previous affiliations with people who participate in these environments change the dynamics of interaction.
- Novelty of online experience is a motivating factor, on the other hand, previous experience of BB use reduces anxiety.
- There might be various tensions and dilemmas associated with a bulletin board use, such as the pressure of keeping up with messages and meeting instructor's expectations.
- Participation in online environments develops communicative competence by providing opportunities to experiment with one's language.

These hypotheses lead to the following questions:

How do online communities form? Why do online communities differ so much in their dynamics? How and what do people learn in the online environments? What is the evidence of learning? What tensions do people undergo through participation in online communities? What participation and learning experiences do students from other than the language education field have? How would students who come from different cultural and educational backgrounds participate in a highly interactive bulletin board? These questions helped to define three research questions I outlined in the section 1.3 of this dissertation.

1.6 Structure of the Dissertation

The structure of this dissertation consists of a Conceptual Framework and Literature Review, Methodology, Findings and Discussion chapters. In the “Conceptual Framework and Literature Review” chapter I discuss the Activity Theory which is an overarching theory this study builds on. Then I discuss how Activity Theory and its expanded theoretical counterparts view learning in general and learning language, culture and communicative competence in particular. I relate these learning aspects to learning online. Finally, I critically analyze the studies presented in table 1.1. In the “Methodology” chapter I describe the steps undertaken to conduct this study including data collection and analysis. I also present my model of Intercultural Context-Embedded Telecollaborative Activity (Figure 3.3), which served as a framework for data analysis.

In the “Findings” chapter I report the findings within three large domains: Contexts, Contradictions and Learning, each domain corresponding to three research questions of the

study. Finally, in chapter five I discuss the key findings of the study and relate them to the existing literature.

1.7 Definition of Terms

The following are the key terms throughout this study and their definitions within the context of this dissertation:

Asynchronous communication - sending and receiving messages at different times.

Opposite is *Synchronous communication* - communication with each other at the same time

Bulletin Board (BB) – a place to leave an electronic message or share news that anyone in the course can read and respond to.

Communicative Competence - an ability to use spoken or written language appropriately in varying social contexts (Hymes, 1972).

Computer Mediated Communication - a set of possibilities, which exist when computers and telecommunication networks are used as tools in the communications process: to compose, store, deliver and process communication (Mason, 1990, p. 22).

“Contexts” domain of analysis - geopolitical structures, institutional contexts, and context of interaction. Each of these three contexts consists of the six elements of the Activity System such as: subjects, tools, objects/motives, division of labour, community, and rules/norms.

“Contradictions” domain of analysis – “a misfit within elements, between them, between different activities, or between different developmental phases of a single activity” (Kuutti, 1996; p. 34). All tensions, dilemmas and conflicts reported by students.

Forum - an online discussion group. This group can be either locked (private) or unlocked (public).

Intercultural awareness - students' awareness of their own culture and other cultures.

Intercultural communication - interactions among people from different cultures.

Compare to: *Cross-cultural Communication* - a comparison of interactions among people from the same culture to those from another. *International Communication* - communication between nations and government rather than between individuals. *Intracultural Communication* - communication between members of the same culture. (Lustig & Koester, 1993).

Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) - involves a set of practices requiring knowledge, skills and attitudes and entails an ability to negotiate a mode of communication and interaction which is satisfactory to oneself and the other (Byram, 1997).

Intercultural Computer Mediated Communication (I-CMC) - online interactions among people from different cultures

"Learning" domain of analysis - any evidence of learning reading and writing in L2, intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence as perceived by students and found through interaction protocol analysis.

MOO (Multi-user Object-Oriented). A program that allows participants to interact while moving around a virtual space and manipulating virtual objects.

Online community - social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace (Rheingold, 1994; p. 5)

Telecollaboration - “internationally-dispersed learners in parallel language classes using Internet communication tools such as e-mail, synchronous chat, threaded discussion and MOOs ... in order to support social interaction, dialogue, debate and intercultural exchange.” (Belz, 2003; p.1)

List of abbreviations

AT – Activity Theory (short for CHAT – Cultural Historical Activity Theory)

CALL – Computer Assisted Language Learning

ESL/EFL – English as a Second Language, English as a Foreign Language

ICETA - Intercultural Context-Embedded Telecollaborative Activity

IRC – Internet Relay Chat

J(M,R)S – Japanese (Mexican, Russian) Students

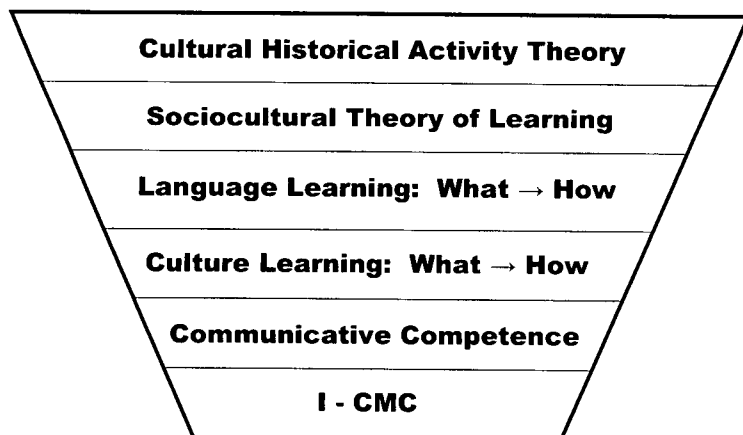
L2 – Second Language

SCT – Socio-Cultural Theory

CHAPTER TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I focus on the conceptual framework and literature review of the study which is based on the plan graphically presented in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2. 1 Plan of Conceptual Framework and Literature Review



I chose Cultural Historical Activity Theory from among the various other frameworks adopted by intercultural telecollaboration researchers. Bregman and Haythornethwate's (2001) use the "Radicals of Presentation in the Persistent Conversation" framework adapted from Northrop Frye, which includes such elements as visibility, relation and co-presence. The framework by Chase et al. (2002) includes the identification of cultural gaps, attitudes toward person to person communication, characteristics of electronic genres, communication styles and routines to show the relationship between cultural determinants and situated actions. Nolla (2001) uses Bale's (1950) Interaction Process Analysis (IPA) framework which provides a detailed discourse analysis of interaction. Belz (2002) employs Hallidayan-inspired linguistic framework such as appraisal theory and epistemic modality to analyze the *attitudes* component of Byram's (1997) model. O'Dowd (2003) employs Byram's Intercultural communicative competence model to explain the varied success of paired exchanges. Overall, most of these frameworks are very

effective for the analysis of one or two aspects of online telecollaboration or for micro-analysis of interaction rather than for providing a holistic and multilayered picture of telecollaborative activity. Therefore, I decided to use the Activity Theory framework as it is capable of providing a holistic description and interpretation of the complex nature of international telecollaboration including contexts, contradictions and learning (Nardi, 1996; Thorne, 2002). Broadly speaking, it has two levels of analysis including social actions and underlying motives and goals driving these actions. More importantly, the key concepts of Activity Theory such as linguistic mediation, intentionality, collaboration, development and culture fit in very well with the exploration of intercultural learning environments. In the following section I first discuss the overarching concept of Activity Theory and its theoretical counterparts which fall under the Sociocultural Theory of learning. I then narrow the discussion by focusing on how Activity and Sociocultural Theories view language and culture learning. Finally, I focus on the concept of “communicative competence” and how it has been approached in the most recent works on I-CMC.

2.1 Activity Theory

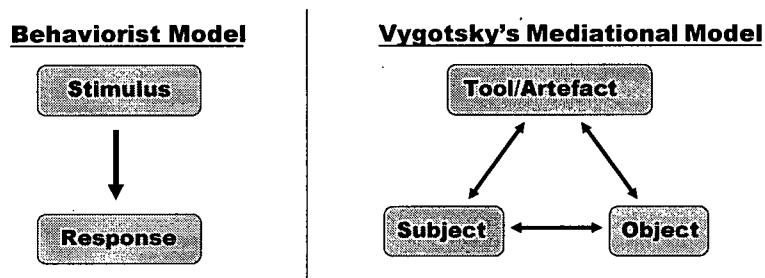
Activity Theorists argue that human psychological behaviour arises from some need/motive and is directed toward some object which, in its turn, is linked to an anticipated outcome (Leont'ev, 1975). This psychological behaviour is realized through activities, therefore, consciousness is not a set of discrete disembodied cognitive acts (e.g. decision making, classification, remembering, rather, it is located in everyday practice:

You are what you do. And what you do is firmly and inextricably embedded in the socio-cultural matrix of which every person is an organic part. This socio-cultural matrix is composed of people and artefacts. Artefacts may be physical tools or sign systems such as human language. (Nardi, 1996; p. 7)

Three Generations of Activity Theory

Engestrom (1987, 1999) singles out three theoretical generations in the evolution of Activity Theory. The first generation, centred around Vygotsky's idea of *mediation*, is embodied in his famous triangular model of "a complex, mediated act" (1978, p. 40) and represents the triad of subject, object, and mediating tool/artefact (Figure 2.2). This model helped to overcome the limiting behaviourist stimulus-response model which implies instinct-based unmediated activity involving direct action between a subject and an object.

Figure 2. 2 Behaviorist and Vygotsky's Models



In the field of language education, the behaviorist model neglects socio-cultural context and views language learning as an isolated, autonomous act of memorizing correct forms. As opposed to behaviorists, Vygotsky (1978) argues that most object oriented human activities are mediated through the use of culturally established physical and semiotic tools/artifacts. Viewing language as a semiotic tool/artefact was one of the major

contributions of Vygotsky. He saw the difference between physical and semiotic tools in that the latter directs the mind and behaviour; whereas the physical tool directs changes in the object itself (Vygotsky, 1978).

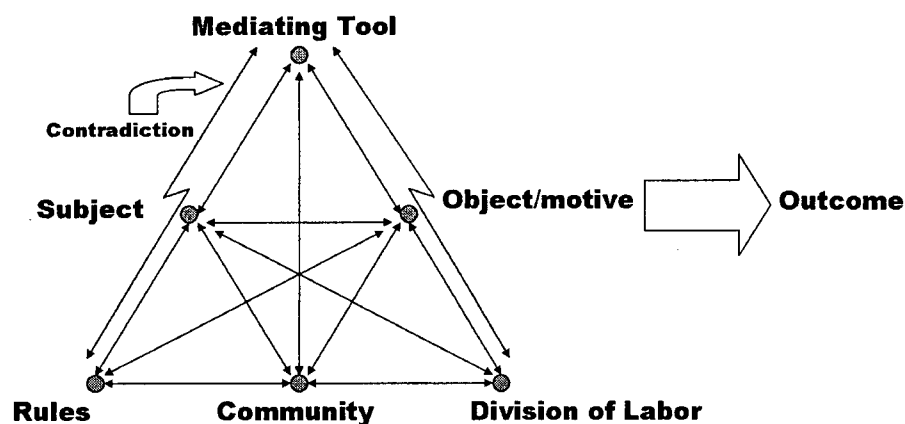
Tools/artefacts shape the ways human beings interact with reality and vice versa - “artefacts themselves have been created and transformed during the development of the activity itself and carry with them a particular culture and a historical residue of that development” (Kuutti, 1996; p. 26). Therefore, the use of tools/artefacts is a means to accumulate, transmit, and transform socio-cultural knowledge. Engestrom (1999) characterizes the insertion of tools/artefacts into human actions as revolutionary because they helped to overcome the split between the individual and the societal structures:

The individual could no longer be understood without his or her cultural means; and the society could no longer be understood without the agency of individuals who use and produce artefacts. Objects no longer were just raw material for the formation of the subject as they were for Piaget. They became cultural entities and the object-orientedness of action became the key to understanding human psyche. (p. 1)

Kuutti (1996) describes an *object* as a material thing, which can also be “less tangible (such as a plan) or totally intangible (such as a common idea) as long as it can be shared for manipulation and transformation by the participants of the activity.” Learning language (object), for example, requires some form of mediation such as explicit instructions, reading books and communication with language speakers face-to-face and through the use of computer tools. Kuutti also adds that “transforming the object into an outcome motivates the existence of an activity” (p. 27).

In the course of time, researchers began to see the limitations of the first generation of activity theory, particularly the individually focused unit of analysis. This limitation was overcome by the second generation of Activity Theory, inspired by Leont'ev's (1981) work. Leont'ev introduced the concept of the historically evolving division of labour in his famous collective hunting example, which brought about the crucial differentiation between an individual action and a collective activity. Vygotsky's original model of individual activity was expanded to the model of collective activity by Leont'ev (1981) and graphically presented by Engestrom (1987) (Figure 2.3) in the form of a network, which includes three additional components: rules, community and division of labour:

Figure 2. 3 Activity System Model (Engestrom 1987)



The relationship between a subject and a community is mediated by rules, and the relationship between an object and a community is mediated by division of labour. "Division of labour refers to the explicit and implicit organization of community as related to the transformation process of the object into the outcome" (Kuutti, 1996; p. 27-28). Any time a person or a group interacts with tools over time on some object with some shared motive to achieve some outcome under cultural constraints such as conventions (rules) and social strata

(division of labour) in collaboration with others, one can analyse their interactions as an activity system.

People participate in multiple activity systems, such as family, school, classroom, work, library, and other communities including online: “the real life situations always involve an intertwined and connected web of activities that can be distinguished according to their objects” (Kuutti, 1996; p. 30). A person engaged in one activity system is simultaneously influenced by other activity systems in which she/he participates. These influences are both horizontal, happening across communities, and also vertical as social actions are also embedded within history, culture and inequitable power relations that both influence the meaning production and shape human activities in important ways.

Engestrom claims that since Vygotsky’s foundational work, Activity Theory was mainly concerned with a vertical development toward “higher psychological functions.” The studies on the societal activity systems conducted by activity theorists for a long time were largely limited to play and learning among children. Since the 1970s this tradition began to shift and the wide range of other applications of Activity Theory began to emerge, such as, for example, within a domain of organizational studies.

Furthermore, Michael Cole (1988) and Griffin & Cole (1984) were among the first in the West to clearly point out the insensitivity of the second generation Activity Theory toward cultural diversity. It was suggested that the third generation researchers should pay attention to horizontal development and focus on questions of diversity, dialogue between different perspectives, voices, and networks of interacting activity systems.

Contradictions/Tensions

Within an activity system, all elements constantly interact with one another and are virtually always in the process of working through changes (Kuutti, 1996). Activity theorists argue that changing tools is bound to change the roles of the members of a learning community and vice versa. For example, changes in the design of a tool may influence a subject's orientation toward an object, which, in turn, may influence the cultural practices of the community. In addition, it is possible that the object and motive themselves will undergo changes during the process of an activity (Kuutti, 1996). Therefore, Engesrom (1987) called an activity system “a virtual disturbance-and-innovation-producing machine” (p.11) and emphasized the importance of *contradictions*, driving these changes.

According to Kuutti (1996), contradiction indicates: “a misfit within elements, between them, between different activities, or between different developmental phases of a single activity. Contradictions manifest themselves as problems, ruptures, breakdowns, clashes” (p. 34). Engestrom (1987) draws parallels between contradictions within activity systems and Bateson’s (1978) concept of “double bind” defined as inner contradictions. In his book “Learning by Expanding” Engestrom characterizes a contradiction as “a social, societally essential dilemma which cannot be resolved through separate individual actions alone – but in which joint cooperative actions can push a historically new form of activity into emergence” (p. 16).

Activity theorists see contradictions as sources of development. Wells and Claxton (2002) also see the positive aspect of contradictions. They write that overlap in goals and willingness to understand each other is crucial for collaboration to occur, but difference and disagreement are also valuable: “Without the contribution of new and even antithetical ideas

and suggestions, there would be no way of going beyond ways of acting and thinking repeated from the past” (p. 5).

Hierarchical Structure of Activity and Object-Orientedness

According to Leont’ev (1978), activities can be categorized into three hierarchical levels: (1) *activity - motive*, (2) *action – goal*, and (3) *operation - condition*. People engage in *activities* to fulfill motives they may or may not be consciously aware of (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 1997). According to Guribye (1999),

To realize these activities, certain *actions* must be performed. These *actions* are directed towards a conscious goal and are related to one another by the same overall objective. *Activities* form a *frame of reference* within which the individual *actions* can be understood. *Actions*, in turn, are composed of functional sub-units called *operations*. These *operations* are automatic processes that are routinized and unconscious. Unlike *actions*, they are not directed toward a goal, but are carried out automatically, providing an adjustment of *actions* to the current situation and the prevailing conditions. (p. 27)

Guribye quotes Leont’ev’s classical example of action-operation dynamics in order to better demonstrate the mechanisms of how actions turn into operations:

When learning to drive a car, the shifting of the gears is an *action* with an explicit *goal* that must be consciously attended to. Later, shifting gears becomes *operational* and can no longer be picked out as a special goal-directed process: its goal is not picked out and discerned by the driver. Conversely, an *operation* can become an

action when *conditions* impede an action's execution through previously formed operations. (cited in Kaptelinin & Nardi, 1997 p. 2)

Lantolf (2000) notes that *activities* can only be observed by others at the level of *conditions*. Since the motives and goals of particular activities are planned internally they cannot be determined solely from the level of concrete doing. The same observable activity implemented by different people can be linked to different goals; and, vice versa, different concrete activities can be ascribed to the same motives and goals.

The understanding of the hierarchical structure of activity and object-orientedness can be used productively in cross-cultural studies to provide insights into the diverse nature of culturally-constructed human mental and social behavior. Wertch, Minick and Arns (1984), for example, compared the interactional activity that arose between rural Brazilian mothers and their children and urban school teachers and their students in a puzzle-copying task. The differences emerged with regard to how the children were mediated by their caregivers. Urban school teachers provided strategic instructions for children, e.g. they explained the steps to be undertaken and gave them instructions on how to work with the puzzle in general. Although the children made many mistakes, they still completed all the work with the model by themselves under the guidance of adults. Rural mothers, on the contrary, did all the work for their children by directly prompting them to pick certain pieces of the puzzle. These children implemented the task with very few mistakes, but did not learn how to work with the model independently. The researchers explained the differences in performing the task by culture-informed considerations. In the rural community the goal was an error-free performance which was associated with the major economic occupation of the region – the

production of pottery and clothes which should be done carefully. This goal was projected onto the implementation of the experimental task. In the case of the urban dyad, the leading activity was educational – i.e. teaching children to think independently. Thus, from the perspective of Activity Theory, while both the rural and urban dyads engaged in the same task, - they were not engaged in the same activities. Despite the fact that the pieces were selected and placed by both dyads, the motives and goals underlying that activity differed.

Similar research - “Same task: Different activities” was conducted by Coughlan and Duff (1994). The researchers demonstrated that tasks are defined not externally on the basis of task procedures but internally on the basis of the participants’ goals, desires, and motivations. Therefore, teachers need to focus less on task outcomes and more on the processes or students’ orientations and multiple goals during their implementation. This is especially important, given that tasks do not manipulate learners to act in certain ways because participants invest their own cultural backgrounds, goals, actions, and beliefs (i.e. their agency) in tasks and by doing so, transform them in various culture-specific ways.

Theoretical Counterparts of Activity Theory

First developed by Vygotsky (1934/1986) and his collaborators – Leont’ev and Luria among others, Activity Theory has gained increasing recognition and has been further developed by scholars in over a dozen countries (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Currently among the expanded and re-interpreted versions of Vygotsky’s Activity Theory, there are the following well-recognized approaches: *Situated Learning Perspective* (Suchman, 1987; Lave & Wenger, 1991), *Communities of Learners* (Brown, 1994; Brown & Campione, 1996), *Theory of Cognitive Apprenticeships* (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Collins, Brown, &

Newman, 1989), *Social Practice Perspective* (Barton & Hamilton, 2000), *Ecological Approach* (van Lier, 2000), and *Nexus Analysis* (Scollon & Scollon, 2004). Each of the new re-interpreted approaches and theories fall under the umbrella of Socio-Cultural Theory of learning (SCT) (Lantolf, 2000).

All SCT theories and perspectives are united by common principles. First of all, they view cognition and conceptual changes beyond the individual mind to include learning that is built up by mediated conversations among members of peer groups, local learning communities, and broader cultural systems. Therefore, they focus on relations (of thought, action, power), rather than on objects (words, sentences, rules).

Second, humans are viewed as part of a greater natural order of living context who function due to their use of “affordances,” a notion which replaced the outdated concept of “input.” Van Lier (2000), building on Gibson’s (1979) ecological theory of perception, writes that:

The environment is full of affordances - language, demands, enablements and constraints that provide opportunities for learning to the active, participating learner. What becomes an affordance depends on what the organism does, what it wants, and what is useful for it. (p. 252)

An affordance is not the property of an actor or an object, but the relationship between the two. Therefore, the concept of affordances is always understood together with a concept of agency, defined by Murray as “the satisfying power to take meaningful action and see the results of our decisions and choices” (quoted in Kramsch, A’Ness & Lam, 2000; p. 97). Learners bring to interaction their own personal histories, values, assumptions, beliefs, rights, duties, and obligations. They do not merely conform to their world but actively

transform it with their agency: “no amount of experimental or instructional manipulation can deflect the overpowering and transformative agency embodied in the learner” (Donato, 2000; p. 47).

Third, those who work within SCT view learning as evolving around notions of identity, meaning, and boundaries, summarized in the following principles, outlined by Wenger (1998):

1) Identity

- *Learning is inherent in human nature.* It is not a special kind of activity separable from the rest of our lives.
- *Learning is a lifelong process.* It is not limited to educational settings but is limited by the scope of our identities, therefore, educational designs should be viewed not in terms of the delivery of a curriculum, but more generally in terms of their effects on the formation of identities.
- *Learning transforms our identities.* Learning is not a reproduction of the past through cultural transmission, but the formation of new identities that can take its history of learning forward. Opening identities is exploring new ways of being that lie beyond our current state.
- *Learning constitutes trajectories of participation.* What participants learn becomes part of their identities, and is thus carried into other parts of their lives.

2) Meaning

- *Learning is, first of all, the ability to negotiate new meanings.* Meaning exists neither in us, nor in the world, but in the dynamic relation of living in the world.

- *Learning creates emergent structures.* Negotiation constantly changes the situation to which it gives meaning and affects all participants. This process generates new circumstances for further negotiation and newly developed meanings as well as new relations with and in the world.

3) Boundaries

- *Learning requires dealing with boundaries.* A learning community must push its boundaries and interact with other communities of practice/activity.
- *Learning is a matter of alignment.* Coordinating our energy and activities in order to fit within broader structures and contribute to broader enterprises (activity systems).
- *Learning is a matter of imagination.* Educational imagination is not about accepting things the way they are, it is daring to try on something really different, to open new trajectories, to seek different experiences, and to conceive of different futures.
- *Learning involves an interplay between the local and the global.* Joining a community of practice/activity system involves entering not only its internal configuration but also its relations with the rest of the world.

2.1.1 Online Environments as an Activity System

In contrast to an earlier “asocial” technology-deterministic view of Computer Mediated Communication, Activity Theorists argue that “the social world is not only outside but also inside people, as part of their identities, and functions even when they sit – physically alone – in front of their computer screens” (Mantovani, 1996; p. 191). Through involvement in collective activities, no matter how widely distributed, learners are in contact with the history, values and social relations of their community or among communities. In

addition, “what is lacking physically is supplied by participants in a complex game of identifications, categorizations and projections” (Mantovani, 1996; p.121). These processes make possible interpersonal relationships: people communicate to the extent in which they live in common symbolic systems. Therefore, all CMC systems - the Internet, local area networks (LANs), bulletin board, e-mail, and conferencing systems - can be described as networks, in which the technical and the social forces cannot be clearly separated: “Technologies are social, because they are produced by, facilitate, and shape human interactions. ...Correspondingly, the www is a technology with social and technical dimensions and implications...it mediates and contributes to social as well as technological change” (Falk, 1996; p. 7).

If we apply the Activity Theory framework (Figure 2.3) to CMC, then we will focus on the following 7 elements:

1. *The subjects*: Students, teachers, or experts who are carrying out an activity.
2. *The object(s) of activity*: Individual or collective goals/motives of online interaction.
3. *The mediating tools of the activity*: Computer technologies, texts.
4. *The community of learners*: All people who are connected by the electronic network and are concerned with the problems and issues discussed.
5. *The division of labor*: Responsibilities commonly associated with the roles of “student”, “teacher”, “expert”, etc.
6. *The rules or norms* regarding appropriate social actions.
7. *The contradictions* within and among activity system elements driving changes.

These seven elements are inextricably related. Because of their highly contextualized nature and learners’ agency that influence all nodes (7 elements) of an Activity System,

technologies do not and can not have a uniform effect on participants. Therefore, groups of similar composition working on similar tasks can perceive and use the same technologies in very different ways.

2.1.2 Learning within an Activity System

Because activity systems are dynamic, they constantly present opportunities for learning. Vygotsky (1978) called these opportunities “Zones of Proximal Development” (ZPD) which he defined as: “the distance between actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86).

According to Vygotsky, at the beginning stages of development, the object-oriented acts of an individual are accomplished through the joint activity of a learner and another person performing together as a working social system (*interpsychological* plane). Only after that, the interpsychological categories used between people in discursive practices are appropriated as tools for thinking within a learner as an individual category (*intrapsychological* plane). As John-Steiner and Mahn (1996) note, “Vygotsky conceptualized development as the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes. In this way he rejected the Cartesian dichotomy between the internal and the external” (p. 3).

Mahn and John-Steiner (2002) argue that oftentimes the notion of ZPD is understood too narrowly, e.g. only in terms of cognitive gains within a classroom context, whereas

learning in ZPD involves all aspects of the learner – acting, thinking, and feeling within a broad network of relationships (see also Wells, 1999; p. 331). They view ZPD as “a complex whole, a system of systems in which the interrelated and interdependent elements include the participants, artifacts and environment/context, and the participants’ experience of their interactions within it” (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002; p. 49). Most importantly, Mahn and John-Steiner draw our attention to Vygotsky’s least known concept “*perezhivanie*” which is defined as “lived and emotional experience” and which “describes the affective processes through which interaction in the ZPD are individually perceived, appropriated and represented by the participants” (p. 49). Learning within an Activity System should take into account emotional scaffolding, which includes “the gift of confidence, the sharing of risks in the presentation of new ideas, constructive criticism, and the creation of a safety zone” (p. 52). Applied to the online environments associated with the risk-taking to expose one’s thoughts and ideas publicly, affective factors discussed by Mahn and John-Steiner such as, for example, fear and anxiety can diminish ZPD.

Thus, learning within an Activity System should be viewed not as internalization of discrete information or skills, but as “negotiating new ways of acting together” (Russell, 2002; p. 69) and expanding involvement – social, intellectual and emotional – with some activity system over time.

In CMC environments it is those human interactions, mediated by a range of tools, that allow zones of proximal development to emerge. Computers can be viewed as one tool among many others through which knowledge, identity, authority and power relations are

constantly (re)negotiated and collaborative learning can take place. Namely, CMC can promote the following aspects of collaborative and engaged learning (Chism, 1998, p. 7-8):

1. *Building group coherence among students* through engaging them in collaborative problem-solving, and creating an online community as students elaborate on discussions that began in class or continue to deal with unresolved issues.
2. *Refining communication skills*, critical thinking, and creative thinking as these aspects cut across all content areas and can be enhanced through electronic communication.
3. *Online tutoring and providing feedback to students, sharing information, and processing ideas*. Students can share papers and post drafts of their work for their peers and the instructors to critique.

The students' works-in-progress can be refined through three types of apprenticeship:

1. The tutor-tutee model of apprenticeship learning through communication between teacher and student (Leont'ev, 1989), which allows more teacher guidance and individual student's reflection. The role of a teacher is to facilitate negotiation of meaning by asking for clarification and thought-provoking questions, thereby, stimulating students' higher order thinking.

2. The collaborative model of apprenticeship learning (Bayer, 1990) with students providing scaffolding for one another through student-student communication and the joint construction of knowledge.

3. The peripheral participation model of apprenticeship learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) through contact with broader discourse communities. This model posits that learners in diverse settings learn best through limited but steadily increasing participation on the periphery of the communities they seek to enter. One of the examples of this kind of

apprenticeship is the CMC between global partners when they seek entrance into the trans-global and trans-cultural community.

To understand the nature of learning as conceptualized by Activity Theory, one needs to ask the question of how that which is inside a person might change over time as a consequence of repeated social interactions with other people and their tools, including such tools as computers and language. There is no one answer as learning is situated, and, therefore, it is not a neat transfer of information but “a complex and often messy network of tool mediated human relationships that must be explored in terms of the social and cultural practices which people bring to their uses of the tools they share” (Russell, 2002; p. 73).

2.1.3 Summary: Activity Theory

Above I have outlined the historical development of the Activity Theory, demonstrated the relationship between the Activity Theory and the Socio-Cultural Theory and presented a model of the Activity System (Figure 2.3) an expanded version of which will be also used for data analysis in this study. I conceptualized the online environment as a separate activity system and discussed the essence of learning within this system. In what follows, I narrow the focus from discussing learning in general to learning language and culture in particular, as conceptualized by AT and SCT.

2.2 Learning Language and Culture

In the above section I argued that learning is a social process taking place through interaction with others. Currently, language educators also move their focus away from the individual (associated with acquisition) toward social, cultural and ecological consideration

of human behaviour (associated with participation and socialization metaphors). In what follows I will discuss three metaphors: acquisition, participation and socialization which mark this shift.

2.2.1 From Acquisition to Participation and Socialization

According to Sfard (1998), the *acquisition* metaphor makes us think of knowledge as a commodity (input), and the mind as a storage where a learner accumulates this commodity (potential output). This metaphor describes language as a set of rules and facts to be acquired. In contrast, the *participation* metaphor understands learning “as a process of becoming a member of a certain community” (Sfard, 1998; p.6). As Hanks (1996) argues, the *acquisition* metaphor emphasizes the *what* to study in SLA, while the participation metaphor stresses contextualization and engagement with others to investigate the *how* to study or act.

Along these lines, Donato (2000) argues that the *acquisition* metaphor requires evidence of what was learned after the instructional treatment, often gathered in the form of post-tests. In contrast, the *participation* metaphor finds evidence for learning in an individual’s growing and widening (or limiting) activity in a community carried out through shared practices of discourse with expert participants. Variables in learning are made visible through the increasing (or decreasing) participation and emergent communication of the learners with their teachers and each other – “an observable feature of the classroom interactions that cannot be denied” (Donato, p. 41).

If researchers and instructors adopt the *acquisition* metaphor (associated with the ‘taking in’ and possession of knowledge) as indicators of achievement, the failure to achieve

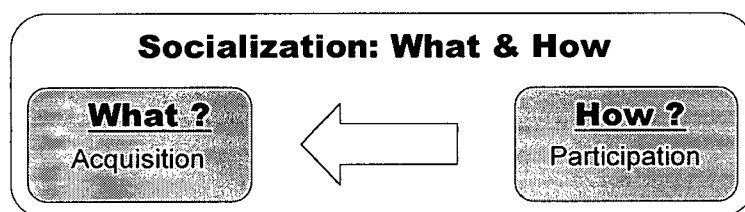
may be explained as an individual's low aptitude, lack of motivation, or inappropriate learning strategies. On the other hand, the *participation* metaphor evokes other reasons for an individual's failure to achieve, such as – an individual's marginalization from a community of practice, insufficient mediation from an expert, or scant access to a learning community (Norton & Toohey, 2001). Despite the critique of the traditional acquisition metaphor, researchers do not argue for its elimination, but, rather, advocate balancing it with the participation metaphor – the two should complement each other (Sfard, 1998).

Interestingly, Sfard does not include in the discussion the metaphor “socialization,” which is closely related to the concept of “participation” due to its emphasis on an interactive nature of learning. Meanwhile it is important to discuss this metaphor as it has been very influential in the study of language acquisition.

Cazden (1999) defines socialization as “the process of *internalization* through which human beings become members of particular cultures, learning how to speak as well as how to act and think and feel” (p. 63). On the other hand, Wenger (1998) defines participation “as a membership in social communities, an active *involvement* in social enterprises,” and “a complex process that combines doing, talking, thinking, feeling, and *belonging*” (p. 56). Definitions of participation and socialization are very similar – in both cases authors talk about membership in communities/cultures, which involves speaking, thinking, acting, feeling in ways these communities and cultures do. The differences seem to be insignificant, yet crucial in understanding both terms. Cazden uses the term “internalization” which considers the Vygotskian psychological aspect. Wenger, in contrast, uses the terms “involvement” and “belonging” emphasizing more the importance of the social aspect.

I see the relationship between these two metaphors as follows. In order to socialize into a particular community of practice, learners first choose to participate or not to participate in the given community. If they choose to participate, they move steadily from peripheral to central participation through acquisition of knowledge and socialization into a culture of a particular group. Therefore, language socialization is a more inclusive term than language acquisition and participation, as it involves pragmatic, syntactic and semantic competence, and, more importantly, a psychological aspect (Cazden, 1999). The relationship between these three metaphors can be graphically presented as follows:

Figure 2. 4 Correlation between Acquisition, Participation and Socialization



Cazden (1999) writes that language relates to socialization in three ways:

- 1) “There is socialization *by or through* language, where language is the means, the primary medium for socialization into culture” (cultural content).
- 2) “There is socialization *for* language, where situation-specific and culture-specific language use is the outcome” (dialect, grammar).
- 3) “There is socialization *about* language in the form of knowledge about and attitudes toward, language forms and functions” (pragmatics) (p. 63).

Compared to the acquisition metaphor, the metaphors of participation and socialization imply that learning language, culture, and content happen simultaneously

(Mohan, 1985; Mohan & Beckett, 2001). In what follows I will review how the concept of culture changed from being viewed as a separate skill into the integral part of the socialization process.

2.2.2 Shift in Culture Learning: from “What” to “How”

In the language classrooms culture is usually studied in terms of *ideas* (values and beliefs), *behaviors* (customs, habits, language) and *products* (artifacts, literature, music, food). The categories of *behaviors* and *products* reflect the notion of culture as observable phenomenon; whereas the category of *ideas* reflects the notion of culture as something which is internal, but which can also be explicitly described. Based on this categorization, Robinson (1985) distinguishes 4 approaches to culture: behaviorist, functionalist, cognitivist and symbolist.

From the *behaviorist* point of view, culture consists of shared and observable sets of behaviors (e.g. traditions, customs, and habits). In the language classroom this approach leads to the study of discrete practices or institutions such as “family,” “ethnic food,” “customs and traditions,” etc. Behaviorists focus on the behavior itself, rather than on understanding or explaining why and under what circumstances certain behavior takes place.

On the other hand, the *functionalist* approach focuses on functions or rules underlying behavior that are shared and can be explicitly described. It is assumed that by understanding the reasons behind particular events and activities, such as celebrating holidays, wearing national clothes, etc., learners will better understand and tolerate people of different cultures.

Guest (2002) expressed his concern that the behaviourist reduction of rich and complex cultures to a few salient and general principles is “misrepresenting foreign cultures

by reinforcing popular stereotypes and constructing these cultures as monolithic, static 'others,' rather than as dynamic, fluid entities" (see also Marker, 1998). Such representation, in Guest's view, are "politically motivated constructs that serve to essentialize and exoticize this 'other'." As a result, culture teaching prevailing over the last decades can be compared to an "exercise in creating taxonomy of differences between familiar and 'exotic' cultures" (p. 154). Guest also argues that those who are hypersensitive to differences may feel threatened and view interaction with another culture's members not worth the risk. Therefore, viewing culture as a static entity and emphasizing cultural differences "exacerbates adversity instead of encouraging mutual respect" (p. 154).

The third, *cognitivist* approach shifts attention from the observable aspects of what is shared to what is shared "inside" the "cultural actor". Based on this approach, culture is like a *cognitive map* which differs among ethnic groups. While cognitivists focus on the *mechanisms* for processing (i.e. cognitive map), *symbolists* focus on the *products* of processing (i.e. meanings derived). For them the key question is: "How is meaning derived, and through what symbols is it conceptualized and communicated?" According to symbolists, particular actions are more related to specific situations than to a rigid group membership. The symbolist approach can be summarized in two propositions: 1) the connection between culture, language and behaviour is essentially one of a resource for managing meaning; and 2) the application of these resources is contextual in that it depends on the perceived situation.

Thus, instead of being a rigid map that people must follow, culture is best thought of as: "a set of principles for map making and navigation. People are not just map-readers; they are map-makers. Different cultures are like different schools of navigation designed to cope

with different terrains and seas” (Frake, 1977; cited in Spradley, 1979, p.6-7). In other words, cultural norms and practices are not fixed properties but rather are constituted in members’ daily activities and social interactions. People construct and sustain reality in terms of their own cultural assumptions and cultural mandates, which, in turn, are made real in members’ communication and interactions. According to Yokochi and Hall (2000), “Concrete examples of successful communication give the culture life” (p. 210).

Symbolists’ understanding of culture brings us back to Vygotsky’s Activity Theory (and Marx and Hegel philosophy which inspired Vygotsky’s work) as it is based on cultural-historical dialectical theory of phylogenetic and ontogenetic development which views cultural development as an ongoing, dynamic process in which learners continually synthesize new cultural input with their own past and present experiences in order to create meaning:

Meaning is the product of ... the integration of successive past and present (and future) experiences into a coherent whole, a life-world, which every individual creates, but also internalizes (the creations of others becoming one’s own experiences) and projects onto his or her interactions with others (Dolgin et. al. 1977, cited in Robinson, 1985; p.11).

Such a view of cultural development has been adopted by a number of modern researchers. Kramsch (1993), for example, applied it to the second language pedagogy by introducing the “third place” model of culture learning. She argues that second language learners after many years of socialization into their own cultures and languages, face the challenge of learning a new cultural and linguistic repertoire. In acquiring new language and culture, they carry with them the “stock of metaphors” (p.43) their native communities live

by. Kramsch views culture learning as being a dialectical process – “a struggle between the *learners’ meanings* and those of the *native speakers*” (p. 24). It is created as a result of cross-cultural encounters where learners “can express their own meanings without being hostage to the meanings of either their own or the target speech communities” (p. 13-14).

Thus, symbolist understanding of culture was developed long ago, rediscovered in the 1980s, and has taken up the consideration of power relations as a new dimension more recently. Current scholars working within the neo-symbolist direction (Baumann, 1996; Clifford, 1988; Marcus & Fischer, 1986; Street, 1993) add a new “power” dimension to the definition and conceptualize culture as “negotiation of meanings among particular individuals in particular communities locked in an interplay of power relations” (Ilieva, 2001; p. 7). Based on this definition, culture is viewed as having an essentially changing and process nature and is characterized by multivocality, diversity, conflicts, and contradictions.

2.2.3 Implications for Pedagogy

Harklau (1999) characterizes culture as “an elusive construct.” She writes that a teacher is positioned to “reify their own interpretation of the culture being taught, making static something that is in constant flux, and making unified something that is inherently multiple” (p. 110). More importantly, as Crawford-Lange & Lange argue (1984), the static view of culture “eliminates consideration of culture at the personal level, where the individual interacts with and acts upon the culture” (p. 141). This results in the problem when “students are taught about culture; they are not taught how to interact with culture” (p. 145).

To resolve this problem, Guest argues for understanding culture in a situated context with linguistic dynamics adjusted according to the nature of interaction (individual/small

groups), and not in order to conform to an abstract, generalized, formula “culture.” He suggests that: “Instead of an overtly cultural approach, it would seem that a method more sympathetic to psychological or small-scale interactive models would ultimately be both more accurate and productive” (p. 157). In addition, given that today cultural boundaries and identities are increasingly blurred and intermingled, the emphasis should be on transcending cultural categories rather than on rigidly-defining unique and distinct traits. Guest calls on practitioners to emphasize pragmatic and linguistic universals, and psychological/social typologies, while limiting the focus on finding and interpreting differences.

According to Geertz (1973), an access to symbol systems of the target culture should be attained not through arranging abstracted entities into unified patterns, but through observing events, or ethnographic process. Therefore, besides acting (writing and reading) and reflecting, learners should engage in participant observation of others’ behaviors, and in some sort of field work while participating in international communities.

Following Geertz, Ilieva (2001) emphasizes the unpredictability of cultural encounters and argues that response to these encounters is based on spontaneity and improvisation, rather than on pre-planned expectations. Therefore, she questions the notion of “culture teaching” and, instead, proposes a “culture exploration” framework. She sees the goal of culture exploration in developing an awareness about the relationship between language and culture and awareness of oneself as a cultural being and a “positioned subject” (Rosaldo, 1993). Ilieva sees the differences between culture teaching and culture exploration in that the first promotes prescriptive and the second interactive approaches:

Whereas the first seems to impose views of the target culture on the students..., the second simply aims to ask questions and assist learners in approaching, naming, and

understanding their own as well as the natives' experience of the target culture and in searching for possible interpretations of it. (p. 8)

2.2.4 Summary: Learning Language and Culture

Conceptualizing culture as a fixed and static entity has resulted in viewing it as a separate skill to be mastered, and as something lacking subjectivity. Current researchers argue that culture is constituted and created by active agents through communication, and that learning language, culture and content cannot be separated.

The above discussion posits that instead of providing students with linguistic and cultural input we need to teach them *how* to participate in social activities and communication using affordances of their local contexts. This leads us to a discussion of the notion of “communicative competence” which is undergoing a new wave of interest among researchers for its focus on the “how” aspect of learning.

2.3 Intercultural Communicative Competence

Hymes (1961, 1972) was the first researcher in North America to suggest that in order to communicate effectively it is not enough to know *what* to say, but *to whom*, and *how*. Savignon (1971) introduced Hymes's notion of communicative competence to the field of language pedagogy in her doctoral dissertation on the study of the effects of training communicative skills. A decade later, the communicative competence models proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) in Canada and van Ek (1980) in Europe gained prominence in their respective countries and abroad. They describe communicative competence as a combination of knowledge of basic grammatical principles, how language is used in social contexts to

perform communicative functions, and how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to principles of discourse. Based on what others have to say about communicative competence, Crystal (1991) defines it as the speakers' ability to produce and understand sentences which are appropriate to the immediate context as well as the knowledge required to successfully communicate in socially distinct environments.

Critique of the 1980s Communicative Competence Model

The goal of van Ek's as well as Canale and Swain's models of communicative competence that is – reaching native-like proficiency in the target language, has been criticized by numerous scholars in the 1990s for:

- Creating an impossible target and, consequently, inevitable failure (Byram, 1997).
- Ignoring the significance of the social identities and cultural competence of the learner in any intercultural interaction (Byram, 1997).
- Placing all power in the hands of native speakers (“the native speaker is always right”) (Kramsch, 1993).
- Failing to reflect the lingua franca status of English (Alptekin, 2002).

According to Byram (1997), power relations add to a new understanding of teaching communicative competence. Learners should not be limited to interaction only with those who have access to the dominant cultural capital. Instead, students' own cultural capital, although not dominant, should be equally valued. Therefore, foreign language teaching should focus on equipping learners with the means of accessing and analyzing cultural practices and meanings they encounter, whatever their status in a society is (Bourdieu, 1990). Byram envisions that learners should assume the roles not of imitators of native speakers, but of

social actors engaging with other social actors in a particular kind of communication and interaction which is different from that between native speakers. In this international interaction, both interlocutors have a significant, but different role, and the foreign speaker who knows something both of the foreign culture and of their own, is in a position of power at least equal to that of the native speaker. (p.21)

In Byram's view, imitation of native speakers' values, behaviors, and grammar should be replaced by comparison, critical evaluation, and establishing a relationship between one's own and others' beliefs, meanings and behaviors. Echoing Byram's proposition of the role of "intercultural speaker," Alptekin (2002) suggests that a pedagogical model of the intercultural speaker of English is a successful bilingual with intercultural insights, who is both a global and local speaker of English feeling at home in both international and national cultures.

Intercultural Communicative Competence in Terms of Objectives

Byram's (1997) Intercultural communicative competence model is the most cited in the literature on foreign language pedagogy, therefore, I use it in this study as well. According to Byram, for successful interaction to take place, individuals need to draw upon their existing *knowledge*, have *attitudes* which sustain sensitivity to others with sometimes radically different origins and identities, and use the *skills* of discovery and interpretation (Table 2.1).

Table 2. 1 Byram's Intercultural Communicative Competence Model (1997)

	Skills	
	Interpret and relate	
Knowledge	Education	Attitudes
Of self and other;	Political education	Relativising self

Of interaction: individual and societal	Critical cultural awareness	Valuing other
Skills		
Discover and /or interact		

More specifically, each competence is meant to develop:

- "Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own" (p. 61).
- "Knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general process of societal and individual interaction" (p. 58).
- "Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries" (p. 63).
- "Attitudes of curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own" (p. 50).
- "Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction" (p. 61).

Building a Shared World through a "Dialogue of Cultures"

The "Dialogue of cultures" model prominent among language educators in the Russian context shares basic principles suggested by Byram, and also helps to explain their philosophical underpinnings. This model is based on Bakhtin's (1986) and Bibler's (1988) notion of "dialogue of cultures". Based on a symbolist perspective, Bibler suggests that

culture can be viewed as a special link of interaction between civilizations and epochs. Seen in this way, culture can exist only in the special relationship of past, present, and future in the history of humankind. We cannot fully understand one culture in the absence of contact with other cultures. Thus, dialogue is at the very core of culture and represents a dialogical self-consciousness of every civilization (Savignon & Sysoev, 2002). The goal of the “dialogue of cultures” framework is to educate a person who:

- Perceives the human historical development as an ongoing process and, therefore, is responsible for his/her actions, other country, people and the future of the entire human civilization.
- Perceives other cultures as equal to one’s own and yet, different, unique and mutually complimentary.
- Realizes the interdependence and integrity of all cultures and their necessity to collaborate in order to solve common global problems.
- Recognizes the civil rights (including cultural and linguistic) and political freedoms of other people.
- Cooperates with other people and social institutions in order to strive for humanist ideals and harmonization of man-nature-society relationships (Safonova, 1996).

Safonova argues that the “Dialogue of Cultures” is a form of interaction between people of two or more cultures when they express interest toward one another, admit differences, accept others in their inner world, respect others’ uniqueness, and, at the same time, through learning and comparison, deepen understanding of their own cultures. The dialogic communication between people of different cultures is based on: absence of judgment, acceptance of others the way they are, respect and trust; developing similar aims in

relation to the same situation; honesty and naturalness in expressing emotions, gaining insights into the lives and feelings of others; and ability to know and use actively the wide range of communicative means.

The Dialogue of cultures framework suggests that the success of intercultural communication is determined not only by the effective exchange of information, as has been the tendency in communicative language teaching, but also by the ability *to establish and maintain human relationship*. Similarly, Gudykunst (1994) considers a competent intercultural communicator as a person who can satisfy “*the need for a sense of a common shared world,*” created through interaction with other people. As such, the efficacy of communication depends upon developing the ability to de-center and take up the perspective of the listener or reader and “using language to demonstrate one’s willingness to relate, which often involves the indirectness of politeness rather than the direct and ‘efficient’ choice of language full of information” (Byram, 1997; p. 3). According to Byram, the functions of a) establishing relationships b) managing dysfunctions and c) mediating between people of different origins and identities comprise the concept of an intercultural speaker. Creating a shared world and being able to establish relationships can be also referred to as community development, the concept which became popular in the study of online environments over the last decade, and, therefore, discussed in the next section.

2.4 Communicative Competence in Online Environments

2.4.1 Online Community as a Web of Human Relationships

Supporting the proposition that being communicatively competent means to know the language of relating and sharing the common world with people from different cultures,

current CMC researchers identify strictly task-based and community building features of interaction. For example, in his three-year ethnographic study of a 400-member, international group of academics who communicated with one another on listserves, Herrmann (1995) found the emergence of three recurrent kinds of communicative activity:

1. Academic, or knowledge-sharing conversations.
2. Administrative, or process management conversations.
3. Community-building conversations that included encouragement, warm and playful remarks, and expressions of gratitude.

Herrmann implies that in order for community to emerge it is not enough to engage solely in academic and administrative interaction. Online community cannot be formed without person-oriented interaction because the model of communication as information transfer (Carey, 1988) does not consider the fact that "it is possible to communicate only to the extent that participants have some common ground for shared beliefs, recognize reciprocal expectations and accept rules for interaction which serve as necessary anchors in the development of conversation" (Mantovani, 1996; p. 91).

Instead, a new model of communication as construction of common, shared meaning is important. Shared meaning-making occurs through successive turns of talk and action. In this two-way transformative communication process, members of the group progressively create, share, negotiate, interpret, and appropriate one another's symbolic actions. By *internalizing* these social interactions and processes, they transform their own meaning schemes. This model refocuses attention away from individuals as independent senders and receivers of information, towards individuals as actors in a network consisting of relationships embedded in complex social structures.

In this regard, Rheingold's (1994) definition of the online community as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on... public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace" (p. 5) well captures the importance of the social aspect of community development. These webs of personal relationships are not always associated with the notions of proximity, homogeneity, and familiarity, because in real life communities are comprised of participants with different cultural backgrounds, learning styles and different needs for affiliation. As Burbules (2000) argues, "the people are drawn together by quite different purposes and are held together by quite different threads" and that "ability to imagine ... communities and realities make it possible to imagine closer affinities or on the contrary exacerbate conflicts" (p. 350).

According to Burbules, "particular communities invite or discourage certain kinds of disclosure and participation" (p. 347). Certain social dynamics in CMC, e.g. group-specific forms of expression, identity, social relationships, and norms of behavior that promote different communities, have been conceptualized by Bregman and Haythornthwaite (2001) in the form of three "radicals of presentation":

Visibility refers to the means, methods, and opportunities for presentation; it primarily addresses the speaker's concerns with the presentation of self and involves choices of "the timing of the entry, the content, form, tenor and tone of the representation."

Relation refers to the nature of the tie between speaker and audience, and the ties among audience co-participants, including the interpersonal relationship, the number and identity of others, and history of association; it addresses the speaker's concerns with the range and identity of the audience, and audience members' concerns about relations with each

other. As Potts (2002) notes, people are not linked only by means of an electronic message: they are also connected by an organizational network and by a set of partly shared expectations, needs and goals, which are to some extent reciprocally recognized.

Co-Presence refers to the temporal, virtual, and/or physical co-presence of speaking and listening participants; it addresses concerns with being with others at the same time and place, and being able to give and receive immediate feedback in conversations (p. 7).

Burbules (2000) suggests that community is formed under mediating, political, and spatial conditions. Among these three elements, spatial conditions are directly linked to Bregman and Haythornthwaite's "radicals of presentation." According to Burbules, people transform spaces into places by acting within and upon them to make them their own. Mapping is an example of trying to turn a space into a place along a number of dimensions including: movement/stasis, interaction/isolation, publicity/privacy, visibility/hiddenness, enclosure/exclusion. "A central factor in the extent to which this environment takes on character of a place where one can live, act, and interact confidently is the degree to which one can make choices within these dimensions" (p. 347).

In order to make linguistic choices that would contribute to development of closer affinities between participants, learners need to have a sufficient level of communicative competence. They already enter online environments with some level of communicative competence, and they also develop their competence in the course of interaction. In what follows I will review the works by Chappelle (2001) and Lamy and Goodfellow (1999) on a linguistic aspect of the communicative competence development.

2.4.2 CMC and Communicative L2 Ability

In Chapelle's (2001) view, the key question CALL research needs to address is "How can computers be used effectively to promote development of communicative L2 ability?" (see also Pelletieri, 2000). Chapelle defines communicative L2 ability as a "communicative competence including control over both form and function of the L2" (p. 41). In her earlier work, Chapelle (1997) proposed that the communicative L2 is acquired through learners' interaction in the target language because it provides opportunities for learners to:

(a) comprehend message meaning, which is believed to be necessary for learners to acquire the L2 forms that encode the message; (b) produce modified output, which requires their development of specific morphology and syntax; and (c) attend to L2 form, which helps to develop their linguistic systems. (p. 22)

Chapelle shares Skehan's (1998) point that "since meaning-based tasks fail to proscribe the use of particular structures, learners have to take an *active role* in sorting out exactly what they are learning" (p. 47) and the teacher's task is to draw their attention to their own learning. Therefore, *accountability*, defined by Chapelle as the learners' responsibility to keep track of what they are learning is important in online learning. Chapelle refers to Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991), as well as Swain and Lapkin (1995) Interaction Modification theories to explain the notion of accountability:

In producing the L2, a learner will on occasion become aware of (i.e., notice) a linguistic problem (brought to his/her attention either by external feedback (e.g., clarification requests) or internal feedback). Noticing a problem 'pushes' the learner to modify his/her output. In doing so, the learner may sometimes be forced into a

more syntactic processing mode than might occur in comprehension. (Swain & Lapkin, 1995; cited in Chapelle, p. 48)

Lamy and Goodfellow (1999) extend the ongoing discussion on communicative L2 development in online environments by adding the “social interaction” perspective, according to which the best quality of learning takes place during “*contingent interaction*” (van Lier, 1996; p. 175-178). Contingent interaction is defined as a form of communication which exhibits the greatest equality among participants and communicative symmetry in terms of the distribution of turns and roles, and a combination of familiarity of subject matter with unpredictability, therefore, “the agenda is shared by all participants and educational reality may be transformed” (p. 180).

Lamy and Goodfellow’s (1999) study is based on the genre-analysis of the three types of messages, generated during an online course in French, and discussion of their value for learning. They distinguish between monologue-type exchanges, social conversations and reflective conversations and find the latter to be the most effective and valuable for promoting L2 communicative competence. In comparison to monologues and social conversation, reflective (or dialogic) conversations demonstrate both the control dimension and a reflective focus:

In this type of exchange: (a) understanding is negotiated; (b) there is explicit reference to knowledge about language and about language learning (when students discuss issues related to language issues); and (c) learner engagement is rooted in a social context in which participants are able to negotiate the dimension of control in the interaction, that is, to be both learner and teacher or expert, setting the agenda for each other.(p. 52)

Thus, for development of communicative L2 ability in online environments, it is important to promote accountability and contingent interaction, so students can take responsibility for their own learning. After this brief discussion of the linguistic aspect of communicative L2 development, I now turn to the discussion of current research exploring the cultural aspect of being communicatively competent in intercultural online environments. As Table 1.1 outlines methodological details of the studies I am going to review, I will go straight to discussion of their main findings.

2.4.3 CMC and Intercultural Communicative Competence

Kramsch and Thorne (2002) in their study interrogate the presumption that computer-mediated communication naturally helps learners to understand local conditions of language use and to build a global common ground for inter-cultural understanding. They identify and explore two themes - “Synchronous CMC among Americans: *seeking common ground*” and “Asynchronous CMC between American and French students: *clashing frames of expectation*”.

In search of common ground American students proposed to discuss the topics they thought French students would support. However, actual communication with the French students did not meet idealistic expectations of American students. The interpretation of the second set of data demonstrated that students run across intercultural misunderstanding during communication when it was based on zero knowledge of the “different social and cultural conventions under which each party is operating” (p. 90) and “very little awareness that such an understanding is even necessary” (p. 98).

Most of the French interlocutors used factual, impersonal, dispassionate genres of writing, e.g. they extensively used argument building logical connectors such as “for example,” “however,” “moreover.” They made nuanced corrections to what they felt were American mis-judgments about the situation in France. By contrast, the American students, who initiated this exchange in order to understand “How they live their everyday lives” viewed this instance of Internet-mediated communication as a ritual of mutual trust building and used an informal, highly personal genre. The authors explain the misunderstanding as “a clash of cultural frames caused by the different resonances of the two languages for each group of speakers and their different understanding of appropriate genres” (p. 94-95). In Kramsch and Thorne’s interpretation, “each group mapped the communicative genres they were familiar with onto their foreign language communicative practices in cyberspace.” Consequently, the educational implication drawn from this study is to prepare students to deal with global communicative practices that require mastering “far more than local communicative competence” (p. 99).

Although the authors see the reason for clashing frames of expectation in genre differences, they do not discuss in detail how students’ local contexts might have contributed to these differences. This issue has been addressed in Thorne’s article published a year later. Thorne (2003) approached the same set of data from the cultural-historical perspective of learning – a theory which is capable of providing a broader view of the problem. Based on this perspective, the context of local cultures is viewed as crucial in explaining cultural differences in the use of computer technologies - the relationship termed by Thorne “cultures-of-use of an artefact.” Thorne defines “cultures-of-use of an artefact” as

“historically sedimented characteristics that accrue to a CMC tool from its everyday use” (p. 40).

Thorne rightly points that due to the differences in students’ experiences with computers, as well as contexts from which they were operating, uses of Internet communication tools may illustrate “a heterogeneous set of communicative practices with different rules, community norms, and division of labour of these two speech communities” (p.40). The *activity* of online interaction was different for the French than it was for the Americans, in part because the Internet communication was used in different ways in each case, e.g., French students were communicating through a surrogate (the teacher who was sending their messages). Thorne concludes that radically different *cultures-of-use* of the Internet communication was the primary reason for different activity outcomes, such as genre differences.

In his study Thorne illustrated a potential of Activity Theory to provide a broad and holistic picture of a relationship between contexts, computer technologies and participants. The study could have benefited more from interviews with students as there was a lack of students’ perspective on their own participation in online interaction activity. It would have been interesting to find out if French students had free access to computers would they participate differently than others with limited access? Would students from countries other than America and France interact differently?

While Thorne’s study is theory-driven, O’Dowd’s (2003) qualitative inquiry is a grounded ethnographic study of a year-long online language exchange between five pairs of Spanish (located in London) and English (located in Leon) language second-year university students. The context of their interaction was structured and placed within 10 collaborative

tasks, such as writing introductory letters, doing word association, comparing expressions, explaining idioms, reading and discussing a joint text. For each task students were required to write at least two messages to their partners.

O'Dowd explores characteristics of e-mail exchanges that lead to students' intercultural learning and focuses on two kinds of aspects – communication breakdowns and successful communication through examples taken from 5 e-mail exchanges between 5 pairs of students. He uses Byram's (1997) intercultural communicative competence model to explain the varied success of paired exchanges. The study confirmed that intercultural exchanges which fail to function properly can lead to a reinforcement of stereotypes and a confirmation of negative attitudes.

More importantly, O'Dowd found that not only task design is important for development of intercultural communicative competence, but also the learners' ability to take part effectively in e-mail exchanges. Pairs that worked well tended to invest a lot of time in their messages, and included some personal, "off-task" messages, to acknowledge their partners' comments, and to respond to their questions. They also tended to take into account the sociopragmatic rules of interlocutors' language and included questions that encouraged feedback and reflection. O'Dowd's significant finding was that such factors as motivation, proficiency level, computer access, and interest in the target culture were less significant for students than the reactions students received when they explained aspects of their culture to their partners, e.g. interest encouraged them to write more, to learn more, and to change their attitudes toward the target culture.

O'Dowd identified the future research direction in testing whether the characteristics of successful e-mail exchanges and the content of effective e-mails presented in his study

need to be modified or expanded in other cultural and institutional contexts. Next, he argues that greater investigation is needed into the question of how teachers can maximize the intercultural learning experience of e-mail exchanges as well as “how notions of language, nation, and cultural identity are addressed by learners in intercultural e-mail exchanges” (p. 138).

The next study by Belz (2003) suggests that intercultural communication in telecollaboration may be more fully explicated if researchers augment content-based interpretations of this phenomenon with linguistic analysis. Such analyses would broaden the investigation focus on *what* learners say to include *how* they say it. Belz uses a Hallidayian-inspired linguistic analyses of intercultural competence (IC) with a focus on the “attitudes” component of Byram’s model. The learners’ developing attitudes toward both the other and the self are analyzed within the frameworks of (a) appraisal theory and (b) epistemic modality.

As in all previously discussed studies, the context of telecollaboration in Belz’s study was structured. During the first stage US students created personal web-pages. Using the information on web-pages, the German students chose their e-mail partners. During the second stage, participants got to know each other through e-mail discussion of 3 sets of parallel texts. Throughout the third stage international partners created a joint web-page in which they examined in greater detail a topic that arose from their common engagement with parallel texts.

Belz suggests that the tendency of the German focal students - Anke and Catharina toward negative appraisal, categorical assertions, and intensification may be reflective of broader German interactional patterns of directness, explicitness, and an orientation toward

the self. On the other hand, Eric's (American focal student) patterns of self-deprecating judgments, positive appreciation, and the upscaling of positive evaluations may index broader English communicational patterns of indirectness and implicitness.

The major strength of Belz's study is that it supports the qualitative findings with strong quantitative evidence in the form of systematically counted linguistic units. Belz demonstrates how linguistic micro-analysis can be productively used for providing an additional "analytic cut" (Layder, 1993, p. 108) in a telecollaborative language study. In Belz's case, data includes a linear, relatively short thread of e-mail interaction between 3 people (1 American vs. 2 Germans), therefore, micro-linguistic analysis fits very well to this type of data without leaving an impression of incompleteness and fragmentation. On the other hand, this type of analysis would not fit the purposes of my large-scale study aimed at a thick and rich description of I-CMC. Rather, a broader analysis of social interaction similar to one used by Nolla (2001) and Potts (2001) would be more suitable to reveal the interpersonal and intercultural dynamics between participants.

Finally, the study by Ware (2003; in press) focuses on the aspect of tension in intercultural CMC. The data in Ware's study pose the dilemma of how students' assumptions about the nature of online communication can inform their online discourse choices in ways that lead to a lack of communication. Ware coded the multiple qualitative data sources described in table 1.1 for salient themes that were presented as a series of six major tensions. She found that differences in students' previous experience with technology, their opinions about an appropriate level of formality or informality, English and German languages valuation, individual reasons for choosing to participate in a telecollaboration, as well as differences in how students construed the primary purpose of the telecollaboration and how

they allocated time to participate in the exchange led to “missed” communication or students’ avoidance of interpersonal communication by choosing not to directly address or engage their online partner. Therefore, research and practice on I-CMC must focus not only on how students jointly construct online discourse, but how they co-constitute the context for their online participation. Ware identifies limitation of her study in the problem of generalizability because of the small number of participants, therefore, she suggests that the future research should involve “a greater number of student cohorts using the larger study design” (p. 31).

2.5 Summary of the Chapter: Building on Existing Research

In this chapter I analyzed the literature which laid a background for this study. First of all, I discussed Activity Theory and presented an Activity System model (Figure 2.3). An online environment, as any web of human relationships, can be conceptualized as a separate activity system, interacting with other activity systems, such as broader physical contexts in which it is embedded.

I explained that Activity Theory views learning as expanding one’s participation in activities from the periphery to the center, through negotiating the ways of acting together with other members of the activity system. I demonstrated that such understanding of learning is also pertinent to language and culture learning. Thus, based on the analysis of current literature, I highlighted the shift in language learning from acquisition to participation and socialization metaphors. I also emphasized the shift from behaviourist to symbolist approaches in culture learning, where culture is learned not by memorizing various target cultural phenomena, but through negotiation of meaning with representatives of other cultures. Therefore, culture learning is associated with the unpredictability of cultural

situations and the active exploration of these situations through the competent use of language. I lead this discussion to demonstrate that learning language, culture, and content happen simultaneously and that the focus in language and culture pedagogy should be on the development of intercultural communicative competence.

As this study explores intercultural online environments, I reviewed the current literature on manifestation/development of intercultural communicative competence in online environments. This study intends to use Byram's (1997) and Lamy and Goodfellow's (1999) criteria to evaluate the development of students' communicative competence as well as the notion of "cultures-of-use of the artefact" coined by Thorne (2003) to demonstrate the relationship between contexts, computer technologies and students' participation. In addition, the study is going to test if the previous findings on I-CMC are replicated in this study such as for example, the role of genre (Kramsch & Thorne, 2002), influence of motivation, computer access, and interest on students' participation (O'Dowd, 2003), possible tensions (Ware, in press) and themes emerged in studies by Chase et al. (2002) and Reeder, et al. (2004). This study is also aimed to expand the scope of research participants by including instructors and the way they shaped the interaction and pay special attention to the notion of cultural identity as addressed by learners. Thus, building on previous research, this study is aimed to provide a more expanded picture of the nature of participating and learning in online intercultural environments. In the next chapter I discuss methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study undertakes a qualitative research paradigm based on both qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide the most detailed responses possible to the research questions. The qualitative paradigm operates under the following assumptions:

- individuals construct reality,
- multiple realities exist in any given situation, and
- the construction of reality is context-bound (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Therefore, I believe, a qualitative research design is the appropriate methodology to understand the nature of online intercultural environments where students interact and share ideas to solve problems collaboratively, and construct knowledge through social interaction.

A qualitative research design avoids generalization in favor of “thick description” and hypotheses, and aims at understanding the richness and complexity of a particular phenomenon (Merriam & Simpson, 1989). Denzin (1989) describes “thick description” in the following way:

It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts the sequence of events for the person or persons in question. In thick description, the voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interacting individuals are heard. (p.83)

During this poststructuralist research era, qualitative inquiry assumes that many interrelated layers of meaning exist in any given situation, and the goal is to search for

patterns among these layers for the purpose of understanding rather than prediction or control. The methodology under the qualitative paradigm relies on inductive logic, allowing categories, themes, and patterns to emerge (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). This study found particularly helpful the conceptual map suggested by LeCompte & Schensuj (1999) who compare doing qualitative study, and grounded analysis in particular, to assembling a jigsaw puzzle:

The edge pieces are located first and assembled to provide a frame of reference. Then attention is devoted to those more striking aspects of the puzzle that can be identified readily from the mass of pieces and assembled separately. Next [after sneaking a look at the puzzle picture on the box for hints] the puzzle worker places the assembled parts in their general position within the frame, and finally locates and adds connecting pieces until no holes remain. (p. 237)

The “edge pieces” in my research are represented by the aspects of “Contexts” domain. The “striking aspects of the puzzle” include the description of Contradictions/Tensions that took place during the interaction. Finally, the aspects of the “Learning” domain correspond to the “assembled parts and connecting pieces” which complete the whole picture.

3.2 Rationale for an Activity Theory Context-Based Approach

The analysis of the Intercultural telecollaboration under study is based on the Activity Theory framework. Viewing activities as developing processes reveals certain methodological implications. First of all, the Activity Theory “rejects cause and effect, stimulus response, explanatory science in favour of a science that emphasizes the emergent

nature of mind in activity and that acknowledges a central role for interpretation in its explanatory framework” (Cole, 1996; p.104). In order to understand, for example, how an artefact is used, one has to study its use over time allowing for the usage to develop (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 1997). In this regards, ethnographic methods that track the history and development of practice as it naturally occurs fits well with the goals of Activity Theory. Nardi (1996) summarizes the methodological approach of Activity Theory into a set of the following characteristics (p. 95):

- A research time frame long enough to grasp the objects of the activity.
- Attention to broad patterns of activity first, then to more narrow episodic fragments.
- The use of a varied set of data collection techniques including interviews, observations, video and historical materials.
- A commitment to understanding things from the users’ points of view.

In my work I argue that ethnographic inquiry may not be necessarily longitudinal, as it can focus on the microgenetic domain, defined by Vygotsky as the reorganization and development of mediation over a relatively short span of time (Lantolf, 2000).

According to Activity Theory, an individual is viewed in relation to his/her complex contexts, involving a system of artefacts and other individuals in historically developing settings. Situations are actively constructed by the social actors, but at the same time, the actors also shape these situations. As Nardi (1996) explains, in the Activity Theory,

Context is not an outer container or shell inside of which people behave in certain ways. People consciously and deliberately generate context in part through their own

objects; hence, context is not just “out there.” Context is both internal to people - involving specific objects and goals-and, at the same time, external to people, involving artefacts, other people, specific settings. The crucial point is that in activity theory, external and internal are fused, unified. (p. 76)

Therefore, it is not enough to understand human actions as context-embedded, it is important to view context and agency as constantly interacting. The complex interrelationship of contexts and agency can be presented as four overlapping dimensions linking more locally situated aspects of language use and language learning to the macro issues of social institutions, beliefs, and ideologies (Table 3.1).

Table 3. 1 Structure and Agency Framework (adapted from Layder, 1993 and Belz, 2002)

Context: Cultural & geopolitical structures	Setting: Institutional contexts	Situated Activity: Communicative activities	Agency: Individual experiences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Large-scale, society-wide worldviews</i> encompassing beliefs, values, and attitudes toward social phenomena; - <i>Group identities</i> such as social class, gender, and ethnicity; - <i>Social issues</i> such as linguistic rights and language education policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Social institutions</i> within communities and groups in which people hold memberships including families and schools; - <i>Communicative practices and activities</i> of particular educational contexts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Activities</i> constituting a particular learning context that shape and are shaped by individual involvement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Ways</i> individuals index and construct their own social identities and roles and those of others; - <i>Ways</i> that individuals in their interactions with each other create social concepts such as motivation, affiliation and competence

Within this multilayered world, a social action is shaped by a close interplay of both macro-level phenomena such as social context and setting and micro-level phenomena such as linguistic interaction and agency.

3.3 Background of the Project

The project analyzed in this dissertation was one in the series of other long-distance projects conducted throughout the Spring, Summer and Winter Semesters of 2001 under the supervision of Dr. Stephen Carey. The Spring 2001 project involved around 40 Japanese and Russian undergraduate ESL/EFL students from the two universities in Canada and Russia. I presented the results of this project in a symposium organized by Dr. Carey at the CAAL Conference in Quebec in 2001. The Summer 2001 project involved graduate Canadian students and undergraduate Russian students who interacted online for a month. We presented these results at a symposium in CAAL 2002.

Valerie, one of the graduate students who also worked under the supervision of Dr. Carey went to Mexico to teach English for a year and we decided to launch the third project in the Fall of 2001 which would connect Japanese (in Canada), Mexican (in Mexico) and Russian (in Russia) EFL undergraduate students. However, because of the differences in schedules and some organizational problems beyond our control (challenges to change the curricula in the Canadian and Russian contexts and the lack of access to the computer lab in Russia), the Japanese and Russian students, although received their passwords, did not join the Mexican students and the latter interacted by themselves, with me, being their guest visitor. Therefore, we began to negotiate the possibility that the Japanese and Russian students would join the bulletin board in the coming term (Spring 2002).

Thus, the negotiation with instructors about implementation this project began in the Fall 2001 semester. The Japanese, Mexican and Russian instructors as well as their university administrations expressed great enthusiasm about the project and gave their permission to conduct the study. In January 2002, I created the Webpage introducing students to the upcoming project and to the pilot projects we had conducted before connecting the Japanese

and Russian students. In February this website was uploaded to the WebCT courseware (Appendix I).

3.4 Participants

The study involved 52 Japanese (38 female and 14 male), 37 Mexican (16 female and 21 male), and 46 Russian (32 female and 14 male) students divided into 4 unlocked forums¹ (A-D) with 32-35 participants in each (Table 3.2). There were approximately equal number of students from three cultures and genders in each forum. Instructors and three project coordinators were assigned to facilitate one forum each.

Table 3. 2 Number of Participants across Forums/Cultures/Genders

Participants	JF ¹	JM	MF	MM	RF	RM	Total by forum
Forum A	9	4	5	6	7	4	35
Forum B	11	2	4	6	9	3	35
Forum C	8	5	4	5	9	2	33
Forum D	10	3	3	4	7	5	32
Total by gender	38	14	16	21	32	14	

¹The first letter stands for nationality, the second letter stands for gender, e.g. JF - Japanese Female

During the first stage of the project students could post their messages only within assigned forums, however, later, students were allowed to post in other forums as well. By the end of the project students' participation resulted in 3,022 messages (forum A – 854, forum B – 746, forum C – 769 and forum D – 653 messages).

Students

¹ *Unlocked forum* –open for students from other forums as well.

The distinctive feature of the Intercultural online community in this study was its diversity – students were from countries that were extremely culturally distant from one another (Appendix A) – a fact often mentioned as beneficial by students and instructors in the interview. There was a great diversity within Mexican and Russian cultural groups as well. For example, Mexican students historically came from diverse Spanish and American Indian cultural backgrounds. Russian students were representatives of two cultures: Russian and Sakha (Native Siberian). Japanese students also came from a variety of intra-cultural backgrounds, however, compared to Mexicans and Russians, they represented the most ethnically homogenous group. Also students from the three countries had different travel-abroad experiences (Appendix D).

As for their socio-economic status, generally speaking, most of the Japanese and Russian students belonged to the middle socio-economic class, and Mexican students belonged to the upper socio-economic class. Among the Russian students there were some who came from the rural area and whose socio-economic status was considered below average. Many Japanese students reported in the interview, that they had to work part-time to save money for the trip to Canada. In comparison, the Mexican university brochure described local students as representing the wealthiest socio-economic class. They could afford paying tuition fees equal in amount to the one paid in major American universities, as confirmed by the Mexican instructor.

Students had several things in common – they were 18-22 years old second/third year students studying English as a second/foreign language. Japanese students had various majors such as international relations, letters, law, social sciences, policy science, business, and economics. Mexican students were majoring mostly in engineering and computers. All

Russian students were majoring in world economics which implicated international relations and policy science.

Generally, the students' English proficiency varied from intermediate to advanced. Some students had been learning English for 10 years, others began to learn it since they entered the university.

Instructors

Six people - Dr. Carey - a project leader, three instructors, a technical assistant and myself – were involved in coordinating the project. The Japanese and Mexican instructors, the student providing technical support, and myself were fellow graduate students and all three of us except for the Japanese instructor worked under the supervision of Dr. Carey. The Russian instructor was the only person who never met face-to-face with other project facilitators, except me as I worked with her at the Russian University before I came to Canada.

Valerie, a Mexican instructor, was a Canadian white female graduate student who went to Mexico to teach English for a year. Marc, a Japanese instructor, was a Hispanic male graduate student residing in Canada. Svetlana, a Russian English instructor, was the Sakha female, bilingual in Sakha and Russian languages. I, a researcher and a teacher, was originally from the same place and ethnic background as the Russian instructor. Whereas Valerie and Marc just began their teaching careers, Svetlana has been working for more than 20 years as a university professor and had a high administrative status in her university.

Valerie and Marc had an advanced level of computer literacy and had been using WebCT courseware extensively prior to this project, which was not the case with Svetlana who said that the students had “much more advanced” computer proficiency than she did.

As all three instructors came from different cultural historical backgrounds and, more importantly, operated in different instructional contexts, they mediated the project differently to their students. In this study I analyze in detail how the project was mediated by each instructor and how differences in instructors' experiences with information technologies and educational philosophies shaped students' participation and learning.

3.5 Research Context

Students were located in three International sites – the Japanese students in a Southwestern Canadian university, the Mexican students in a major university in Northern Mexico, and the Russian students in one of the universities in the North East of Russia. The University in Mexico was a modern upper economic class institution for privileged, highly motivated students, which made it non-representative of other small Mexican universities. The university in Russia, although not as large and well-renowned as other central universities of the country, was the main university in that region. The Russian students were enrolled in the most prestigious department and were also highly motivated students. The university in Canada, hosting Japanese students, was a major research university. Japanese students came for a 9 month exchange program. Here is how Yuka, a Japanese student described this program in one of her BB messages:

100 [Japanese] university students come to [University in Canada] to study for about 8 months. Therefore, we're taking special program that [Canadian and Japanese universities] created. We're studying culture, economics, media, sociolinguistics and stuff. Those who have enough TOEFL score, they can take one or two regular courses too, I'm also taking a regular course, linguistics.

The WebCT interaction was integrated into the face-to-face English courses students took in their home countries. The course taken by Japanese students - "Language Across the Curriculum: Introduction to Language and Culture" - was a language through content course, focused on exploration of various topics in language and culture including comparative cultural patterns, power relations, linguistic imperialism and colonialism, cultures in contact, and the challenges of intercultural communication.

The course taken by Mexican students - "Advanced English: Critical thinking of Global issues" - was also a language through content course, focusing on raising global awareness and centered around the following themes: environment, mainstream and alternative media, social activism/culture jamming, cultures and subcultures, political correctness, and current global topics.

In the case of the Russian students, they participated in the project instead of taking "Business English" section of the "English for the World Economics students" course. In this course students studied how to write business letters and discuss economy-related issues. Although the Russian students' course was not directly focused on cultural studies, students still were interested in all aspects of international relations. As several students said in a group-interview: "We are the World Economics students – we are interested in what happens around the world."

Shortly before the project we posted project materials on the BB including schedule, instructions how to use BB, suggested topics, and certain requirements, such as writing 5 messages a week (Appendix I). There was no strict agreement among instructors on these requirements - it depended on their decision to either follow them or not in accordance with the local curricula and their educational beliefs. It also depended on students if they wanted

or not to follow these posted online requirements. After the process of fitting this activity to the curricula, instructors allocated the following percentage for students' participation in the project: Japanese – 20%, Mexican – 25%, and Russian – 100% (as the project was conducted instead of the Business English section of the Russian students' English course). The students were evaluated for course credit on the basis of their participation in the telecollaborative exchange by their course instructors. Other facilitators of the project and a researcher could not have any bearing on students' final grades.

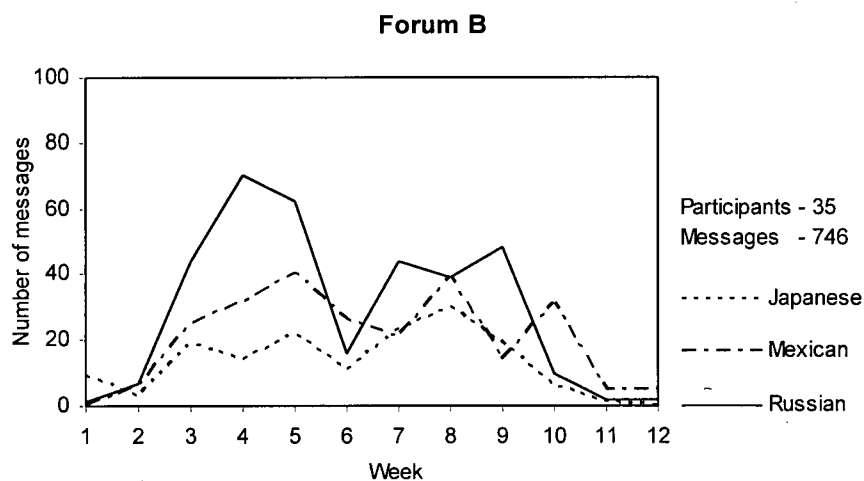
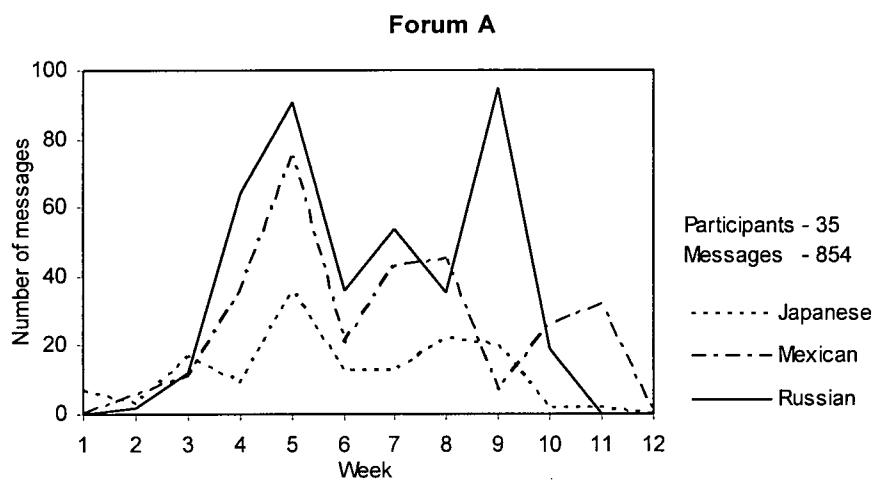
The WebCT bulletin board was intended to become an additional space for students where they could practice the English language through asynchronous discussion of various global and cultural issues. The purpose of the project was to promote thought-provoking, engaging and active interaction in English as a second/foreign language in order to improve students' language, intercultural awareness and critical thinking.

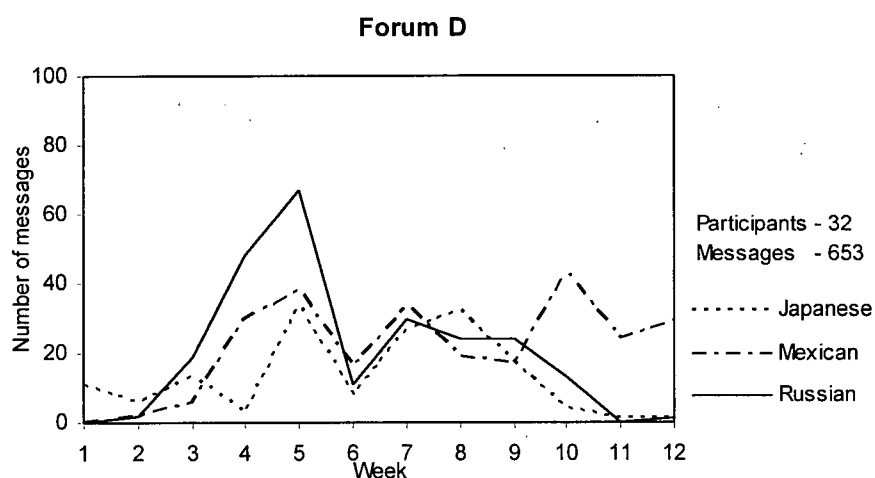
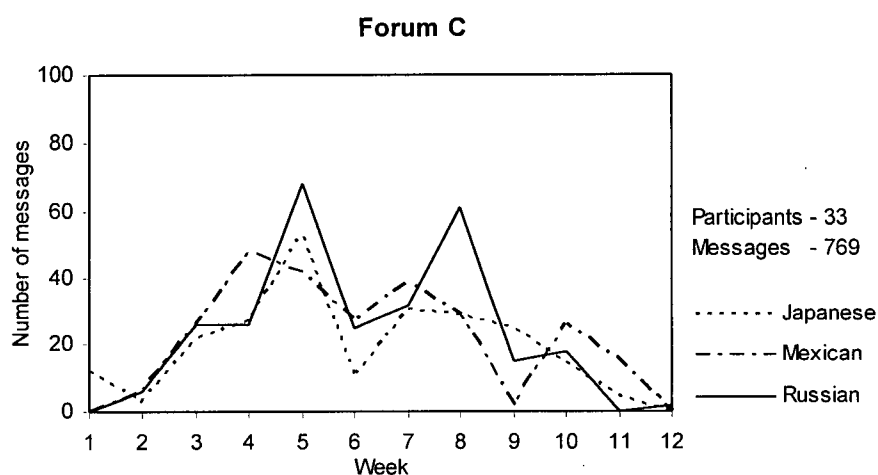
The project was conducted in two stages for 12 weeks: from January 21 to March 3 and from March 3 to April 5 of 2002. Each stage lasted for 6 weeks one after another. The end of the first stage was marked by archiving all messages excluding a few interesting threads, with the purpose of not overwhelming students with the large number of messages and to increase the speed of downloading the site. The second stage, therefore, began with a clean bulletin board.

Statistical data from the project presented in this dissertation raised new issues that needed to be explored and helped to finalize the research questions. The graphs in the figure 3.1 illustrate the dynamics of students' participation in each forum week by week. Japanese students were the first who entered the forums and posted their introductions. The Mexican and Russian students' semesters began a week later, therefore, they joined the Japanese

students in the next week and then began to steadily increase their participation in all 4 forums.

Figure 3. 1 Posting Activity in Forums A - D





The first peak of active participation for Japanese, Mexican and Russian students took place on weeks 4 and 5 (Figure 3.1) indicating that by the middle of the project students began to pay more attention to their participation. The fall of the peak began between weeks 5 and 6 and its steady rise in all four forums reflects the beginning of the second stage. Only in forums A and D is the second peak higher than the first one.

Table 3.3 illustrates that on the average, the Japanese students posted half as many messages as the Mexican and Russian students. On the average, the largest number of

messages was posted by the Mexican females. The high standard deviation indicates that there was a big difference in student participation within cultures – ranging from those who posted only 5 messages to 60 messages and higher.

Table 3. 3 Posting Activity - Student Averages

Females	<u>Mean</u>	<u>STD</u>	Males	<u>Mean</u>	<u>STD</u>
Japanese	15.1	16.2	Japanese	12.9	7.2
Mexican	36.8	17.9	Mexican	25.0	13.5
Russian	32.8	17.6	Russian	26.3	15.1

The reading activity revealed a new surprising finding – despite that the Russian students posted the large number of messages, they read the least. At the same time, Japanese students, who posted the least, on the average, actively engaged in reading activity.

Table 3. 4 Reading Activity – Student Averages

Female	<u>Mean</u>	<u>STD</u>	Male	<u>Mean</u>	<u>STD</u>
Japanese	359.1	303.2	Japanese	221.6	140.5
Mexican	436.4	266.0	Mexican	292.4	211.4
Russian	195.6	206.9	Russian	172.3	155.3

* “Number of messages read” is somewhat overstated as it is calculated by WebCT in cases when students might have only hit on the messages, but not necessarily read them.

These statistical findings left me wondering: Why did students participate in the same project in three different ways? In addition, I was curious to find out if students had any complaints with regards to these differences.

3.6 Coordinating the Project

The role of facilitators was to promote critically framed discussions that would lead to the development of critical thinking and stretching students' L2 and intercultural awareness. Facilitators asked questions that would potentially lead to deep and critical thinking. They were attempting to achieve the Multiliteracies four step pedagogical model – situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformed practice. Each facilitator on average posted around 300 messages.

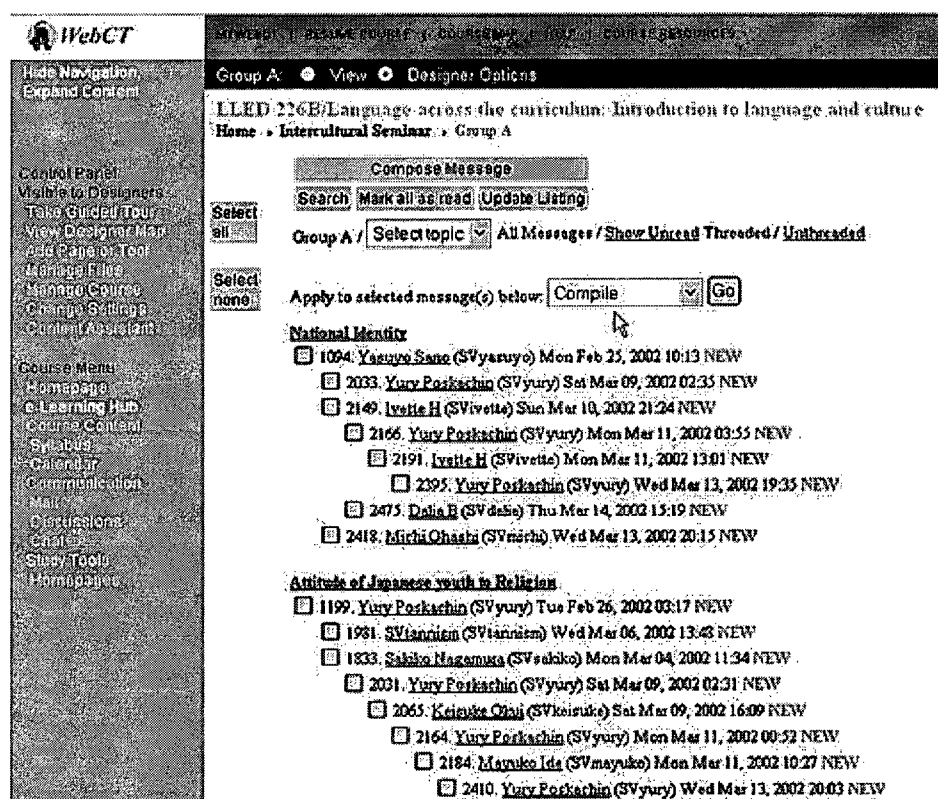
Keeping in touch via e-mail and telephone with instructors and project coordinators was crucial throughout the study as some modifications to the project were conducted during its implementations. Interaction with a Russian instructor was delayed, as she had limited access to the Internet, so, it was easier to connect with her via telephone. Thus, problems with passwords, chat sessions, the ways to facilitate the project by offering new topics, negotiation on who would facilitate which forum, reflections on students' interactions and other organizational issues were all discussed by instructors and project coordinators via e-mail and the telephone in case of the Russian instructor. As each instructor was responsible for facilitating a particular forum during the time when someone was too busy, others took an extra-load to substitute for the "missing" instructor. Thus, implementation of this project required investment of large amount of time, flexibility, quick decision making on the part of instructors, as well as their ability to facilitate discussion in a way that would lead to students' scaffolding within the ZPD.

3.7 Materials

WebCT courseware was first developed at the University of British Columbia and is now commercially available to public and private schools and universities throughout the

world. The courseware has a variety of components including, web-based resources and links, an assessment grid, a calendar, private chat-rooms, and an electronic bulletin board. The different components can be designed by the instructor to provide materials and information that are specific to each course. The interface of the discussion board looks as follows:

Figure 3. 2 Interface of the Discussion Board



The following are some of the features of the WebCT that encourages student written interaction:

- Students' entries can be organized chronologically or in threads that follow a particular theme or topic. Thus, students can see who has written the latest posting,

or follow the line of an argument between a group of students, and can interject at any point.

- Students can view all postings or only the ones that they have not yet read.
- Students can initiate a new topic for discussion by using the 'compose' button, or they can respond to another student's question or entry by pressing the 'reply' button.
- Each posting includes the student's name, the date the article was posted, and the subject of the article.
- The teacher and students can use the quote function to incorporate text from a previous posting in order to comment on it in a new posting. This feature is particularly useful to teachers as it allows them to make comments or corrections to student writing using the bulletin board.

Also, students could post their academic essays and pictures onto the electronic bulletin board by using an attachment, or by copying and pasting their document onto a message. All messages were stored and could be retrieved at any point, but once a message had been posted, no further changes could be made by students.

3.8 Data Collection Procedures

Because the online telecollaborative project was an integral part of the courses taught by instructors in Canada, Mexico and Russia, students who were enrolled in these courses were also enrolled in the project. Whereas students were evaluated for participation in the project, their participation in the research was volunteer-based and had no bearing on their final grades. Right before the project students were offered the opportunity to participate in the study. Those who agreed to participate in the study, signed the consent forms (Appendix

J) and underwent a three-phased data collection process (Table 3.5). Some aspects of the data collection process such as filling out the questionnaires and participation in the mid-interviews were part of the students' English course.

Table 3. 5 Types of Data Collected for the Study

Time Line of the Project	Type of Data	# of students interviewed/surveyed*		
		Japanese	Mexicans	Russians
Beginning	Language Learning & Technology survey	47	37	39
	Intercultural Awareness survey	43	32	39
Middle	E-mail interview	28	31	36
End	Language Learning post-survey	45	36	35
	Intercultural Awareness post-survey	26	37	35
	Individual interviews	40	22	18
Additional data	WebCT bulletin board protocols (3,022 messages), Participant observation,			
	Interviews with instructors			
Russian students	Group interviews (40), Reports with project evaluation, Video-taped session			
	Written project evaluation			
Japanese students	Journal entries (51), Face-to-face Informal conversations			

*Not all students who gave their consent participated in data collection procedure, as they were absent at the moment. This explains why the total number of students are uneven from table to table.

At the beginning of the project, all students filled out two pre-project questionnaires: "Language Learning and Technology" and "Intercultural Awareness" which provided information about students' previous experience with technology, learning English and their intercultural awareness (Appendix B).

In the middle of the project the e-mail interviews consisting of 7-item open-ended questions were sent out to all students to document their attitudes toward participation in the project (Appendix C). Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with volunteer Japanese

students. In addition, three students – one volunteer from each culture were interviewed in the WebCT chat room by another graduate student.

At the end of the course, all groups filled out two post-project questionnaires – one on language learning and another on development of intercultural awareness (Appendix B). Also, students were invited to participate in follow-up interviews.

I interviewed Japanese students after the project ended during the first two weeks of April, 2002. The Mexican students had an option to be interviewed either face-to-face by their instructor or through electronic chat. Most of them preferred chat interviews in the private Web-CT chat-room or using MSN software. The remaining students were interviewed by Valerie face-to-face after the project ended based on the questions I sent her beforehand.

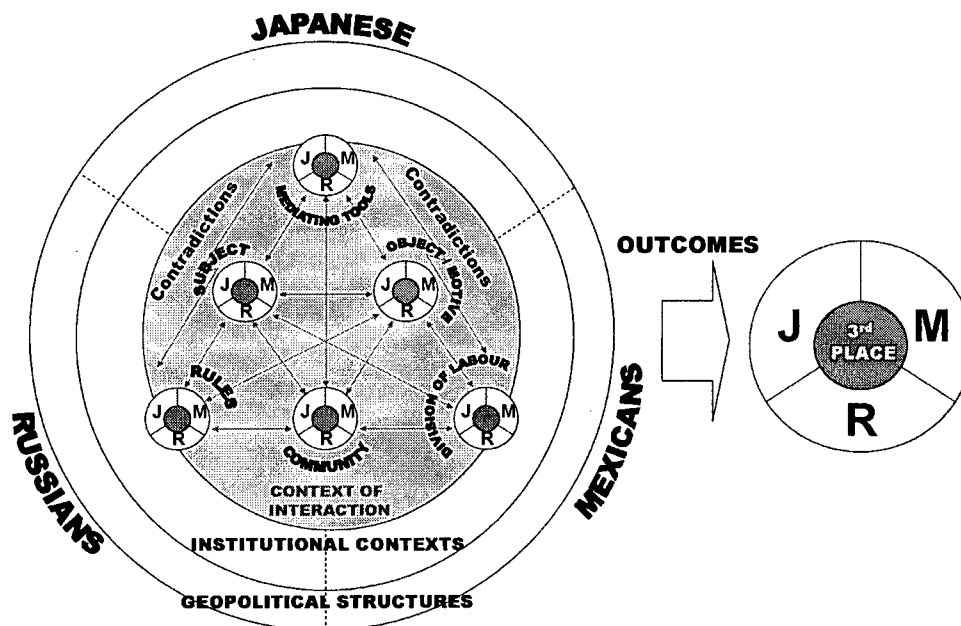
I interviewed Russian students face-to-face upon my arrival in Russia, in May, 2002. Russian students chose to be interviewed in the Russian language, therefore, all recordings after being transcribed have been translated into English. The interviews lasted 40 minutes on average. In addition, the Russian instructor video-taped her students during the final class in the computer lab where students reflected in English on their participation in the project. This was Svetlana's own initiative, not required by research, however, students gave their permission to use this video-taped session as an additional data source. I also interviewed instructors at the end of the project.

All students' and instructors' names were changed and individually identifying information about participants was removed. In addition, within each electronic message all the original formatting, spelling, use of alternate characters, emoticons etc. were left as written by the participants.

3.9 Data Analysis

To analyze the data for the three research questions of the study, I developed a model of Intercultural Context-Embedded Telecollaborative Activity (ICETA) on the basis of the Activity System model (Figure 2.3) and the Model of “Multi-directional inter-relationship of Structure (i.e., *context* and *setting*) and Agency (i.e., *situated activity* and *self*) in the investigation of human activity” (adapted from Layder (1993) and Belz, (2002)) (Table 3.1).

Figure 3. 3 Intercultural Context-Embedded Telecollaborative Activity (ICETA) Model



Explanation of the ICETA Model

The online activity, presented in the form of the triangular model of an Activity System, is embedded within broader contexts such as institutional contexts and geopolitical structures. Institutional contexts and geopolitical structures are also activity systems on their own which consist of the same categories as the triangular model inside the circles. The broader circles are divided into three parts representing three different countries and institutions in which students were located.

The nodes in the form of small circles within the triangle are also divided into three parts representing points where students' objects, tools, rules/norms did not merge. In comparison, the dark small circles within nodes represent the points of unification and similarities when students share similar tools, and their objects, rules/norms coincide.

The outcomes of activity are presented in the form of a larger circle with the dark circle inside representing the emergence of the shared "third place" (Kramsch, 1993) when intercultural learning takes place. On the contrary, students who have differences in tools, norms/rules and objects and who fail to form the international community remain outside the "third place" and, therefore, limit their intercultural learning opportunities.

The ICETA model helped to analyze and organize the data within three broad domains: Contexts, Contradictions and Learning. All interview transcripts and other written data were analyzed by "unitizing" and "categorizing." *Unitizing* is a coding operation in which information units are isolated from the text. *Categorizing* information units derived from the unitizing phase are organized into categories on the basis of similarity of meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; p. 345-347). The whole process of data analysis involved the following steps:

Step 1: Initial Reading of Transcripts

After all tape-recorded interviews were transcribed (and translated in English in case of the Russian students and their instructor), I reviewed all the data twice before developing a preliminary list of categories, themes and patterns. Several prominent themes emerged from the initial reading. The transcripts were coded on recurrence of emergent themes.

Step 2: Organization and Coding of Responses

Next, the recurrent responses were sorted and grouped by the seven elements of the Activity System (subjects, tools, objects, community, division of labour, norms/rules,

contradictions and outcomes) and three contexts (geopolitical, institutional and context of interaction). I read through all the responses for each research question, highlighting pertinent information, and developed a master coding list of response categories. Within each element of the activity system, response categories were counted by frequency.

Step 3: Review of Total Transcripts and Final Coding

Using the master coding list, I coded the full transcript of each participant, noting when the second or third references were made in a response category. The coding list was then finalized.

Step 4: Completion of Data Analysis and Report of Findings

The analysis of each response to research questions and analysis of each interview transcript were conducted. This resulted in themes, patterns, and categories for the research questions. To determine when it was time to stop processing data, I used the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): exhaustion of sources; saturation of categories, emergence of regularities and overextension. In what follows I describe the data analysis process under each question separately.

Research Question 1: What is the nature of the relationship between contexts, participants and computer technologies? I began the analysis from the outside “Geopolitical structures” circle of the ICETA model (Figure 3.3). I described the salient themes that emerged from the interviews, journals, and interaction protocols data, which fell under 6 categories of the triangular activity system and then within “Geopolitical structures” overarching category. For example, on this level one of the salient themes was a “community” aspect of an Activity System when students reflected on their belonging to

imagined communities (Anderson, 1991; Pavlenko & Norton, in press) of non-native speakers of English. On the institutional level, the “tools” aspect of the Activity System was a salient category, as students reflected on how an access to computers/or lack thereof influenced their participation. Next, I focused on data which fell within the category “context of interaction” represented as a triangle in this model. To respond to this category, I documented the salient themes from students’ reflections on their experiences when they came in direct contact with each other in the online environment. Finally, I presented the salient themes within the “agency” (subjects) aspect of the model, reflecting how students themselves shaped the interaction.

Research Question 2: What are the cross-cultural contradictions/tensions of International telecollaboration? To answer this question, I focused on “Contradictions” aspect of ICETA model. According to Nardi (1996), the Activity Theory is more valuable for understanding what went wrong rather than doing predictive work, therefore, it was natural to structure the analysis based on two questions: 1) What happened? (Observable behaviour, students’ complaints). 2) Why did it happen? (Explanations elicited from the interviews). The discussion of contradictions was also intended to reveal the processes of online interaction.

Research Question 3: What kind of learning does I-CMC promote? The third question corresponds to the “Outcomes” aspect of the ICETA model. Because “Learning” is such a complex phenomenon, exploration of this question was built with the help of three types of data and research methods. As the project was relatively short, it was impossible to expect major changes in students’ language proficiency and views. Therefore, the exploration

of the “learning processes” was important as they captured the patterns that could potentially result in learning.

1. Content analysis of interaction protocols. To reveal the learning processes, I analyzed the interaction protocols. I was looking for the following evidence:

- Moments of interaction which captured changes in students’ perspectives, manifested in students’ expression of expanded ideas and explicit statements of learning.
- Examples of dialogues vs. phatic interaction that, I believe, lead or did not lead to intercultural learning (Table 3.6).

2. Analysis of social interaction. Further, I compared students’ manifestation of intercultural learning in the first and the second stages of the project. In order to do it I used the model adapted from three studies: Byram’s (1997) “Intercultural Communicative Competence” model, Lamy and Goodfellow’s (1999) “Reflective Conversation” model and O’Dowd’s (2003b) 4-elements based model of Intercultural learning. O’Dowd’s (2003b) model itself is the adaptation of Byram’s (1997) model which includes the following elements:

Element 1 Function: Introducing, apologizing, joking (i.e. social communication)

Element 2 Function: Reporting factual or personal information about one’s own culture

Element 3 Function: Critical reflection on home or target culture or explicitly comparing 2 cultures

Element 4 Function: Asking questions to members of the target culture.

According to O’Dowd, all elements except element 2 lead to very effective intercultural learning. I expanded O’Dowd’s model by including such aspect as phatic

interaction. I also viewed “Comparison” as a separate element. In table 3.6 I drew parallels between Lamy and Goodfellow’s (1999), Byram’s (1997), and adapted from O’Dowd (2003b) models:

Table 3. 6 Criteria for (Intercultural) Communicative Competence Development

Interaction functions (Adapted from O’Dowd, 2003b)	Lamy & Goodfellow’s (1999) “monologues – conversations - reflective dialogues” model	Byram’s (1997) Intercultural communicative competence model
1. Phatic interaction 1.1 <u>Reporting factual</u> or personal information about one’s own culture copied from the source	<u>Short conversations</u> - exchanges of a social nature. <u>Copied Monologue</u> - a text containing no invitation to interaction	
2. Informative, but less critical messages (<u>Reporting factual</u> or personal information about <u>one’s own culture in</u> <u>one’s own words</u>)	<u>Personal Narrative</u> <u>Reflective dialogues</u>	Knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country
3. <u>Critical reflection</u> on own or target cultures 4. <u>Explicit comparison</u> 5. <u>Asking questions</u> to members of target culture	<u>Reflective dialogues</u>	Skills of interpreting and relating Critical cultural awareness/political education Attitudes of curiosity and openness Skills of discovery and interaction

Reporting factual or personal information. Such type of communication is similar to the “controlled” classroom discourse in which an exchange ends after the learner replies to the teacher’s question (Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999). It lacks features characteristic to critical reflections, and, therefore, does not lead to the effective learning. Here is an example of the fact-reporting message:

Message no. 2480[Branch from no. 1094]

Posted by **Rodrigo** on Thursday, March 14, 2002 3:55pm

Subject Re: National Identity

In México the National Identity is very strong in the soccer games, when the national teams plays here or in other country people of México or mexican people that live in that country they carried big flags and paint

their faces and make a lot of noise to support our team...

Critical reflection, Comparison, Questions. A critical reflection has features including personal exchange involving negotiation of contingent aspects, form focus, and strategy focus, as well as structured opportunities for comprehending meaning and producing modified output (Lamy and Goodfellow, 1999). This type of communication is the most closely associated with Byram's model of the competent intercultural communication (Table 2.1). For example:

Message no. 1094

Posted by **Yasu** on Monday, February 25, 2002 10:13am

Subject National Identity

Did you watch the final men's hockey game (the United States versus Canada) in Feb 24th? Canada won the first prize. ... Canadian identity became stronger that day. I think the United States makes it stronger. I heard that Canadian people do not want to be seen as American. Although there **are similarities** between the United States and Canada, in fact they are different. I guess that many Canadians thought "We won America." rather than "We won the hockey game." In Japan, there are few people taking flags in such a case as in Canada. I think Japanese identity become stronger a little, though. **How about in Mexico and Russia? Do you take your flags and your national identities become stronger?**

Phatic communication. Given the relative superficiality of phatic communication, it is difficult to see in what non-trivial sense understanding is being negotiated or how a focus on form might work through such an unreflective, though protracted, exchange (Lamy & Goodfellow, 1999). Here is an example of phatic communication:

Message no. 3261[Branch from no. 2547]

Posted by **Lina** on Monday, March 25, 2002 11:35pm

Subject Re: Globalization

Hi!!! Of course globalization helps us to grow up. To my mind may be in the nearest future you will have technologocal progress and the globalization will take place there. To my mind we have to do something for it.

Based on the criteria of ICC development (Table 3.6), such elements as a) critical reflections (reflective dialogues), b) social interaction and c) questions to communication partners in this study served as indicators of the (intercultural) communicative competence development. Aspects that I considered not to lead to the communicative competence development were a) fact-reporting messages (monologues) and b) phatic interactions. Within each of the 5 categories there was a variety of smaller social functions, that could not be ignored. Therefore, I coded each message in two focal forums A and B for the following categories:

Table 3. 7 List of Coding

Element	Functions
1. Social interaction	1.1 Expressing agreement, solidarity 1.2 Expressing positivism, gratitude, invitation for interaction 1.3 Apologizing 1.4 Giving advice 1.5 Explicitly stating interest/curiosity/learning 1.6 Expressing readiness to provide more details if asked 1.7 Expressing disagreement, tension 1.8 Stating one's nationality 1.9 Referring to existing theories/articles/books 1.10 Leaving e-mail
2. Reporting factual or personal information	2.1 Reporting information about one's own culture 2.2 Reporting negative sides of one's culture 2.3 Reporting information about other topics 2.4 Personal stories 2.5 Reporting info + personal stories
3. Critical reflection	3.1 Reflection critically on home or target culture 3.2 Comparing 2 cultures
4. Asking questions to members of target culture	4.1 "What do you think about it?" 4.2. "How about your country?" 4.3 Actual wording of the question 4.4 Personal questions, e.g. "Do you like...? Do you know?" 4.5 Asking about own culture 4.6 Request for additional info, e.g. "Can you send me info?"
5. Phatic communication	5.1 Expressions not contributing to forum discussions

Step 3 – Survey and Interview-based analysis. Finally, I presented findings with regards to students' perceptions of learning based on major themes from their interview and post-survey responses (Appendices B & C).

3.10 Validity

Validity is an elusive construct as applied to interpretive research. Depending on the “interpretive communities” or other audiences... validity will be quite different for different audiences” (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; p. 488). Therefore, I take the view that validity in qualitative research is a judgment produced by the readers of a research text. In this light, validity is not a property of my data, research design, or analysis per se; it is a social construction focused on the credibility, trustworthiness, reliability, and believability of my accounts. I describe below the specific strategies I have used to strengthen this validity.

For research findings to contribute to the knowledge base of a phenomenon, they must be judged trustworthy. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), all research is judged by four criteria: *credibility, applicability, consistency and neutrality*. This research attempted to verify Guba and Lincoln's (1985) concept of “credibility” through:

- Persistent observation (via revisiting and reorganizing of raw data);
- Searching for negative and discrepant examples within each case;
- Use of critical subjectivity;
- Triangulation and data convergence by looking for consistency of analysis.
- Use of different approaches to analysis in response to the ideas that may emerge from different ways of exploring and reorganizing the data.

Triangulation rests on the assumption that the weakness in a single method may be compensated by the strength of another method. Using several sources and types of data and data analysis was an effective way to provide the concept of validity for this study (Denzin, 1995). For example, I triangulated my rating results of students as deep, strategic and surface communicators. Instructors' ratings coincided with my rating, thereby, indicating trustworthiness. The list of coding and an excerpt of the transcript was given to one of my colleagues and checked for the degree of match in order to provide reliability of the social interaction analysis. Her coding and my coding coincided which provided additional reliability of the data. I also used analytic memos and continually reviewed them in light of new evidence. Literature was continually consulted, and data continuously reviewed.

3.11 Limitations

Qualitative studies such as this are intended to provide detailed descriptions of one set of participants in one setting, existing within a fixed period in time. Although such studies may inform other educators and instructors as to the range and types of issues that may be pertinent to their own settings, the results cannot be extended and directly applied to other learning situations.

The next limitation is related to the nature of the qualitative research methods such as the 'truth value' of the study. Poststructuralists argue that reality can never be fully captured, only approximated (Guba, 1981). There is no clear view into the inner life of an individual - "Any gaze is always filtered through the lenses of language, gender, social class, race and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; p. 12). Findings *are*

created through the interaction of a researcher and participants rather than by the researcher “standing behind a one-way mirror, viewing natural phenomena as they happen and recording them objectively” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; p. 107).

Furthermore, there are hardly any means of ensuring that what students wrote and said was what they actually believed. With this type of data collection, I relied on the honesty and accuracy of the participant’s responses. The concerns I had about inaccurate accounts and false claims were minimized by creating a trusting relationship with students, anonymous surveys, and by ensuring students that they would not be deducted marks for providing ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers; rather, they would be rewarded for participating and expressing themselves honestly to the best of their ability.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT-EMBEDDED TELECOLLABORATION ANALYSIS

This chapter consists of three sections: Contexts, Contradictions and Learning (see section 1.7 for definitions of terms), with each dimension corresponding to three research questions:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between contexts, participants and information technologies?
2. What are the cross-cultural contradictions/tensions of International telecollaboration?
3. What kind of learning does I-CMC promote?

CONTEXTS

Research question 1: What is the nature of the relationship between contexts, participants and information technologies? To answer this question I describe the relationship between contexts, computer technologies and students' participation based on my ICETA model presented in the Methodology Chapter (Figure 3.3). I view the Intercultural bulletin board as a separate Activity System (including object(s)/motive(s), tools, rules/norms, community, division of labour, and outcomes) embedded within Institutional and Geopolitical contexts. I focus on how contexts shaped the interaction and how interaction was shaped by students' agency. The presentation of findings within "Contexts" dimension is structured according to the following overarching themes:

- Geopolitical structures and salient Activity System elements
- Institutional contexts and salient Activity System elements

- Context of interaction and salient Activity System elements
- Agents and the ways they adapt to affordances of three contexts.

4.1 Geopolitical Structures

The electronically connected classroom was not a decontextualized locale; it was embedded within a school, located within a district, situated within a local community that was an integral part of the larger global community. These contexts were activity systems that shared tools, meanings, understandings, and experiences. Analysis of the data within the “Geopolitical structures” domain identified the themes presented below.

4.1.1 Students and Instructors as Positioned Subjects

Theme 1: Power relations. Before the project many Japanese students had limited knowledge about Mexico and Russia. Most Japanese students (72.1%) indicated that they had poor/no knowledge about Russia and 58.2% had poor/no knowledge about Mexican culture. Mexican and Russian students knew more about Japan than about the cultures of each other. Many Mexican students (62.6%) indicated that they had poor/no knowledge about Japan, and 90.7% had poor/no knowledge about Russia. A little less than a half of the Russian students (48.8%) reported that they had poor/no knowledge about Japan and 87.8% had poor/no knowledge about Mexico (Appendix E).

Sasha, a Russian student, said: “We know about them [Japanese] more. We have many programs about Japan. I am not sure if they have as much information about Russia in Japan.” Olga, another Russian student, explained such differences by unequal power relations that existed between “developed” and “developing” countries:

I think that developing countries want to know more about the developed. We, the developing countries have to follow and watch the developed countries and they don't. [O.B.: Which countries are developed and which are developing?] I think the developing is Russia, and developed is Japan. Mexico is more likely developed rather than the developing one. (Interview)

Also Jose, a Mexican student, explained his interest in Japan and Russia as follows: "I like to learn about other cultures, especially Japanese and Russian, I think that we can learn very much about them, *they are powerful* cultures and we have to take them as an example" (mid-interview). Thus, some students thought that there were unequal power relations between their countries which influenced their willingness to interact with one another.

Theme 2: Canadian Multiculturalism. The Japanese students participated in the project not from their home country, but from Canada where they had been living for 6 months since the beginning of the project. Therefore, one of the main themes that emerged from the interviews with the Japanese students was the influence of Canadian context on their interest in other cultures. Many students reported in the interview that living in a "mono-cultural" country like Japan and moving to multicultural Canada made them interested in cultures more: "Japan is a mono-cultural country, therefore, I like to interact with people from other cultures" (Yumiko). "Living in Canada makes us to be interested in cultures more" (Mari). Several Japanese students also had a chance to meet Mexicans in Canada: "I met Mexicans and heard a lot about Mexico in Canada" (Toshi). However, the Japanese students did not report that they met any other people from Russia in Canada besides me. Seven Japanese students, influenced by their instructor who had a Hispanic

background and the course within which this project was integrated, went to Mexico during their Christmas break.

At the same time, the possibility to interact with Canadians face-to-face constrained participation of some students such as Eriko, who wrote in her journal:

In my opinion, the best ways of knowing that other culture is making friends and talk them face-to-face!!! There are many opportunities in this daily life in Canada! BB is good for some people but not so good for person like me.

For Eriko, the interaction face-to-face with Canadians and other international students was more important than investing her effort in distance communication with Mexican and Russian students.

Theme 3: Stereotyping. The main theme that ran across multiple messages of students was an emphasis on the diversity which existed within their countries and which was always undermined behind the simplistic nature of stereotypes. Overall, many Mexican students blamed Hollywood in creating wrong stereotypes about Mexico, evident in the following message:

Message no. 2292[Branch from no. 1965]
Posted by **Stella** on Tuesday, March 12, 2002 5:37pm
Subject Re: Cultural stereotypes, Images and Objective reality
Hello Shigue.. do you remember me??? i am sTeLLa from Mexico.. well i was curious about your message because i know that you came to Mexico.. and i have a question.. **have you ever seen american movies? because you know in american movies you always see mexicans with big hats with guns.. and in the border of U.S to Mexico they show Mexico like a dirty city.. but that imagine is false..** don't you think thaT? ..byee!! sTeLLa

Akiko opposed the stereotype that people generalized all Asians - "Asian is....," neglecting the differences that existed between diverse Asian people:

Message no. 3113[Branch from no. 2379]

Posted by **Akiko** on Friday, March 22, 2002 2:23am

Subject Re: Cultural stereotypes, Images, and Objective reality

I agree with you. I also think we can't categorize people. I sometimes hear " **Asian is**". I think we can see **differences even within one country** and I feel **why they categorize us as Asian**. it is true that Asian might have tendency to do that but i can say that it's not applicable for every Asian . I also think **media like movie or TV affect** to our stereotypes for each country..

Another Japanese student opposed a stereotype that all Japanese were quiet. Based on his own example of interacting with Canadians, he showed that stereotypes about Japanese as being quiet might have been created because of their insufficient command of English language.

Message no. 2923[Branch from no. 1765]

Posted by **Yoshi** on Tuesday, March 19, 2002 11:48pm

Subject Re: Cultural stereotypes, Images, and Objective reality

One of my roommates who is canadian has a stereotype. It is the stereotype that Japanese are quiet. I usually go out for dinner with my roommates who are canadians on weekend. During the dinner, there was a lot of conversation. But I did not join almost all of the conversation. So, one of my roommates might have thought that Japanese are quiet. I wish I could have joined the conversation, but I did not catch the conversation. If I want to break down the stereotype, I have to learn to speak and listen to English well.

The main theme in the messages of many Russian students was about ethnic diversity in the Russian context and the lack of information about their native republic and that many people might not have even heard about it. Tina wrote: "I'm sure most of you didn't hear about [my republic], that's why I'll write about it." Another Russian student, Toma, wrote the following message which she thought reflected common knowledge about her republic in the eyes of those who lived in other parts of her country and the rest of the world:

Message no. 2197[Branch from no. 540]

Posted by Toma on Monday, March 11, 2002 7:00pm

Subject Re: My notion of Japanese, Mexican, and Canadian

Hi, everybody! To say the truth I understand what Mexicans feel because we have the same situation here in [our republic]. Even in Russia people know nothing about our

country, so what to speak about all world! In the centre of Russia some people think, that we are rolled on deers, we find diamonds in streets, we hunt on polar bears within the limits of a town and we live in stone wigwams!!! and so on. Of course, it's not so and sometimes it's very difficult to overpersuade them. Sometimes we do not try to do it, we just tell them more fables and they believe!!! It's very petty that people don't know and don't want to know about other cultures.
Toma

Based on what students wrote I inferred that many Japanese students grounded their views on their experience of living in Canada. The perspectives of many Mexican students had been formed as a result of their interaction with Americans who live across the border and their trips to the US. Many Russian students formed their awareness about their republic as a result of interaction with people from their own country who live in the Eastern part of Russia. These perspectives, in their turn, were formed by mass media (Anderson, 1991) including local media and Hollywood movies.

4.1.2 Objects/Motives of Positioned Subjects

Geopolitical relationships between countries of communication partners determined some students' preliminary objective to interact with students from particular cultures.

Theme 1: Novelty as an incentive to interact with students from a particular culture.

Many Japanese students said that they knew very little about Russia: "Despite that Russia is so close to Japan, I do not know much about it" (Naoko). Also:

First of all, I am looking forward to communicating with Russian students because *I have never talked* with Russian people. *I did not even know* that Russia is a multicultural society because there is little information on Russia in Japan unless you

try to get some. Therefore, this is a good opportunity to get to know what Russian culture and its people are like. (Taro)

Similarly, Shura, a Russian student, wrote: "I was interested in *Mexican*, because *I knew about them a little* & I had no any imaging about them" (mid-interview). Also, Danil, another Russian student, wrote:

I prefer to read the most Mexicans messages because a lot of my friends were in Japan, I have read a books about Japan and saw the films but *i have not information* about Mexican people, their style of life. Mexica for me is "*terra incognita*" and that's why I preferred Mexicans messages. (Mid-interview)

Theme 2: Pragmatic interest. George, one of the most active Russian students, viewed the project as an opportunity for future collaboration, important for those who studied world economics. In one of his messages he wrote that he was interested in interacting with Japanese students, because "our relations with Japan are growing." In contrast, "...Mexico is very far from Russia, and I know there are some trading relations, but they are very small":

Message no. 2001

Posted by **George** on Wednesday, March 6, 2002 7:58pm

Subject The advantages of the project.

In my humble opinion this project is not only for improving our English language skills, because as I mentioned majority of you have very good English, **but also to find friends, maybe future partners in business and so on.**

... Our relations with Japan are growing and it's good to know. Japan is very close to our boarders and this fact makes a lot of advantages. I know there are some problems with former islands of Japan , which still can't be solved by our authorities. ...Mexico is very far from Russia, and I know there are some Trading relations, but they are very small. And I'm sure That we're the generation who is going to solve these problems or will do the best to do it. So, this project seems to be very useful and advantageous, and we shouldn't loose opportunity we have. George

The Japanese student, Tsuki, wrote the following message in response:

Message no. 3217[Branch from no. 2001]

Posted by Tsuki on Monday, March 25, 2002 8:54am

Subject Re: The advantages of the project.

hello, it is Tsuki. I found your message recently and I was impressed that **you were thinking about this project as a view of your future. I agree with you.** now we have chance to know each countries and it gonnabe our important experience and a **partonership. In Japan, I donot meet people from Russia so that it is hard to know the circumstance.** I wanna ask you about Russia. Do you see Japanese people in your country often? Do you know any Japanese companies in Russia? what do you think Japanese economy in present? I also wanna want to know about Russian econmy in detail Are there lots of international companeis?

Similarly, Fernando, a Mexican student, mentioned in the interview that “Mexico has economic relations with Japan” which was a strong incentive for his personal interaction with Japanese students.

Theme 3: Integrative interest. Some students were motivated not only by pragmatic considerations, but also by simple interest in learning other cultures. As Kostya, a Russian student, said: “There was no practical interest in Mexicans. It was just interesting what kind of people they are - not from TV and newspapers, but from the primary source.” Similarly, Yuki, a Japanese student wrote in his journal:

Now the most interesting thing for me is about the relationship among Japan, Asia and the United States economically and politically. In this context, I can say that I am not interested in Russia and Mexico. On the other hand, it is also certain that I want to share ideas with people who are from various countries and I think it *important to learn other cultures.*

Also, the fact that some students studied the languages of their communication partners became a strong motivation for their participation. Thus, for example, some Russian

student, said: “As I study Japanese it was most interesting for me to read the Japanese messages” (Luda, mid-interview); “Japanese are interesting for me, because I learn their language & I think that I have to know much about them” (Shura, mid-interview).

Kaneko, a Japanese student, wrote in her journal: “learning other languages automatically leads me to be interested in those cultures and people’s thoughts again because of the inseparability of language and culture.”

Theme 4: Opposing stereotypes. Some students were curious to find out what others thought about their countries and to oppose or confirm existing stereotypes about themselves. Ardenio, a Mexican student, said: “What motivate me is to know what people from other country think about México” (mid-interview). Also some students wanted to tell the “truth” about their countries evident from what they said:

I do it [participate] more of a “nationalistic pride” so to say. I want people to know something about Mexico other than a stereotype. I want to tell them about my country, and tell them the truth as I see it. (Salvador, MS, IRC interview)

I wanted to explain them that we live not in yurtas [national dwelling], we are not wild people, that we also learn English, that our thinking is also well developed and we also have our own values. (Olesya, RS, Interview)

I’m really glad that people from other countries are interested in knowing more about us, and Japan. I really want to tell them about real Japan and Japanese people.

(Kaneko, JS, Journal)

Interestingly, the Mexican students more often expressed their willingness to break stereotypes about their country compared to Japanese or Russian students. This might be attributed to what Aya and Kei, the Japanese students, said: “There are only positive

stereotypes about Japan, so I do not want to break them” and to what Olga, a Russian student, said: “You can not make them think differently, on this bulletin board, anyway, so it is useless to try to over-persuade them.”

4.1.3 Community of Non-Native Speakers of English

As students who participated in the project were all learners of English as a foreign/second language they had errors in their writing. Many Japanese students often mixed the sound “r” with “l.” The main culture-specific error of Mexican students was that they omitted “It” in the “pronoun” + “be” sentences, such as in this example: *“Is a little resume of my country history, see you later, and be happy!” “Is not Mexica – is Mexico.”* The Russian students tended to make stylistic errors. For example, they confused the style of writing business letters with writing messages on the bulletin board, evident in the way a few students opened their messages with *“Dear sirs”* and closed them with *“faithfully your’s,”* expressions, taken from the local “Writing Business letters” book.

Despite these errors, the post-survey revealed that the majority of Mexican (85.3%) and Russian (73.5%) students had a positive attitude toward interaction with other non-native speakers, which was not the case with the Japanese students. Almost 45% of the Japanese students had negative attitudes toward interaction with other non-native speakers, perhaps because they felt urgency to practice their English with native speakers during the short remaining time of stay in Canada.

Table 4. 1 Students’ Attitudes toward Interaction with Non-Native English Speakers

	Japanese		Mexicans		Russian	
Attitudes	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>n</i>	% ²	<i>n</i>	% ³

Positive	25	55.6	29	85.3	25	73.5
Negative	20	44.4	0	0.0	1	2.9
Neutral	0	0.0	5	14.7	8	23.5

¹ Percentage of total count of Japanese. ² Percentage of total count of Mexicans. ³ Percentage of total count of Russians.

The analysis of the qualitative data, found that most students did not have either negative or positive attitudes toward interaction with other non-native speakers, rather they had both attitudes at the same time. Most students perceived themselves as belonging to the same community of non-native speakers who were in an equal situation vis a vis the English language:

- “We are in the equal position - we are also non-native speakers, we have the same level of English, that is why, it is normal for us to interact with other non-native speakers” (Rosalinda, MS).
- “English is a global language - we can share different opinions about English” (Keiko, JS).
- “If one makes a mistake others will understand that we are learning and we can help each other” (Tina, RS).

Most students had a strong awareness that they were united by the English language.

As Rodrigo, a Mexican student, wrote on the bulletin board:

Message no. 2452[Branch from no. 2362]
 Posted by Rodrigo on Thursday, March 14, 2002 9:52am
 Subject Re: Learning second language
 I think that learning another language its very important, more if is english becuae this language its the international language. *Look us!...people from Russia, Japan and Mexico, people who their native language are totally diferents and we are speaking in english, its curius!..*

Rodrigo

A few students reported that the interaction with non-native speakers reduced their anxiety level: “Sometimes English speakers get annoyed when they do not understand what we say” (Jose, MS). “Communication with non-native speakers made me feel more confident; I would not feel comfortable to communicate with native speakers because of my poor grammar” (Kostya, RS). Eriko, a Japanese student, realized that the interaction with non-native speakers was different in nature from the interaction with native speakers. As she said in the interview:

It is very important for me to speak with native speakers, but in a sense communicating with non-native speakers is more important because we Japanese, Mexicans and Russians share same situation each other regarding as non-native and *we can gain something what we can't gain from communication with native speakers.*

However, for the majority of students the negative aspect of interaction with non-native speakers was the possibility of borrowing one another's errors. As Rodrigo said: “It is more difficult to interact with native speakers, but more useful because non-native speakers make mistakes.”

4.1.4 Summary: Geopolitical Structures

On the “Geopolitical structures” level of analysis the Subjects and Objects/motives aspects of Activity system turned out to be the most salient. The ways subjects (students and instructors) were positioned by mass media as well as by geopolitics of their local contexts shaped their broader objects/motives such as pragmatic or integrative interest in

communication partners and intention to reverse stereotypes about their countries created by mass media.

The study found that students had both positive and negative attitudes toward interaction with non-native speakers - on one hand, they were moving toward a similar goal – that is mastering English, on the other hand, they were concerned about borrowing each other’s mistakes.

4.2 Institutional Contexts

The interviews with instructors revealed that the administration of the three institutions in Canada, Mexico and Russia supported the integration of innovative technologies into the educational process. The website of the Japanese – Canadian exchange program proclaimed furthering “intercultural understanding among participants” as its main mission. The Mexican university was very advanced in international online technology. The Mexican and Russian universities welcomed international collaboration, which was evident from their institutional missions and previous experience of telecollaboration (e.g. “The U.S.-SiberLink Internet Project,” Braunstein et. al.; 2000).

4.2.1 Object: Students’ Expectations from the Project

At the beginning of the project students responded to the open ended survey question “What do you expect from participation in this Intercultural Seminar?” in the following way:

Table 4. 2 Students’ Expectations from the Project

Expectation	Japanese		Mexican		Russian	
	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>n</i>	% ²	<i>n</i>	% ³

Learn cultures	40	88.9	35	94.6	18	46.2
Communicate	9	20.0	12	32.4	12	30.8
Compare cultures	9	20.0	1	2.7	0	0.0
Become more intercultural	5	11.1	0	0.0	0	0.0
Improve English	3	6.7	23	62.2	20	51.3
Find friends	3	6.7	5	13.5	5	12.8
Learn some foreign expressions	2	4.4	2	5.4	0	0.0
Learn own culture	1	2.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Meet new people	0	0.0	5	13.5	3	7.7
Self-expression	0	0.0	1	2.7	0	0.0
Total	45	100.00	37	100.00	39	100.00

^{1, 2, 3} Students could choose several options, therefore, calculation of percentage was based independently for each category

Half of all Russian students (51.3%) thought that practicing English and learning cultures (46.2%) was equally important. For 94.6% of Mexican students learning culture was the most important objective. Many Mexican students also wanted to improve their English (62.2%). Interestingly, most Japanese students had one primary goal – to learn other cultures (88.9%). Only 6.7% wanted to improve their English.

These differences in goals might be explained by the overall mission of Japanese exchange program, oriented toward multicultural learning and constraints of Mexican and Russian students' local contexts in which students did not have opportunities to practice their English. In addition, the courses in which the project was integrated in three different contexts might have also influenced students' objectives. Thus, for example, the course of Japanese students was oriented toward culture learning, explaining why they expected to learn culture more than language. The courses taken by the Mexican and Russian students

were less culture-oriented, and, therefore, students were willing to invest their efforts in mastering their L2.

Some Japanese students (20%) also had expectations to compare cultures. This can be explained by their experience of living abroad, which entailed passing through the stages of acculturation to a new environment and which involved comparing their home culture with the host culture. Also 11.1% of Japanese students expressed their willingness to become more intercultural. As Mari, a Japanese student, wrote:

I am not familiar with Mexico and Russia, so I want to get to know their culture and many things. Then I want to become to feel kinship with Mexico and Russia. In addition to that, I expect that I become interested in Mexican and Russian culture.
(Journal)

4.2.3 Tools: Students' Access to Computer Technologies

The Canadian and Mexican Contexts: Free Access to Computer Technologies

The Canadian university had a good technological basis, with multiple computer labs all over the campus and free and unlimited access to the Internet. The lab where students engaged in WebCT activity was equipped with Macintosh computers and each student had an individual station. In addition, all Japanese students had PC laptops and Internet connection in their rooms. This incompatibility between the lab Macintosh and student owned PC computers was inconvenient for some students as they said in the interview.

The Mexican university could be compared to the well-subsidized private universities of Canada and the US. It was fully equipped with cutting-edge technologies and computer labs. Valerie described the technological base of her university as follows:

There is a high speed Internet throughout campus and high speed access everywhere and a wireless access. Although, there are quite a bit of computer labs in the University, there is, in fact, no need for lab time.Students bring their own laptops into classes. *It is not like here where if you want to use a computer you have to go to a lab.* There you sit at a picnic table outdoors, eating your lunch, plug in your computer and have high speed Internet.*So there is no comparison to anything I've seen in Canada.* (Interview)

All Mexican students except one female had computers at home and all except 3 female and 1 male students had Internet connection at home (Tables 4.3, 4.4). In addition, both Mexican and Japanese students had unlimited access to computers and the Internet on campus.

Table 4. 3 Computer Ownership

		Mexican students		Russian students	
		<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>N</i>	% ¹
Females	Yes	15	93.8	14	48.3
	No	1	6.3	15	51.7
Males	Yes	21	100.0	11	91.7
	No	0	0.0	1	8.3

* The questions from the survey was: "Do you own a computer?"

¹ Percentage of total number of Mexican and Russian female/male students.

Table 4. 4 Internet Access

		Mexican students		Russian students	
		<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>N</i>	% ¹
Females	Yes	13	81.3	9	31.0
	No	3	18.8	20	69.0
Males	Yes	20	95.2	7	58.3
	No	1	4.8	5	41.7

* The questions from the survey was: "Do you have Internet access at home?"

¹ Percentage of total number of Mexican and Russian female/male students.

The Russian Context: Limited Access to Computer Technologies

The technological base at the Russian university was by far weaker than in Canada and Mexico. The entire university had 78 computers donated by the Open Society Institute (Soros Foundation). Half of the female Russian students (15 out of 29) and one male student did not own computers (table 15). Only 9 out of the 29 (31%) Russian female students and 7 out of the 12 (58.3%) Russian male students had an Internet access at home. The survey found that the 15 Russian students went online both from their school and home, 17 only from their school and 7 used other public places such as parent's work, friends' place, and Internet cafes.

The Internet was expensive, with rates based on the time of its use, therefore, many Russian students tried to limit their time spent online when they worked at home. Students tended to say: "Internet is expensive, and I try to cut time of use at home as much as possible." "I have to pay for my Internet, I could use it more, but I'm still being just a student." That is why, many Russian students composed their messages off-line and logged on the Internet for the short period of time just to post them. Dana, a student who owned a computer described the way she used computers as follows:

As for me, I have an Internet at home and I'm go to WebCT every day. I spend (in common) about 2 or 3 hours per day. Usually I compose my messages writing on the bulletin board. If sometimes I have problems with my Internet I firstly write in the Word and then copy to the bulletin board. (Mid-interview)

On the other hand, Luda, a Russian student who did not have a computer and Internet access engaged in the following practice:

I haven't the computer at home and I need to go to the Institute to work, but it's very difficult, because I study till 17.00 o'clock and then I need to go another building (because there is no Internet in our building). But even here we have some difficulties with work, because there is very big queue [line] and you may work here only two hours. I have two free days a week, and I try to work in the project. So I have less than two hours per day. (Mid-interview)

Also the lack of access constrained students' participation in that their messages appeared on the bulletin board with delay: "I did not have an access to the Internet and in the lab I only read because of the limited time and replied at home, and than, when I was to send *I was a week late.*" Many Russian students said in the interview: "If I had unlimited access I would have participated much more."

When I asked if Russian students were ready to participate in Internet-based projects given that technological basis was not so strong Svetlana, their instructor, said:

Unfortunately, we are not ready in terms of technical side. But, we still need to try to do something. It is worse if we do nothing. We can not wait until we are ready – we'll never be ready. *We need to use what is available to us right now.* (Interview)

Students' Previous Experience with Computer Technology

It turned out that the overwhelming majority of the Japanese female and male students engaged very often (5-9 times a week) in a) sending e-mails (f=97.4% & m=75.0%) b) chatting on the Internet (f=73.7% & m=75.0%) and c) searching the Internet (f=71.1% & m=62.5%).

The majority of Mexican students engaged very often (5-9 times a week) in a) sending e-mails (86.7% & 60.0%) b) searching the Internet (80.0% & 65.0%) c) word-processing (66.7% & 80.0%) and online chatting (66.7% & 55.0%).

The Russian students were the least experienced in the socio-collaborative use of computers such as e-mail and chat interaction. Many Russian male students, for example, 8 (66.7%) and many Russian female students – 15 (51.7%) had never chatted before.

For most of the Japanese and Mexican students the main frustration about computer technologies was the Internet information overload and difficulty to find necessary information: “There are too many information, so sometimes I cannot get accurate information which I’d like to get” (Keiko, interview). Less students complained of various technical problems such as “computer gets frozen, viruses, frame disappears” (Francisco, interview) and slow speed. Four Japanese and two Mexican students complained that it was difficult to read information in English: “If the information is written in English (or other language), I don’t feel like reading it” (Yoko, Interview).

The nature of the frustration that most Russian students experienced with technology was different in nature than the frustration of Japanese and Mexican students. Only 1 out of 39 Russian students complained about the difficulty to find necessary information. Four out of 39 students complained about technical problems and slow speed. On the other hand, most of the students were frustrated with the limited access because the Internet and computer time was expensive. One Russian student could not answer what frustrated her about computers because she did not use them enough: “I don’t know, I don’t spend much time in it to specialize” (Vera, Interview).

4.2.4 Summary: Institutional Contexts

On the level of “Institutional context” the important aspects of an Activity System that shaped students participation were objects and tools. The study found that the three groups of students had different expectations from the project that were shaped by their broader contexts – such as living in the target or native language environment and the different objectives of the courses in three contexts in which the project was integrated. Generally speaking, most Mexican and Russian students wanted to improve their English, whereas most Japanese students did not expect to improve their English, rather, they wanted to invest in their improvement of Intercultural awareness.

In the Canadian and Mexican contexts students had free access to computer technologies and all Japanese and almost all Mexican students owned computers and had access to the Internet. This was not the case with the Russian students, many of who did not own computers and did not have Internet access (Tables 4.3, 4.4). Different access to computers explains why the Japanese and Mexican students engaged in chat, e-mail and Internet search activities regularly, whereas many Russian students never chatted before and used the Internet and e-mail significantly less often. This finding is important as it shows that Japanese and Mexican students in general were more prepared to participate in the highly interactive BB than the Russian students.

4.3 Context of Interaction

4.3.1 Instructors as Mediators of Rules and Objects

Instructors were mediators (mediating tools) of the rules and objects of the online activity, as they were the ones who integrated the project within the courses they taught in

their local contexts. In this section I discuss how each instructor mediated the project to their students based on their educational philosophies and experiences with technology.

The Japanese Instructor's Mediation: Democracy and Multitasks

Some aspects of instructor's philosophy. Marc, a Japanese instructor, favoured democratic and equal relationships with his students evident in what he said in the interview:

I never reprimanded anyone for *doing something that was outside of our class* because I thought well ...that's an assignment they really need to finish now and hand it in and they will catch up with these activities maybe in their room with their own computers.

He also structured WebCT activity in a very free and flexible way. He said in the interview:

I think that it's important to give students the *freedom*, to start any topic any thread they feel like and those other things they are interested in and generate discussion. Because many of the topics that I would have never thought about were posted by students and generated a lot of discussion.

Marc did not want to overwhelm his students with the same assignment for the entire 1.5 hour long lab time, as he felt that if students engaged only in WebCT activity during their lab time, it would have been "too much for them." Therefore, he made a decision to give his students additional assignments besides doing WebCT activity during their lab time. I was a TA and a researcher in that class, but I did not interfere in the instructor's ways of structuring the course, first, because I found them absolutely legitimate and, second, because it was important for the study to show how instructors would integrate the project based on their own educational beliefs and affordances of their local contexts.

Object/Rules based on the instructor's philosophy. The way Marc structured the course and treated his students can be characterized as engaging students in multitasks and giving them freedom to choose how they would participate in the WebCT project.

The project was introduced to Japanese students during the first class along with other course components such as participation (10%), oral presentations (20%), reflection journal (20%), webquests (10%), 2000-word term paper (10%), final exam (10%), and WebCT project (20%).

The students engaged in the WebCT activity during the 1.5 hours long lab time. They were also encouraged to participate in interaction in the out of class time. In the lab students were to work on the WebCT project, write journal entries and do a webquest (300-word position papers on the course content). They had freedom to choose the sequence of each activity.

Whereas in the case of Mexican and Russian students the requirement to write 5 messages a week (posted online, Appendix I) became the official policy and the criteria for evaluating students' participation, this was not the case with the Japanese students. We did not emphasize and did not remind students to write 5 messages a week. We also did not explain students in detail on how they would be evaluated.

The atmosphere in the lab was free and relaxed, so students could move around a room, sit and work in pairs, and discuss assignments. When I twice visited the lab briefly, I noticed that some students were writing webquests, some were doing WebCT and writing journals, whereas a few students were checking their e-mails.

Students' participation outcomes. Marc's focus on multi-tasks and freedom to choose between assignments, resulted in active participation only by those Japanese students who

were genuinely interested in this activity and who preferred it over other tasks. At the same time, as students received 20% for their participation, they always felt the obligation to contribute to the bulletin board.

Seemingly an advantageous feature when students could access the bulletin board any time they wanted to: “I can access whenever I want” (Masumi, Interview), turned out to be not as positive for some students. As Kiho, a Japanese student, said: “it is a good point to go there and participate whenever I want, but this is maybe also bad because if I do not have enough time, I do not participate in it at all” (Journal entry).

In addition, multitasks of the course, might have diminished the value of WebCT as it was perceived by some students as one of the multiple assignments. As Shiba, a Japanese student wrote in his journal:

Why don't many people participate in BB? Actually I also don't always do that. The reasons why I don't always do that are time and differences of information. I think we have too many works, in particular “Essay”. We must work two essay (2000 words). This work are useful for us, but other activities are more useful and valuable.

Despite that some students liked WebCT the most, they felt that two other lab activities (webquests and journals) were more important as they were graded for doing those assignments on a weekly basis which was not the case with the WebCT activity. In addition, because webquests and journals had a finite nature they were easier to work on, and could not be as easily postponed as the 12-weeks long, process-oriented WebCT activity.

The Mexican Instructor's Mediation: Justice and a Balanced Approach

Some aspects of instructor's philosophy. Valerie's, a Mexican instructor's approach to the project can be characterized as balanced and based on principles of social justice, a theme which was salient throughout the interview with her. From what she said about the rationale behind grading students for their participation, we can see that she did not impose rules from the top, but rather, integrated the project into the course based on students' needs:

The students had such a heavy work-load, so many exams, so I realized I could not take much of their time because *it's unfair to them*. That is why I made the project a part of the course and *gave them bonus points* for participation, so they wouldn't be able to legitimately complain because the project was an extra-work and it was in English. *Of course the Tec was really supportive of this project they were really really enthusiastic about it*. I knew it was not going to jeopardize my job or anything, but, at the same time, I realized this *was not a part of their text-book*. (Interview)

In another reflection, Valerie also talked about equal opportunities for her students: "A lot of them had *password problems* so I had to lower the number of messages they had to write because it would be totally *unfair* for some of them" (Interview).

Object/Rules based on the instructor's philosophy. The WebCT project was conducted instead of traditional essay writing and was the only one online activity, besides reading online articles for the class, students engaged in. Students did not have a lab time, so they engaged into the WebCT activity outside of their classroom and at their own time and pace. Valerie introduced the project in the following way:

I introduced the project really enthusiastically: "this is going to be great and this is what you get to do." *As a result of doing the project they would not do writing essays*, so I introduced it in a way – "this is a lot more communicative - there is an audience,

whereas when you write an essay there is only one person who will see your work – the teacher.” (Interview)

Valerie gave students freedom to write on topics of their interest, but at the same time, set the following requirements for her students:

I said that they had to write 5 messages a week and *if they miss one week they could not write 10 messages the next week* because, otherwise, some could write 20 messages in one day. I also told them they should check the BB every day as they check their e-mail so they would not get overwhelmed with all the messages. (Interview)

In addition, Valerie emphasized the importance of reading a certain number of messages every week. She also gave some explanations on how she was going to evaluate them:

I told them I would evaluate them on quality and quantity and I did not tell how - I left it ambiguous. Actually I did not really evaluate the quality until the very final last couples of week.I randomly selected the messages and gave them the grade on that ...I marked them really hardly on quality. (Interview)

In terms of the question with regards to whether to provide a grammatical feedback on a regular basis, Valerie thought that: “it would have been totally unfeasible for me to do that - I had no time” (Interview).

Students’ participation outcomes. The way Valerie structured the course by giving students the freedom to write on the topics of their individual interest within certain required

frames allowed Mexican students to perceive WebCT activity as finite in nature. Besides, the Mexican students did not have to choose between several tasks as in the case of the Japanese students. Moreover, the project was conducted instead of their essay writing, which assured participation of all students. Therefore, most of the Mexican students demonstrated the balanced participation by posting and reading an equally large number of messages

The Russian Instructor's Mediation: Authoritarian and Teacher Centered

Instructor's philosophy. Svetlana's, a Russian instructor's educational philosophy favouring authoritarian methods was reflected in what she said in the interview:

First of all, our students have different mentality, *they do not study for themselves – they study for me.* ...Being less strict and less demanding will not have good results. I'd rather have bad image, but I will not be ashamed later for the knowledge they gained. I'd rather be bad in their eyes, but I will not be embarrassed that they did not learn anything. ...I am strict not because I play the role of a strict instructor, neither I support an image of the one, but it is my nature, my principles.

On of the most salient features of the project was Svetlana's non-participation in online discussions. She explained why she did not participate as follows:

If I write something, it will somewhat uh... we have *a sort of authoritarian method of teaching* and if I had expressed my opinion, students would have agreed with my opinion, so I decided that it is better for me to not appear on the bulletin board, otherwise, students would have been suppressed and they would have written in a way I wrote, in the directions determined by me. (Interview)

Svetlana was aware of her authority and power and did not want to display it on the bulletin board. Her non-participation in the interaction, resulted in her unawareness of the nature of the bulletin board. She was not a member of the online activity system and implemented control from the outside, by checking students messages not directly on the BB, but from the floppy-discs which students turned in to her every week.

Svetlana said in the interview:

There were problems at the beginning - I did not have a *clear vision* of the project. I was on the *same level* as students. *I was entirely dependent* on the information that I would receive from you. *Because for us it was something new and I, myself, could not imagine what was going to happen*

Two main themes emerged from this reflection:

- 1) *Svetlana was not aware of the nature of the project*, as she had very little experience with technology. Therefore, she entirely relied on the instructions and course materials posted on the Website, whereas Marc and Valerie did not necessarily follow the common schedule posted online.
- 2) Second, her identity of the “knowledgeable instructor” has been jeopardized as she found herself being “on the same level” with students, “entirely dependent” on forum coordinators.

Also in the interview Svetlana said that although she had known her students for at least 2 years, she learned a lot of new things about them through the project. This was different, for example, from the Japanese instructor’s experience, who did not learn anything new about his students through the project, as he had a chance to do it during the previous semester. This illustrates the differences in instructors’ approaches – the one demonstrated by

Svetlana was authoritarian and teacher-centered and the one by Marc – democratic and student-oriented.

Object/Rules based on the instructor's philosophy. Because many students did not have an Internet access, Svetlana decided to conduct the project instead of the business English class in the computer lab. The WebCT project was the only one activity the Russian students engaged in during their entire 1.5 long lab time. Svetlana met with her students a month before the project began. During that time the project schedule was not posted online, so she came up with assignments for students herself. She gave them 5 themes - 1) World economics, 2) Economy of Russia, 3) Economy of the Sakha republic, 4) Culture, 5) Free topic, which students were expected to make research on during the Christmas break. Later, when we posted the suggested schedule on the WebCT website, students began to accurately follow it, whereas, Japanese and Mexican students did not. Similarly to Valerie, Svetlana set certain requirements:

I told them to write 5 messages on the given themes every week. I was not sure about the length of the messages, but than I thought that half of a page would be fine, given that they would write 5 messages a week which would total in 2.5 pages. Plus, they were supposed to do a research – *find literature* based on the themes before writing their messages. I did not set up any requirements for reading a particular number of messages. (Interview)

Those who did not write 5 messages during a week had to catch up with the requirement over the next weeks. This requirement was drastically different from the requirement set by Valerie who prohibited any “catch up” activity for her students, as she

realized the whole interactivity and flexible nature of the bulletin board. One could not “order” students to write more than 5 messages a week as the WebCT activity was about the unpredictable and flexible interaction, not the one-sided, essay-writing task. When the project was over, Svetlana said in the interview:

Our students wrote on the same topics that I gave them. In the course of work I came to thought that I should not have given students similar topics. *I should have come up with 20 topics and distribute them among students*, e.g. topic #1 would write this student, topic #2 that student, so there would not be any repetitions.

This also indicates that she thought of the project as a conventional essay writing exercise. Svetlana told students to bring their own dictionaries in class: “so they would not distract each other asking the meanings of the words, but work independently. They used dictionary a lot, especially at the beginning” (Interview). Thus, instead of being a collective activity, as, for example, encouraged by Marc, when students were allowed to consult with each other, this activity was structured as any other individual assignment for the Russian students.

At the beginning Svetlana checked students’ messages on a weekly basis by underlying the incorrect expressions with red ink. After a while, though, Svetlana realized that it was very time consuming to check all students’ messages, therefore, instead of checking all messages individually, she made a list of common mistakes that were discussed later in class. At the end of the project, Svetlana set up the final requirement for her students - to write the reports of their participation which would include all their messages written throughout the project. That is why, students complained in the interview that the messages

from the first stage (first 6 weeks) were no longer accessible as they were archived with the purpose of saving space on the bulletin board.

Students' participation outcomes. The Russian students approached the goal to improve their English in a way their instructor expected them to do - through traditional methods favouring writing academic essays, use of additional literature, dictionary, and revising grammar. Svetlana said: "I had to control students strictly in class, otherwise, not everyone would participate. My goal was to make each and everyone of them participate. As a result, there was hardly a person who did not participate at all" (Interview). The strict control and instructor's personal charisma made all students post the required number of messages. However, the fact that students just posted and read very few messages shows two main things: 1) students had limited access; 2) many of them engaged in this activity just to please their instructor. Also many Russian students complained that instructor's strict control was detrimental to their participation in a way that they had to write even when they did not have any communicative need.

Some Russian students who participated actively in interaction, questioned the rules of writing academic and long essays, which was not compatible with the writing styles of the Japanese and Mexican students. They developed new tacit rules for participation by changing the genre and length of their messages – namely their messages became more interactive, less academic, shorter in length. With the second stage of the project, when it entered the phase of interacting on free topics, the interaction became richer in critical messages, generating more instances of the true dialogue. Therefore, Lena, a Russian student said in the mid-interview: "I am becoming more interested in the project *after I understood what it is about*. At the

beginning it was a *requirement*, and later an *interest*; first we wrote *long messages*, then began to write *shorter*.”

4.3.2 Dilemma: Grade as Motivation or Constraint

As in any large community, students had different motives to participate in the project. As Salvador, a Mexican student, said: “The primary motivation varies from student to student. Some, might want to know people from other places others might want to know about their culture and there are a few people who do this just because of marks” (IRC interview). Indeed, as survey found, more than a half of the Japanese (56.5%) and Mexican (54%) students viewed the project as part of their course and were neither excited, nor indifferent about it (Table 4.5). As for the Russian students, the equal number (41%) selected options A and B from the questionnaire.

Table 4. 5 Attitudes toward the Project

	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>n</i>	% ²	<i>n</i>	% ³
A. I was excited and could not wait to start interacting with Japanese and Russians	17	37.0	11	30.0	16	41.0
B. This is a part of the course and I am neither excited nor indifferent	26	56.5	20	54.0	16	41.0
C. Honestly, I don't want to participate in this activity	3	6.5	1	3.0	0	0
D. Other	0	0	5	14	7	17.9

¹ Percentage of total count of Japanese. ² Percentage of total count of Mexicans. ³ Percentage of total count of Russians.

Some students admitted that without evaluation, their participation would have been less active. On the other hand, a few students viewed the obligation to participate as a discouraging factor. Fidel, a Mexican student said: “I am forced to go and that makes it boring.” Yasu, a Japanese student, also said: “As negative point, I felt it a little bit

compulsory. I must read, I must respond, and I must write our opinion about WebCT itself.”

Similar feeling was shared by Taro, a Japanese student:

I feel like I “have to” post messages every week and those messages have to be something “academic.” This pressure is too heavy on me who is lazy. ... What I feel now is that I need more freedom on the board. *The best way for this is not to grade on the postings.* (Journal entry)

Students who were against grading perceived the grade as undermining their “true” motives for participation, as, for example, in case of Nori who did not view the project only as an obligation, but rather, viewed it as an activity useful for her professional development:

Actually, it is *our obligation* of LLED226 course. We have to participate it in order to get grade. However, I do not think it is an obligation. My major in Japan is International Relations. I like to learn about the world. I want to think from many points of view. In order to accomplish it, I need other way of thinking. That's why, it is very useful for it. (BB message)

4.3.3 Tools: Affordances and Constraints of Online Environments

Theme 1: Authentic interaction. Some students appreciated the online interaction for providing a unique opportunity to find out “what other students think.” Kenji, for example, wrote in his journal:

The most important expectation is to know *how they think* through online discussions. We can study many facts like *history and geography* to some extent by ourselves or in class, but we cannot study *the way to think and feel* about various things.

Theme 2: Special place for cultural learning language/culture. Many students said that the bulletin board was a good method of learning language – “not boring,” and “the best way to improve English when we practice, not sit and study drills, but talk freely, interact, share with our thoughts” (Zhanna, RS, BB message). An interesting opinion was expressed by Miki, a Japanese student, who thought of the bulletin board as of the place specifically designed to discuss cultural topics:

Even if I could meet people from Mexico and Russia face-to-face, sometimes it is difficult to talk about cultural differences and different ideas and so on with people who just happened to meet. ...So this setting of *a specific place* to talk and discuss about these topics is very easy for me to ask questions and gather information about different cultures and ideas directly. I know that students who join this forum are interested to know these things as well, so discussion will be deeper and more interesting. (Interview)

Theme 3: Facilitating agency. Some students also thought of the bulletin board as a place granting agency: “such online interaction gave me and other students an opportunity to express ideas when we want and not when we are asked” (Petr, RS, BB message).

Theme 4: Means to connect with wider world. Some students viewed the BB as “the last alternative to communicate thanks to the Internet in case we are so far from each other” (George, RS, BB posting). Several students engaged in discourse of technological progress: “In our industrial time online communication cannot be any surprise. So I appreciate online chatting and different forums. Ten years ago it was impossible because the level of our technical development was very low” (Nurgun, RS, BB message).

Theme 5: Availability 24/7, extra-time for thinking, persistent conversation. Like in a number of other studies (Carey, 1999 a,b; Harasim, 1996) many students in this study reported such benefits of asynchronous interaction as the time it provided to think through their ideas, “persistent conversation” - a possibility to return to posted messages again and again (Erickson, 1999), and availability at any time and any place.

Along with the motivating aspect of the bulletin board many students also experienced the discouraging sides, outlined in the following themes:

Theme 1: Time-consuming. Many Japanese and Russian students said that online activity required a lot of time on their part: “When I tried to enter WebCT it took so much time” (Keiko, interview). Many Russian students said that the sole typing process of the English texts took a lot of time, due to their slow typing speed.

Theme 2: Bulletin board is too “slow” compared to chat. Some students found the bulleting board to be a slow mean of communication when you “forget everything” while you are waiting for the next message. Interestingly, the Mexican instructor warned me that many Mexican students did not realize that their university had a very fast Internet access. Most likely, the problem was not in slow connection, but in students’ desire to approximate bulletin board interaction to the speed of immediate response (Thorne, 2003). Based on this reason some students expressed their preference of the chatting over the BB interaction: “I don't really like such echo-chats or BB discussions, I like relay-chats” (George, RS, BB message). Also:

Message no. 3527[Branch from no. 2565]
Posted by Jose on Saturday, March 30, 2002 5:54pm
Subject Re: What is your opinion about online discussions?
Hi everyone. I think online discussions are fine but are to slow, is good because you can interact with other contries people and talk about other cultures. But if we

can **chat** maybe we talk better because sometimes you are inspired to talk about a topic and if you wait maybe you forget everything. Is my point of view.

With regards to the degree of complexity, students placed the e-mail interaction on the continuum between the chatting and writing in word document. Many students shared George's, a Russian student's opinion, who wrote: "It's more useful to discuss important and formal problems through discussion board [compared to chat]" (BB message). Also: "When u r chatting u can short some words and u dont have to worry about any grammar or spelling problem but in BB or in works for schools you have to write everything right and complete" (Elisa, IRC interview).

Theme 3: Minor technical inconveniences. Many Japanese students found it discouraging that they could not bookmark the project website when they worked in the lab. Also when students worked in the lab they could not see which messages they had read and which they had not, compared to when they worked on their own computers which automatically highlighted all read messages. Some Mexican students disliked that Id's and passwords to the bulletin board were provided, and not chosen by students themselves. Quite a few Russian students said that the web-address was too long and troublesome to type every time they wanted to log on.

Theme 4: Names and gender confusion. The Japanese students could not distinguish between Mexican and Russian names. As Kaneko, a Japanese student, said: "Sometimes I confused that this opinion is from which country's people. I wish I could recognize them. I'm trying to mention my nationality every time, but it's troublesome" (Journal entry). In comparison, for the Mexican and Russian students this was not an issue, excluding a single case, when a Mexican student thought that the Russian male name "Yuri" was a Japanese

name. Rather, the Mexican and Russian students could not distinguish between Japanese female and male names.

Theme 5: Chaotic nature of threaded discussions. Students complained that the interface of the bulletin board was inconveniently designed:

I think that it's interesting. Many people many points of view. The only problem I think is in a little bit inconvenient design of the forum. *Today it has already became so large and it's hard to operate with it. And also I think new message should appear on the top and not at the bottom.* Sorry if I wrote something incorrect. (Semyon, RS, BB message)

Fidel, a Mexican student, also said:

Some of the topics where off date and others took too long to answer. Besides, the forum was a bit unorganized since the tread of messages was disorder and you couldn't follow a single way to find the answer to a post. You had to search it in the entire tread about the topic. (IRC Interview)

Such inconveniences resulted in difficulties to form a community. Stella, a Mexican student, said: "Something that i didn't like was that the messages was so difficult to find.. you know .. you didn't know if somebody answered you.. and you couldn't keep a conversation with one person" (mid-interview). She further continued:

My motivation is that a person that i wrote keep writing me.. so i can mantain a real conversation, but when i wrote someone and then that person don't write me so i have

to look for another conversation but i don't feel comfortable because i get lost.. you know what i mean. (Mid-interview)

This also led to the following decision making problems, expressed by some students:

- There are sometimes many messages, and there are sometimes same topics.
Therefore, I puzzle which is appropriate topic I should post.
- Moreover, when messages increased about one topic, I also puzzle which I should follow pre-message or topic, because topic was developed and was sometimes changed. (Akiko, mid-interview)

Because of the problem of the chaotic nature of the threaded discussions, some postings were simply overlooked by others.

Theme 6: Message overload. The problem of message overload also identified by Sengupta (2001) discouraged many students to participate in the interaction. As Masumi, a Japanese student, said: "If I go to the web after an interval and there are a lot of messages which are unread, it discourages me to do that." Miki, another Japanese student, added: "I do not have enough time to read every single message. If I can't read every message it makes me feel that I am not sure what exactly is going on" (Interview). Also, Alla, a Russian student said:

At the very beginning of the project I was eager to participate in it. Firstly when there were not many persons I was looking forward to see other postings very much. And now when we have so many students there I want to follow all messages but it's difficult. I think that it's very good idea to divide all participants into groups. (Mid-interview)

In addition, the overwhelming number of messages caused their devaluation. As Yukako, a Japanese student, said:

Sometimes, I have no idea what to say about some specific topics because, I feel there are too many topics to discuss something deeper and *I am not sure how and how much I can do that*. Many topics seem very superficial, I sometimes feel.

4.3.4 Triangulation: Factors Discouraging Students' Participation

The survey conducted to triangulate students' interview responses confirmed that the main factors that discouraged many Japanese students' participation were: the overwhelming number of messages (72.7%) and the focus on other assignments (56.8%). Seven Japanese students (15.9%) wrote that they were afraid to seem less knowledgeable (the reasons for that will be discussed in the section 4.6.1 of this dissertation).

Table 4. 6 Factors Discouraging Students' Participation

Discouraging factors	Japanese		Mexican		Russian	
	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>n</i>	% ²	<i>N</i>	% ³
I was overwhelmed with a number of messages	32	72.7	12	33.3	4	11.4
I focused on other assignments	25	56.8	17	47.2	11	31.4
I was afraid to seem less knowledgeable	7	15.9	6	16.7	13	37.1
I was not satisfied with the topics and the level of discussion	6	13.6	12	33.3	10	28.6
Technical problems	6	13.6	19	52.8	20	57.1
I had other reasons	5	11.4	7	19.4	0	0.0
I did not want to put effort into reading and composing messages	4	9.1	4	11.1	0	0.0

I expected more structure and control	3	6.8	10	27.8	4	11.4
Limited Internet access	0	0.0	9	25.0	30	85.7
Total	44	100.0	36	100.0	35	100.0

^{1, 2, 3}Students could choose several options, therefore, calculation of percentage was based independently for each category

The main factors that prevented many Mexican students (52.8%) from participating were technical problems such as problems with passwords when students could not enter the site, and when their computers got frozen. The next discouraging factor was the focus on other assignments. A considerable number of Mexican students (33.3%) said that they were also overwhelmed with the large number of messages and were not satisfied with the topics discussed.

In the case of the Russian students, 85.7% of them said that the limited Internet access and technical problems (slow Internet, difficulty to post messages) were the main discouraging factors for them. The technical problem most of the Russian students encountered was when their messages did not appear on the bulletin board. Because of the slow speed of downloading the project web-site, some Russian students wanted to switch to the e-mail interaction which, in their view, was easier to use than the bulletin board. This explains why some Russian students added e-mail addresses in the end of their messages.

Interestingly, 37.1% of the Russian students reported that their fear to seem less knowledgeable was also one of the discouraging factors for them. Furthermore, 31.4% of the Russian students focused on other assignments and were not satisfied with the topics discussed. In comparison to Japanese and Mexican students, only 4 (11.4%) of the Russian students said that they were overwhelmed with the large number of messages. This was because students had limited time to work on the Internet in the lab, and therefore, many of

them thought: “you are not frustrated that many messages remain unread because you know beforehand that we would not have time anyway to read everything. You just come on a couple of hours to the lab” (Tina, interview). Therefore, many Russian students suggested that there should be additional lab time for this activity.

4.3.5 Summary: Context of Interaction

On the level of Context of Interaction the salient aspects of the activity system were: the rules and objects of participation mediated by instructors. The study found that the ways instructors mediated the project to their students in accordance with their educational beliefs and experiences with computer technologies, educational contexts and curricula in which the project was integrated, became one of the most important factors in shaping students’ participation.

The next salient shaping factor was the tools or affordances of online environments that were related to the nature of the BB itself. Among affordances of the BB the study identified the following aspects: 1) an authentic interaction 2) a special place to learn L2 and culture 3) facilitating agency 4) the only means to connect with outer world 5) availability 24/7, extra-time for thinking, and persistent conversation.

The following features of the BB were perceived as constraining: 1) time-consuming, 2) “slow” speed compared to chat, 3) minor technical inconveniences, 4) names and gender confusion, 5) chaotic nature of threaded discussions and 6) message overload.

The study also found that evaluating students’ participation was both a motivating and constraining factor. On one hand some students said that the major incentive for their participation was a grade, on the other hand, this fact made them feel more pressure and

turned the activity which was supposed to be based on students' communicative need into obligation.

As the survey demonstrated, students from the three cultures named different discouraging factors. Thus, for Japanese students the main discouraging factors were the overwhelming number of messages and the focus on other assignments. For Mexican students the main discouraging factors were technical problems and the focus on other assignments, finally, for the Russian students the main discouraging factors were limited Internet access and technical problems. Also, 37.1% of the Russian students said that they were afraid to seem less knowledgeable.

4.4 Agency

So far the discussion was around how students' participation was influenced by outside contexts, in what follows I discuss how students themselves shaped their interaction through making their personal choices. In this section I also present an example of the diversity of personalities expressed in the discussion that developed around the topic "Pets".

4.4.1 Communicative Need

The context of interaction influenced students' participation by shifting their external motivation such as a grade to the internal interest in the process of interaction. Miki, a Japanese student, wrote:

First of all, it was a *requirement* for my class. Second, I can honestly say that after I got to know the project better, I enjoyed participating in it. Something that made me log in for more time was to see *if someone had answered a message back*, and what he thought about my opinion. It was always very cool to log in and see that some of

the people actually read my messages, and it was even better to see that I had a response! (Journal entry)

After students began to interact, most of them found that interesting topics were more important than messages of students from particular cultures. As Amador, a Mexican student, said: "Interesting stuff is brought by a student, not by a country" (Mid-interview).

Also many students tended to say: "I chose by topics of interest." "I don't care if the message is addressed to me personally, if *it is interesting* I reply."

Theme 1: Choices. The common strategy students used was scanning messages: "I first defined the content of the message through looking at key-words, and then decided if I would read it" (Miki). Many students also tended to read replies to their messages and latest messages first. Kostya, a Russian student, used the following tactics: "I tried to post as many messages as I have read" Salvador, a Mexican student, who was one of the active participants, when asked how he chose to read and post his messages, said:

1. I might try to *complement* their [my classmates] posts if I feel something might be missing.
2. If there are a *lot of posts*, I might want to see why everybody is writing something or
3. if *no mexican has posted* something in that topic. I'll read it and see if I can make a good post
4. maybe if there are names of *foreign students that I know* that have written something (Interview).

The first line reflects Salvador's posting activity and the lines 2-4 reflect his reading activity. Salvador positioned himself as a person who felt responsible for the participation of

his fellow-students and who was also interested in messages of foreign students. Overall, students chose to write in the following cases:

- “If I have an opinion on a message which I am reading. I wrote the topics that I knew and was sure about.”
- “If I have opposite opinion. If I am struck by a message e.g. by differences between cultures.”
- “If I am asked a question: I did not reply to many messages because they did not ask any questions, just comments. I did not feel like I need to reply.”
- “If I receive a reply to my message.”
- “I tend to avoid long, academic, culture-specific messages.”

Theme 2: Communicative need and Identity. Many students tended to reply when they were stimulated to do so and, more importantly, when they were emotionally stimulated by the interaction. This stimulation led to a communicative need, the importance of which was well captured in the following reflection:

Actually I found some interesting topic on this bulletin board, and I felt, “I want to reply this message”. However, I often feel that I do not need to reply, or I do not have any opinions or any suggestions about the messages on it. I think the reason why I have little interest in the messages is that most of the topics are not so exciting or appealing for me, and I am lazy. (Jun, JS, Journal entry)

Interestingly, after I interviewed Jun in the middle of the project, she wrote in her journal:

After I took an interview with Olga, I realized *I should think something more positively*, or I need to make use of this good opportunity to get to know foreign

students, and that is the point that I was most interested in this program. *I went to the site and posted a few messages after the interview*, I think it seems to be more interesting since *I changed my attitude* toward the WebCT. I think whether we can make the most of every opportunity depends on *how we take an attitude toward it*.
(Journal entry)

Indeed, Jun posted a few messages, however, after that, her participation ended. Therefore, communicative need was not something which could be provided from the outside, it had an internal origin, stemming from students' overall attitudes to participation and learning. For example, Elisa's gendered identity helped her to initiate and moderate a dialogue with the Japanese and Russian female students. In her message she congratulated all women on Women's day, described the position of women in Mexico and asked about the status of women in Japan and Russia. She explained her choice of this topic as follows:

[I chose to write about] the international women day, *because i'm a little bit feminist*, and *i knew that my topic would create some controversy*, and i liked to know how other women feel in their countries and how women live in the other countries. (IRC interview)

Some Russian students said: "Every time I did not know what to write about and how to write it correctly." Therefore, they said: "I liked it [the project] at the end, when we began to talk on free topics," which indicates that they liked communicating when they felt an internal communicative need.

Theme 3: Debates. In the interviews and journals some students reported that debates would promote more discussions and desire to participate: "It's interesting, but not too much. The topics of conversation so far have not created much *controversy or discussion*,

everybody just gives their opinion about something, but its not much of a *debate*” (Paloma, MS, Interview). “I wish we discussed some *debate-provoking issues*, e.g. ethnic conflicts” (Vera, RS, Interview). “We should have more chances to discuss, have argument, and not just simply post narratives. In the process of *debate* we can find the truth.” (Olesya, RS, Interview). Also Stella, a Mexican student, said:

(I was discouraged) when i couldn’t find some interesting topic because i wanted to participate but i didn’t know what to say in some topics. I would like more interesting topics that *people can debate* not just to comment and say yes this is interesting..and bla bla.. i prefer topics that people is against other..and so on. (Mid-intreview)

Some students thought that personal information tended not to lead to much discussion. For example, Salvador said: “It depends on how the person handles it. If he states it just like personal information, it might not lead to much in terms of discussions” (WebCT interview). Also, in order to evoke a communicative need in other students, some participants “tried to say something interesting” (Stella). This points at students’ understanding of the importance of knowing how to facilitate interaction, so it would be interesting and thought-provoking for everyone.

4.4.2 One Community or Multiple Communities?

Students in the three contexts had different course objectives, rules of participation and computer tools, and, therefore, they could not always form a community that worked toward the same goal. Instead of one large community, they formed multiple micro-communities. Feeling a sense of community with a few people rather than with all 32-35 people in their forums, was evident in the following students’ reflections:

We got to know each other after a while, or at least I got used to seeing the same names every time I logged in. Also, once I saw someone's message, I usually tried to read more things about the person who posted the message. (Patricia, MS, Interview)

[I felt a sense of community] with someones, because in some topics I feel the same way like as the people of my own group, and I think that I was alike with (Arcadia, MS, Interview).

Miki, a Japanese student, said: "I tend to reply to specific members of our group, because I feel we have built closer relationships through our discussions. Maybe that is because of my personality, but I feel comfortable to do so" (Interview). Some students felt sad when people who they got used to see left their forum:

The sole negative moment was during the second round when some participants changed groups and we couldn't continue communication with a person who left our group; on the other hand, there was no information about new ones who connected us. It's my subjective opinion however. (Alla, RS, Evaluation)

Thus, generally, students understood a sense of community as being attracted to messages of certain people, "feeling the same," "feeling comfortable with". They felt the sense of community with people who they got used to see in their forums or with people who they liked on a personal level. In addition, as Yana, a Russian student reported, she felt uncomfortable to write in other forums as for her it was a different territory, which she did not have a legitimacy to cross. Similarly, Toma, another Russian student, reported that she

had a sense of competition with people from other forums – she wanted her group to write the largest number of messages.

Politeness Moves and Community Building

In forum B a greater number of the Japanese and Russian students greeted each other compared to forum D. The Mexican students, on the other hand, greeted others more often in forum D. This indicates that slightly more community-building efforts were made in forum B than in forum D.

Table 4. 7 Greetings Averages

	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	Forum B <u>M</u>	Forum D <u>M</u>	Forum B <u>M</u>	Forum D <u>M</u>	Forum B <u>M</u>	Forum D <u>M</u>
Personalized Greeting	4.5	4.2	5.6	12.4	9.3	6.5
Greeting everyone	4.5	4.6	9.5	11.6	11.3	6.4
No greetings	3.0	3.6	9.3	8.4	9.6	10.5

* Average number of all posted messages in forms B and D with/without greetings per student

Students across the three cultures were slightly more person-oriented and social in forum B than in forum D as they also used closures (e.g. “talk to you later,” “this is all I wanted to tell you,” “looking forward to hearing form you”) more often.

As seen from Table 4.8, Japanese students finished their messages with questions more often than Mexicans and Russians. More Mexican students, on the other hand, put names in the end of their messages compared to Japanese and Russian students:

Table 4. 8 Closures Averages

	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	Forum B	Forum D	Forum B	Forum D	Forum B	Forum D

	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>
Closure	3.2	2.8	8.5	4.9	10.5	6.1
No closure + signature	0.3	0.5	3.0	3.6	1.3	1.3
Question	3.7	4.0	4.1	6.4	3.1	3.5
No closure	4.5	5.0	8.6	17.9	13.3	13.1

Average number of all posted messages in forms B and D with/without closure per student

Based on how students tended to address others – by collective or personal greetings, they could be divided into *collective* and *individual* communicators. Individual communicators tended to address individual students in person by their first names. They also tended to finish their messages with questions, closures and signatures. On the other hand, collective communicators tended to omit greetings and closings or tended to greet everyone at once.

Absence of such politeness moves as greetings and closures could be compensated for with the person-oriented content, however, when the content of messages was also task-oriented, absence of politeness moves made messages sound even more distanced. Presence of politeness moves and questions in the end of the students' messages, but poor quality of their content, did not make messages more appealing either. Thus, the best form of messages suitable for community building were the ones combining substantial and rich content with politeness moves.

There was also a wide range of individual differences in students' use of politeness moves. For example, Miki and Stella (Tables 4.14) were balanced communicators who always wrote messages of good quality and tended to use individual or collective politeness moves. Karl, despite his extensive use of politeness moves, never wrote messages of substantial quality and quantity, and therefore, his messages did not contribute to community

building. Akiko, on the other hand, was social and critical in terms of content, but rarely used politeness moves. Still she contributed to community building by weaving social elements in the body of her messages. Finally, Inna, a Russian student, represented an example of a student who did not use any social moves. Inna was lying in the hospital during the project. She wrote her messages by hand that later were typed and posted on the bulletin board by her friends, therefore, she had a very low sense of interlocutor which was reflected in her messages lacking social cues. Thus, individual students contributed differently to the community formation.

Table 4. 9 Individual Students' Use of Greetings

	Addressing					
	Japanese	Mexicans	Russians	Instructor	Hi/hello	No greeting
Miki - JF ¹	1	4	1	1	8	1
Stella – MF ²	13	2	11	5	8	2
Karl – MM	0	0	0	1	29	5
Akiko – JF	0	0	1	0	5	22
Inna – RF	0	0	1	0	10	14

¹JF – Japanese Female, ²MF – Mexican Female, ³RM – Russian Male

Table 4. 10 Individual Students' Use of Closures

	No closure + name	Closure + name	Closure	Question + closure	No closure
Miki - JF	2	1	8	5	0
Stella – MF	1	6	4	29	0
Karl – MM	2	13	6	10	2
Akiko – JF	0	0	2	6	20
Inna – RF	0	0	4	0	19

Some students consistently used the same formulaic openings and closures in all their messages:

Table 4. 11 Formulaic Openings and Closures

	Openings	Closures
Japanese	JF _{2,3} "Hi! I am [name], a Japanese girl"	JM ₃ "Let's share opinions! Thank you for reading" JF ₄ "Thanks+name"
Mexicans	MF ₁ "Well..." MF ₂ "Hey [name] ... hello!" MF ₃ "[Name]:" MM ₃ "Ey man"	MF ₄ "Bye.....[Name]" MF ₅ "Be happy" MF ₆ "adios!", "Love, [Name]" MF ₇ abbreviated name "mtmt"
Russians	RM _{1,2} "Dear sirs" RF ₁ "Good morning!" RF ₂ "Hi there" RF ₃ "Hi, my name is []" RM ₃ "Good afternoon"	RF ₄ "Thank you for reading + closure + name" RF ₅ "If you have question, ask; if you want to know more, see previous message" RF ₆ "Your's, faithfully" RM ₄ "Any comments?"

Such habitual ways of opening and closing messages some students used were a form of mapping their space, turning it into a place (Burbules, 2000). "Mapped territories" made students easily recognizable in the forums and contributed to community building.

Sense of Community with Own Classmates vs. Foreign Students

Some students purposefully chose to read messages only of the foreign students. They said: "When I read I was looking for foreign names." "I did not read messages of my classmates about culture as I knew what they would be about." "I didn't learn much about my classmates since i tried to avoid all the messages they posted to learn from somebody else."

The choice of foreign communication partners for some students was facilitated by the bulletin board itself. For example, Elisa, a Mexican student, said that compared to a chat interaction, on the bulletin board, the interaction with foreign students is promoted more:

Message no. 3075[Branch from no. 2566]
Posted by Elisa on Thursday, March 21, 2002 10:34am
Subject Re: What is your opinion about online discussions?

In chats and other sites you can interact with other cultures, but usually **you prefeer to talk with people of your own culture**, and in this forum **you have to interact with people from other cultures**, and i have discovered that this is fun! and i have learn a lot.

Be happy!!

As for the Russian students, they were encouraged by their instructor to read and reply to messages of Japanese and Mexican students, as they were told that they could communicate with their own class-mates face-to-face.

The interviews revealed that most students were interested to read messages of both foreign students and their classmates. Miki, a Japanese student, said: "Actually, it is very interesting to read messages *by my classmates* as well. I know them, but I do not know exactly what they are thinking about different cultures" (Interview). Yukako, another Japanese student, said:

I roughly know how Japanese students tend to think, so I am not so interested in their postings. *But it depends on the topic.* Some topics make me eager to know how Japanese students introduce our culture to foreign students; or how they are interested in other cultures and ask them questions. (Mid-interview)

Similarly, Shura, a Russian student, said: "What about my classmates: there were so many postings of them, and it was interesting for me to read them and *to know their opinion*" (Mid-interview). The study found that the third year Russian students felt attracted to messages of their quiet and reserved female classmate Alla. Semyon said that there were

other quiet people in the forum, but they did not feel attracted to them, as opposed to Alla (and Luda – another person Semyon was interested in) because she had a charismatic personality:

Alla e.g. for me she has such an attractive aura. It was interesting what kind of person she is. I don't know ...it is difficult to approach her in the face-to-face context. When Luda writes and makes reports in English and talks about her interests – it is very interesting to listen to her. *I think they are two the most interesting people who I interacted during my studies very little.* ...Due to this forum I began to treat our students ...not differently, but simply knew more about them, about those people who were interesting to me. (Interview)

Indeed, Alla and Luda were two very shy students in a face-to-face context and active online. Luda, for example, found it easier to interact online than face-to-face. This is what she said in the interview: "I-net dialogues are very useful for thought expression: it is quite difficult to be open with people when you speak face-to-face." She also said:

In Internet you reveal yourself more. You do not see the reaction. In the face-to-face conversation there are people who will not give you a chance to express your thought and thrust on their own. And here you can speak out everything and wait until they reply and than again. (Mid-interview)

Whereas some students preferred to read messages of students from their culture, they rarely replied to their messages. Analysis of greetings in forum B indicates that only 4 Japanese, 2 Mexican and 3 Russian students personally addressed their classmates. In forum D slightly more students addressed their classmates. In comparison, in both forums the Japanese students addressed more often the Russian students; the Mexican students

addressed more often the Japanese students, and the Russian students addressed the instructors and the Japanese students more often than the Mexican students. Therefore, generally speaking, the Mexican and Russian students were more attracted to the Japanese students, than to each other.

Table 4. 12 Averages of Greetings Addressed to Students/Instructors

Greeting:	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	Forum B <u>M</u>	Forum D <u>M</u>	Forum B <u>M</u>	Forum D <u>M</u>	Forum B <u>M</u>	Forum D <u>M</u>
Japanese	0.3	0.5	2.2	4.7	2.4	2.5
Mexicans	1.4	1.3	0.2	1.0	3.0	1.5
Russians	2.1	1.9	1.8	4.0	0.3	0.6
Instructors	0.8	0.5	1.4	2.7	3.7	1.9

* This breakdown is somewhat understated as it is limited only to messages with explicit greetings of students/instructors and does not necessarily indicate students' overall preferences of communication partners.

4.4.3 Division of Labour: Deep, Strategic, and Surface Learners

The next important variable in the analysis of the online context and students' participation was the division of labour between students and instructors, as well as among students themselves. Several students mentioned that they did not feel instructors' and researchers' online presence, as the latter positioned themselves in a way granting agency to students.

As for division of labour among students themselves, depending on the quantity of students' messages, I divided them into a) active, b) balanced and c) passive writers and readers, d) late visitors, and e) drop-outs.

Table 4. 13 Criteria for Classification of Participants

Classification	Wrote messages	Read messages
Active writer/reader	>20	> 400
Balanced writer/reader	12-19	150 – 400
Passive writer/reader	<12	<150
Drop-outs	Visited BB at the beginning, but dropped out at the end	
Late-visitors	Did not participate at the beginning, and visited WebCT in the end	

Classification of students' interaction revealed that most of the Mexican (70.3%) and Russian (67.4%) students were active writers, whereas most of the Japanese students (73%) were either balanced or passive writers (Table 4.14):

Table 4. 14 Classification of Participants across Cultures

	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>n</i>	% ²	<i>n</i>	% ³
Active writers	5	9.6	26	70.3	31	67.4
Balanced writers	19	36.5	7	18.9	11	23.9
Passive writers	19	36.5	1	2.7	0	0.0
Late-visitors	6	11.5	0	0.0	2	4.3
Drop-outs	3	5.8	3	8.1	2	4.3
Total	52	100.0	37	100.0	46	100.0

¹ Percentage of total count of Japanese. ² Percentage of total count of Mexicans. ³ Percentage of total count of Russians.

In forum A there was the largest number of active writers and the largest number of messages was generated in this forum (Figure 3.1):

Table 4. 15 Classification of Participants across Forums

	Forum A		Forum B		Forum C		Forum D	
	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Active writers	19	54.3	16	45.7	16	48.5	11	34.4
Balanced	7	20.0	11	31.4	8	24.2	11	34.4

writers								
Passive writers	4	11.4	5	14.3	5	15.2	6	18.8
Late-visitors	4	11.4	0	0.0	2	6.1	2	6.3
Drop-outs	1	2.9	3	8.6	2	6.1	2	6.3
Total	35	100.0	35	100.0	33	100.0	32	100.0

¹ Percentage of total count of participants in forums A-D.

Individual students consistently wrote messages that were either critical, mixed (less critical and more social), or phatic; reflecting students' deep, strategic or surface approaches to learning and interaction, based on Entwistle's classification (1994; in Thorpe, 2002; p. 139):

Table 4. 16 Entwistle's (1994) Approaches to Learning Model

<i>Surface approach(Reproducing)</i>	<i>Strategic approach (Organizing)</i>	<i>Deep approach (Transforming)</i>
<u>Intention:</u> to cope with content and tasks set Studying without reflecting on purpose or strategy Seeing the course as unrelated bits of knowledge Difficulty in making sense of ideas presented Memorising facts and procedures routinely Feeling undue pressure and worry about work	<u>Intention:</u> to excel on assessed work Alertness to assessment requirements and criteria Gearing work to perceived preferences of lecturers Putting consistent effort into studying Ensuring right conditions and materials for studying Managing time and effort to maximise grades	<u>Intention:</u> to understand material for oneself Showing an active interest in course content Relating ideas to previous knowledge and experience Looking for patterns and underlying principles Adopting a cautious, critical stance Checking evidence and relating conclusions

Those students who used a deep approach invested much of their efforts in writing messages of good quality that would stretch their L2. Those who used a strategic approach, did not invest extra-effort, but wrote just as much as needed to satisfy their instructor and, at the same time, to have an enjoyable practice. Finally, those who used a surface approach were not likely to improve their language and intercultural awareness as they engaged in the interaction just to not fail the course - their focus was not on quality of messages, but rather

on leaving short, often phatic evidence of their presence. The deep approach to interaction was expressed by Salvador, who said:

I take my time to read things over, to think carefully, to start writing and to proofread what I've written, and then post. ...I try to be active, and also try to give something meaningful to the discussion, but also keeping quiet so that others can speak. I'd rather make a few posts of something that really interests me, and make good ones, than to speak lightly about some I might not care too much. (IRC - Interview)

The students who took a deep approach had a strong sense of interlocutor, as Alla, a Russian student, said: "I wanted to clarify their image, give some acknowledgement, cheers I tried to find common issues" (IRC interview).

The holistic analysis has demonstrated that the number of students who took deep, strategic and surface approaches to interaction and learning was approximately equal across cultures:

Table 4. 17 Deep, Strategic and Surface Communicators across Cultures

	Japanese		Mexican		Russian	
	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>N</i>	% ²	<i>n</i>	% ³
Deep approach	12	27.9	9	26.5	10	23.8
Strategic approach	23	53.5	17	50.0	23	54.8
Surface approach	8	18.6	8	23.5	9	21.4
Total	43	100.0	34	100.0	42	100.0

^{1,2,3} Percentage of total count of Japanese, Mexicans, and Russians.

*Statistics in this table does not include "drop-outs" and "late visitors"

The number of students who took deep, surface and strategic approaches differed across forums, though. The largest number of students who took deep approach were

students in forums A (26.3%) and B (30.6%). In forums C (18.2%) and D (12.5%), the number of students who took deep approach decreased two times.

Table 4. 18 Deep, Strategic and Surface Communicators across Forums

Communicator	Forum A		Forum B		Forum C		Forum D	
	<i>n</i>	% ¹	<i>n</i>	% ²	<i>n</i>	% ³	<i>n</i>	% ⁴
Deep	10	26.3	11	30.6	6	18.2	4	12.5
Strategic	15	39.5	18	50.0	20	60.6	14	43.8
Surface	5	13.2	3	8.3	3	9.1	10	31.3
Late visitors & Drop-outs	5	21.1	3	11.1	4	12.1	4	12.5
Total	35	100.0	35	100.0	33	100.0	32	100.0

¹⁻⁴ Percentage of total count of participants in forums A-D.

Although in forum A there were many students who took a deep approach, this did not contribute to the community development. Many critical messages remained unanswered because they were too long, academic, and not appealing to others. Participants who used a deep approach in forum A were academically strong, but not as social. In addition, some deep messages were simply overlooked by others because of the large number of messages. In comparison, in forum D there were too many students who either took a surface approach or did not participate at all. This forum was also male dominated. The most popular topics in this forum were about alcohol, sports, gambling, soccer world cup and computers.

Generally speaking, the best quality of interaction took place in forums B and C, which contained the fewest number of unanswered messages. In addition, the students in these forums wrote balanced messages that combined both critical and social features that helped promote a community development.

Differences in participation across forums indicated that each forum had its own dynamics orchestrated by students themselves. Contributions from students with different personalities (e.g. social and joyful Stella, serious and critical Salvador and Petr, “philosopher” Luda, talkative Yuka, thoughtful Kenji and Alla, etc.) made their forums evolve in distinct ways. In what follows I illustrate how different personalities were reflected in students’ writing and shaped the dynamics of online interaction.

4.4.4 Different Personalities Expressed in Writing

Semyon, a Russian male student introduced the topic about his dog. Semyon thought that, generally, this topic was more likely to be discussed by children and, therefore, began his message with expressing his awareness that this topic might not be interesting to other students. Then, he introduced his dog using a genre of narrative. The text felt like a small literary work with the presence of texture and emotions. Semyon chose, first of all, to reveal himself as a very loving, tender human being and managed to awake this side in the readers. His message was written in grammatically correct English revealing the evidence that Semyon used a dictionary in which he was looking for translation of his dog’s pedigree. Here is his full message:

Message no. 2610

Posted by **Semyon** on Saturday, March 16, 2002 1:20pm

Subject Pets

May be it’s not interesting topic, I think children in school discuss such things. But in anyway. Do you like dogs or cats more, or any other pets?
As for me I like dogs. I don’t like cats and I don’t want to tell why. I think the dog is the best pet. Especially mine. **I didn’t find the translation of it’s breed.** But you should know it. It’s small, funny, fluffy, has long ears and always like a puppy. And all my family loves it very, very much. Long time ago it became a member of the family with equal with us rights. I don’t know maybe we are

crazy, but we wash it with the best human shampoo, and papa very angry when I use it, it sleeps on the armchair next to parents bed, we give her gifts on each holiday. Mama always dresses our girl in different ornaments on such days. Mother and father spend much time a day to shirk, to comb and to cheer up it. Now our girl is pregnant for the second time and we're in a worry for her health. I advise to all of you to purchase little dogs, not big. **Because little dog brings heat to the soul and always a smile. And if you have big rancho or villa then you should have two dogs.** One big as a security, and another little for the family.

Semyon used international words – “rancho” and “villa” demonstrating his consideration of the contexts from which other students were participating in this discussion. Paloma, a Mexican student, replied 2 days later. She opened her message with the expression of her approval of the non-academic topic. She also shared her love for dogs and introduced cats as potential objects of love. We see that Paloma became sincerely curious in Semyon's personality, as she asked: “Why don't you like cats? Im curious.” Her positive attitude is evident in the use of smiley face and positive appraisal of Semyon's message about his dog:

Message no. 2719[Branch from no. 2610]
Posted by **Paloma** on Monday, March 18, 2002 8:35am
Subject Re: Pets
hi semyon! Im glad somebody introduced a **simpler topic to talk about, other than all those complicated problems...** :) I also like dogs very much, but only the small ones, because you cant play with big ones, at least not me. I have a big germa shepherd, and hes a hasle.. hes very playful but knocks me down and I cant stand it. **Your dog sound very cute.** On the other hand, i think cats are also very cute, especialy kittens. They are much more peaceful than dogs, and very easy to take care of. why dont you like cats? im curious.

Teresa, another Mexican female student, responded to these messages by posting a joke about cats and dogs:

Message no. 2977[Branch from no. 2610]
Posted by **Teresa** on Wednesday, March 20, 2002 10:05am
Subject Re: Pets
I love dogs, though I don't have one. my house is too small. I hate cats because they are not loyal. I feel like cats are there when they need you. There is a joke

I would like to share with you: DOGS THINKING: My master takes care of me, pets me, feeds me, walks me, etc. He must be god. CATS THINKING: My master feeds me, takes care of me, baths me, etc. I must be god. SEE THAT'S WHY I DON'T LIKE CATS. JAJAJAJAJAJAJAJA :) mtmt

Yet, another style of writing motivated by a simple topic: “pets” was introduced by Kenji, a Japanese student. His message took a critical stance by turning a discussion of seemingly “unserious” topic to discussion of social problem about the lack of responsibility of the dogs’ owners in relation to their pets:

Message no. 2989[Branch from no. 2977]
Posted by **Kenjion** Wednesday, March 20, 2002 11:27am
Subject Re: Pets
Hi, I like dogs...but I must tell about situation in Japan. Maybe over less dogs are increasing because they had those as pet and then they threw away those. Because of Japanese selfish, over less dogs are killed by using injections in helath facilities. I think we should not chain dogs up...if you were them, you must stay home all day with doing nothing special outside. I think we should have responsibilities..I mean if people have problem not to have as pet, we should find to solve that problem properly intested of throwing away. I want to have some dogs without chain in future if I could have space like farm. How about situation in your country?

The final message in this thread was posted by Jose, a Mexican student. He chose not to go in a “serious” direction, taken by Kenji, rather, he chose to talk lightly on this topic:

Message no. 3522[Branch from no. 2977]
Posted by **Jose** on Saturday, March 30, 2002 11:19am
Subject Re: Pets
My favorite pets is turtles, i love turtles because they are so passive and nice, two years ago i had a one but a dog ate it. Now i have little ones but they are water turtles. I like dogs but i dont have one in my department because is small and i like big ones. I dont like cats because i dont like its eyes **im afraid of them.**

As we can see from this exchange, the trivial topic “pets” generated a wide array of responses – emotional narratives, critical inquiry, humorous message and casual conversation. In each of these messages we can see students’ personalities – Kenji chose to

be serious and critical, Semyon and Paloma emotional, and Teresa and Jose took the “youth” stance. Semyon and Paloma opened their inner, vulnerable emotional selves to others which revealed their high level of trust. For Semyon showing his loving side became a “gender-crossing” act to some extent, as discussing such topics as “pets” and being emotional usually indicates a female side. This example demonstrated the pluralism of identities and genres characteristic to an online community. In addition, through this example we can see that discussing “trivial” topics can become emotional, border-crossing, educational and very human communication experience.

4.4.5 Summary: Agency

I determined the presence of human agency and its shaping effect by discussing an object, community, and division of labour aspects of AT based on students’ reflections.

Object: Communicative Need. Interestingly, when students began to interact, their objects and expectations that were formed on the broader level of geopolitical structures and institutional contexts underwent changes in accordance with the affordances of online environments and students’ own agency, revealed in a new online context. Thus, for example, as we could see from what Miki said, at the beginning her main motive was grade, but, as soon as she began to interact online, it turned out that her main motivation became the anticipation of replies. Once students came to the online space, they re-considered their goals in accordance with the affordances of the new environment. The study found that only when students felt communicative need – the state when they were emotionally and intellectually involved in the interaction, they were truly investing themselves in this activity and felt satisfaction.

One Community or Multiple Communities? Instead of forming one community of learners, students formed multiple small communities based on their interests in particular topics and their interaction partners. Echoing a number of previous studies on CMC (Chun, 1994; Herrmann, 1995; Nolla, 2001; Potts, 2001) this study found that community formation was taking place because of the social functions students demonstrated including the most discrete ones such as greetings and closures (politeness moves). The different use of politeness moves also revealed individual differences of the students – some tended to be person-oriented, polite and social and some were more task-oriented and omitted social rituals (Tables 4.9, 4.10).

Students were interested in messages of their own classmates as well as their foreign interaction partners. Their interest in messages of their own classmates most likely was due to their willingness to feel the presence of people they knew in order to turn a new online space into a friendlier and familiar place (Burbules, 2000).

Finally, in this study individual differences and division of labour became two salient features. Based on the quantity and quality of students' contributions, the study classified them into active, balanced, and passive writers/readers, late-visitors and drop-outs; deep, strategic, and surface learners. I demonstrated students' personal differences in terms of their socio-emotional characteristics expressed through discussion of the topic "pets." Thus, the study found that student agency was a strong shaping factor of online communities.

CONTRADICTIONS

Research question 2: What are the cross-cultural contradictions/tensions of International telecollaboration?

“Contradictions/tensions” became the salient theme that emerged from the data. According to Vygotsky (1978), the analysis of rough and conflict-based situations may bring a lot of insights into interpreting “the developmental path of a particular phenomenon.” With this in mind in this section I discuss each contradiction separately with the purpose to reveal the processes of how intercultural online communication evolved in this study.

4.6 Cross-Cultural Contradictions/Tensions

4.6.1 Concerns: to Participate or not to Participate

The study identified 6 types of anxiety students experienced at the beginning of the project.

1. Novelty/Unpredictability of the Practice.

Almost all Russian students shared Shura’s opinion: “As everyone else I felt uncertainty and constraint at the beginning of the project associated with my unawareness of what was going to happen.” Similarly, Sierra, a Mexican student, said:

At the beginning of the project i was a little confuse, i didn't know what to say, what to write, how to response the other msgs..... but while i was writting the messages i like the idea to interact with people of other places so i send a lot of messages more than the teacher told me to send. (IRC interview)

At the beginning, Sierra was confused and “did not know what to say, what to write” because for her, to participate in such an international project was something new and unfamiliar. However, Sierra reported that she became interested in interaction, as soon as she began to interact and found out more about the project.

2. Cultural Concerns – Anxiety to seem “strange”. In addition to the anxiety of not knowing what to say, Yasu, a Japanese student, was afraid to seem “strange” due to her perceived cultural differences. She wrote in her journal:

First I have heard of this discussion, *I have no idea what to talk with them*. Because *I did not know what topic they are interested in*. Moreover, I was little *embarrassed to express opinion to others*, especially from different culture. At first, I only could read their messages and *could not respond* them. I was too *conscious and worried* to be seen strange. The reason is because *my way of thinking* is based on Japanese very much and I thought it might sound *strange* for Mexican or Russian students. I myself have been *surprised* to hear different opinion from different culture and I thought *difference is bad thing* at that moment. (Journal entry)

After Yasu saw that other students felt quite comfortable to post their messages, she had also posted her introduction and after she received replies, her anxiety began to decrease as she realized that she had something in common with her communication partners:

Now *my way of thinking is changing* and I posted my introduction on the online discussion board. I did not think it is a big deal for me and other student. However, when I found *respond* to my postings, *I was very glad* that someone was interested in my topic and gave me back a message. As I read the message, I realized that other students from Mexico and Russia also have *the same kind of interests* as me. I found it interesting because we have great regional distance, but our interest are really close to each other. (Journal entry)

3. Being afraid to not meet all project requirements. Before the project Russian students were asked of their feelings toward the project, and some of them shared Katya's

feelings: "First of all I said to myself – cool! But then I asked myself *whether I could meet these requirements.*" This type of anxiety was also related to students' lack of experience with computer technologies. Many Russian students said: "I was very surprised and *I was afraid* because I had never took part in such seminar." "*I was afraid, because I had no practice of working on the Internet.*"

4. Anxiety to seem less knowledgeable than Japanese and Mexicans. In addition, many Russian students said in the interview: "I felt less confident because I thought that Japanese and Mexicans would be more advanced than we were." "We thought that their English would be much better than ours." Concern to seem less knowledgeable made the Russian students to prepare for the project beforehand. Students' anxiety level was triangulated through the survey (Table 4.6), which identified the highest degree of concern to seem less knowledgeable among the Russian students (37.1%) (Compare to 15.9% of the Japanese and 16.7% of the Mexican students) As Kostya, a Russian student said in the interview:

I was concerned about participating in the project. I thought they were all monsters - *I thought Mexicans were so advanced.* If they read my poor messages I thought I would disgrace our department of World economics and myself. Therefore, I had to learn grammar again - how the sentences are written. This might have improved my grammar.

Echoing Kostya, Shura notes: "We learned how to compose grammatically correct sentences in order to not disgrace ourselves in the eyes of other foreign students." Anxiety of such nature, might have been related to Russian students' lack of international experience, as compared to Japanese and Mexican students, they traveled the least (Appendix D).

Later, when the project started, many Russian students realized that the Japanese and Mexican English language proficiency was similar to their English proficiency. This significantly reduced their anxiety level. As Shura, a Russian student said: "I was afraid that I would seem odd compared to them, but it seemed to me that the level of their knowledge is similar to ours."

5. Cultural concern - Anxiety to represent the whole country. Russian students' anxiety to seem less knowledgeable might have been also related to the way Svetlana introduced the project as a unique and rare opportunity, made possible due to the Canadian university initiative. Students were told that participation in the project was a privilege: "Our teacher said that we were chosen among all university: no one more can have such lesson here besides our Department - to communicate through Internet with Canada" (Alla). As some of the Russian students said: "it's an international project and we are face of our Republic" (Alla, interview). "We had a feeling that we were the part of something and representatives of the whole Russia. I personally had such feeling. Not the whole Russia, but [my republic]" (Asya, interview). The Russian students perceived this project not as a mere interaction, but, rather, as something having a broader international meaning. This fact motivated students, and, at the same time, raised their anxiety level. This type of anxiety explains why there were more students who were afraid to seem less knowledge among Russians.

4.6.2 Unequal Participation

Based on students' posting activity, I divided them into thread-initiators and thread-developers. The striking statistic was that almost all new topics were initiated by the Russian students, and therefore, they fell within the thread-initiators category (Table 4.19).

Table 4. 19 Thread Initiation

Students	Japanese		Mexican		Russian	
	% ¹	M ²	% ¹	M ²	% ¹	M ²
Forum A	13.2	2.0	10.7	2.1	76.1	13.6
Forum B	17.8	2.0	10.3	1.5	71.9	8.8
Forum C	26.0	2.6	9.2	1.3	64.9	7.7
Forum D	19.9	2.6	8.8	2.1	71.3	11.1

¹ Proportion out of the total number of initiated threads in the forum ² Mean number of threads initiated per person.

In comparison, the Japanese and Mexican students were characterized as thread-developers. Rodrigo explained why he did not initiate new thread as follows: "I initiated just 1 thread because: I had enough with those already posted, and I think *i'm lazy*, it was easier to only read and respond" (Interview).

The largest number of messages initiated by the Russian students during the first stage of the project, were about their native culture (table 4.19), such as "National holidays", "Customs and traditions", "Sports", "History," "Education," "Economic situation," "Russian meals" (Table 4.20). The second by number were casual topics about modern, everyday life of students.

Table 4. 20 Breakdown of Topic Initiation

Topics	1-6 Weeks			6-12 Weeks		
	Japanese	Mexican	Russian	Japanese	Mexican	Russian
Introductions	53	32	45	0	0	0

Farewells ²	0	0	0	0	2	29
Casual	7	4	33	12	6	41
Course-based	3	2	7	4	0	19
Cultural (own culture)	2	6	144	5	2	38
Cultural (other cultures)	2	0	12	6	1	15
Global	6	0	20	4	4	15
Total	20	12	216	31	13	128
Mean³	0.4	0.3	4.8	0.6	0.4	2.8

* This table represents all newly initiated topics across 4 forums that were categorized and counted with a purpose to demonstrate a) unequal topic initiation activity by students from three cultures and b) students' topic preferences.

²Introductions and Farewells were not included into total count of messages. ³Averages of total posted messages per person.

When many Russian students posted their first messages with description of their cultural aspects such as "Russian holidays", "Russian history", "Sports in Russia" etc. Japanese and Mexican students were grateful that the Russians shared information about their culture. However, when messages on the same cultural topics appeared multiple times (as students followed the fixed plan what topics they should discuss), it became a burden for some students.

Analysis of messages identified, that Russian students posted longer messages, compared to Japanese and Mexican students. Thus, some of their messages were the size of two-three computer-screens (Table 4.21).

Table 4. 21 Averages of Students posted Messages of Different Length (Forum A, Stage 1)

Length of messages	Japanese		Mexican		Russians	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>M</u>
Very short (up to 7 lines)	1.4	1.3	2.4	4.6	4.0	4.8
Short (8 - 13 lines)	2.9	0.8	7.2	5.2	4.0	2.8
Medium (14 - 20 lines)	3.2	0.5	3.2	1.6	4.3	2.0

Medium – long (21 - 27 lines)	0.8	0.0	1.6	0.0	1.9	1.3
Long (28 – 34 lines)	0.4	0.0	0.4	0.0	0.3	1.8
Very long (35 – 42 lines)	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.0	0.4	1.3
Longer than 42 lines	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1	1.8

*M - mean number of messages initiated per person.

Because of such unequal participation, many Russian students complained that: “Mexicans and Japanese should send more information and topics.” Nurgun, a Russian student, openly expressed his frustration about unequal participation in the following manner:

Message no 1339: [Branch from no. 1051] posted by Nurgun Tue Feb 26, 2002 19:25
Subject: What do you think about this WebCt project so far?
Hello. I think it's very interesting, **but why only students from Russia are sending messages.**

Theme 1: Unequal Transfer of Information. Some Russian students complained that generally, messages of Japanese and Mexican students were not as informative, as some Russian students expected them to be. This can be evidenced from the following example of exchange between Karl, a Mexican student and Kira, a Russian students.

Message no. 1608:
Posted by **Karl** on Thu Feb 28, 2002 16:05
Subject: About my school!!!!

Firstable I would like to tell you what kind of school Is [my school]. This is a school who make students too prepared and could be memers of any company that work for good.
This school is too expensive but it depends on you how prepared you wanna be.
So, I recommended.
c-ya latter

We see that Karl did not invest much effort in his message, and therefore, received additional questions on the topic from Kira, a Russian student:

Message no. 1910: [Branch from no. 1608]
Posted by **Kira** on Tue Mar 05, 2002 06:39
Subject: re: About my school!!!!

Can you tell something more about [your school]? What kind of specialists does it make? (p. 136)

Also, the common complaints among Russian students were: “Japanese and Mexicans did not give us much information about their culture and traditions.” “Japanese did not write about their culture. They probably thought we knew about it.” Complaint of an unequal participation was especially salient in forum A, where the Russian students were the most active participants. Some students from this forum requested more information directly on the bulletin board. Danil, for example, wrote:

Message no. 1514:[Branch from no. 1082]
Posted by **Danil** on Mon Feb 27, 2002 20:04
Subject: re: OLYMPIC GAMES
Hi!!!
Please **write me some information** about pre-eminent Japanese sportsmens.

Message no. 1508[Branch from no. 1091]
Posted by **Danil** on Mon Feb 27, 2002 19:56
Subject: re: MY FAVOURITE HOLIDAY

Hi!!!
What is your most important holiday? Please **describe it** for me.

Danil used words “send me information” and “describe” which indicate that he viewed interaction as information transmission. He also posted a series of long, grammatically correct and full of information essays such as: “My usual day off,” “My favorite holiday,” “Olympics,” “My native country – the Russian federation. History, geography, culture”, “My favourite singer” (Michael Jackson) and “The role of books in our life. My favourite book.” Few of his postings received short replies and never developed in longer discussions, therefore, Danil thought he did not receive the equal amount of information in exchange.

In another example when, Naoko, a Japanese student, wrote a list of Japanese holidays, Dolores, a Mexican student, requested a website where she could learn more about these holidays: “tell me about a website where I can find some information about each of them (holidays), I’m really curious about knowing a little bit about each.” Naomi satisfied Dolores’s curiosity by providing a website with a few comments:

Message no. 520:

Posted by **Naoko** on Mon Feb 18, 2002 13:51

Subject: Japanese holidays

Hello guys!! If you know about Japanese holidays and culture, plz check on this
[www\(http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2062.html\)](http://www.japan-guide.com/e/e2062.html)!!
There are many interesting topics!!
See you,
naomi.

The response from Yana, a Russian student, to Naoko’s short message was:

Message no. 1499: [Branch from no. 520]

Posted by **Yana** on Mon Feb 27, 2002 19:48

Subject: re: Japanese holidays

HI!!! My name is Yana. **Why donot you write some information about it?** I think that it is very interesting to know about it!!! We have some similar holidays. Ilike it very much!!! Do you know some Russian national holidays? If you want to know, please ask.

It is evident from Yana’s message that she was disappointed that Naomi did not provide information about Japanese holidays, but instead gave a website where others could find information on that topic. Indeed, some Russian students found it frustrating that Japanese and Mexican students just sent them web-sites instead of writing the information. Tina, a Russian student, said: “You write something not according to the plan, but from your heart and soul and wait for reply, but receive either no reply, or just 2 lines. And they only throw their sites – search as you want” (Interview).

Explanation

The Russian students initiated almost all threads and wrote messages on similar topics because they followed the plan to write 5 half-screen long messages every week. They had to post their messages no matter if they felt an inner communicative need or not. Therefore, Luda, a Russian student, wrote: "If someone writes to me, I reply to this person, and if nobody writes, I just send a topic – general topic to everyone" (Mid-interview).

More importantly, the Russian students were required to catch up if they did not post the required number of messages over the previous weeks. Also because the Russian students had limited Internet access, they wrote messages at home and posted them from the floppy disks by simply initiating new threads on the bb during their limited time in the lab. Because of this, their messages were on the same topics and scattered all over the place, creating disorder on the bulletin board. As Luda, a Russian student, said:

I don't have the Internet at home, so I have a chance to read and reply messages only during the lessons in the computer class. I live in a dormitory, and I can use my friend's computer to write the messages on the discette. And then I ask my friend who has the Internet at home to send my messages. *That's why my messages appears rarely and one by one.*

4.6.3 Clash of Genres: "Writing at the Moment" and "Writing Beforehand"

When, Petr, a Russian student, wrote the following message:

Message no. 1410

Posted by **Petr** on Wednesday, February 27, 2002 6:36am

Subject Globalization

Globalization One of the important aspects of globalisation is integration. Economic, political and other connections between countries develop. Today it's impossible to grow without foreign affairs, and it's

better to trade with your partner on good or at least satisfactory terms - and countries unite and unite with each other. So, according to this theory, the more a country integrates, the better is it for its economy. American magazine "Foreign policy" investigated the level of integration of 62 countries. Russia occupies the 39th place - a bit worse than average, just between Japan and Senegal. The USA - the 12th place. The highest level of globalisation now is in Ireland, Switzerland and Singapore. 13 indicators were considered during the evaluation. They describe level of integration in different spheres - economy, politics, international trade, informational technologies exchange etc. Specialists think that it's small countries that are considerably involved in the integration. And such huge countries as India, China, Brazil, Indonesia are in the bottom of the list. It can be easily explained by the fact that small countries depend on foreign trade quite more than big ones owing to having fewer resources and fewer transport expenses. But the integration can be regarded as dangerous as it reduces countries' independence. So, there are two attitudes to the integration. Which one is correct?

The reply from Karl, the Mexican student was:

Message no. 2017[Branch from no. 1410]
Posted by **Karl** on Thursday, March 7, 2002 4:15pm
Subject Re: Globalization
Hi everyone...

The only thing that i want to know is...what do **you think** about globalization ???

Bye bye

CCHS

In this example of genre clash we see the dissatisfaction of Karl with Petr's message which he found to be dispassionate, distanced, too long and academic. Petr, guided by the assumption that this communication should be academic and, based on his professional interest and additional literature, was in conflict with Karl who viewed the interaction as informal and a chat-like conversation. For Petr it was all about transfer of objective information, for Ivan it was a relationship-building activity. In addition, this example represents a clash between students' deep and surface approaches to communication. I classified Petr as a deep communicator, as all his messages were

consistently reflective, although not all of them necessarily social. On the other hand, Karl consistently interacted on a surface level with almost 90% of his messages representing phatic interaction. In what follows we will see the major themes within this “Clash of Genre” contradiction.

The Mexican Students' Reflections on Genre

Many Mexican students characterized the Russian messages as long, same, “boring” topics about their culture, “scattered all over the place,” which made many Mexican students say: *“first I was interested in both – Japanese and Russian messages, but than was bored by Russian messages.”* This explains why almost 50% of messages initiated by the Russian students in forum A, have not received any replies in the first stage of the project (Table 4.22).

Table 4. 22 Number of Russian Threads that Have not Received Replies

	Stage1			Stage 2		
	%	<i>n</i>	Total	%	<i>n</i>	Total
Forum A	47.4	37	78	7.6	5	66
Forum B	31.3	21	67	0	0	27
Forum C	29.3	17	58	4.8	1	21
Forum D	37.8	31	82	12.1	4	33

In the mid-interview many Mexican students characterized the genres of writing of three groups of students in the following way:

- “Japanese have sense of humor, life and culture; Mexicans are relaxed, sharp, to the point, Russian write long messages and I got lost what they were talking about.”
- “Japanese and Mexicans postings are the most interesting and easier to read.”

Theme 1: Plagiarism. Moreover, many Mexican students accused Russian students of plagiarism. They said in the interview: “Japanese and Mexicans write their own postings, and Russians copy and paste (plagiarize) and it is not fair.” On a question what motivated and discouraged students from participation, the common answers of Mexican students were:

It motivates me the fact that you can share your opinions and express yourself with others. What discourages me is the fact that it seems that not everyone is taking the time to write messages about *what they think* and they’re just *copy and pasting* some information. (Dolores, Mid-interview)

The things that motivated me, are the interesting topics that sometimes the students write; and discourages me: the plagiarism that sometimes occurs, when the student talk about some specific theme of their country and then they copy and paste it from the internet, it really disappointed me. (Arcadia, Mid-interview)

Theme 2: Writing at the moment and writing beforehand. Many Mexican students got the impression that the Russian students plagiarized because their messages did not sound like they were written based on their own opinions. Russian students, for example, referred to existing theories/articles/books 20 times in forum “A”, compared to 6 times of Japanese and 3 times of Mexican students (Appendix H). Sierra, a Mexican student, characterized the Russian messages in the following way:

The russians are like they write the msgs, but ...it isn't seems like they write in the moment with theirs own word their msgs were perferct, they didn't have any mistake and japanese were like they write at the momento... what they think in this momento i

dont know... but i feel it was like that... and i prefer to write what you think in this momento than write something that i found in internet or a book.... *is like copy paste*... and is better in your own word because you are practicing your English.

...That people if see that is that not all are gonna read that. (IRC interview)

Thus, in many Mexican students' view, the Russian students engaged in the practice of "writing beforehand," which was opposed to Japanese and Mexican students' practice of "writing at the moment." Sierra said that "writing beforehand" would be quite acceptable on the asynchronous bulletin board as long as copied information is "put in one's own words":

...is better a copy paste but change some words and *put in your own words* is like reading a book... and in this case is like a chat combine with information.... *to know how to say the things without the people say that they dont want to read that message* because is very long.... and it not seems like the persons write. (IRC interview)

In this statement Sierra raised the importance of being communicatively competent: "to know how to say the things without the people say that they don't want to read that message."

Practices of "writing at the moment" and "writing beforehand" reflect two different approaches to interaction - the one happening without any preliminary preparation and the other taking place off-line and based on a literature review. Students who wrote "at the moment" might have or might have not consulted the sources and dictionaries, depending on their overall (deep, strategic or surface) approaches to interaction. As interview demonstrated, many Japanese and Mexican students did not consult any sources, grounding their messages on their current background knowledge and immediate context of interaction. Therefore, they avoided writing on the topics beyond their scope of expertise because they

were afraid to give distorted information (unless they would have engaged in the practice of “writing beforehand” on their own).

On the other hand, some Russian students who wrote “beforehand”, although inserted social anchors in their messages, such as greetings and closures, were not engaged in interaction. These students were doing something different – namely, they followed the path of engaging in traditional writing practice, when they were evaluated for precise information transfer and for error-free performance reinforced by their instructor.

The Japanese Students' Reflections on Genre

Interestingly, many Japanese students tended to regret that their participation was not as active as the participation of Mexican and Russian students. Here are some common Japanese students' reflections:

- “Mexicans and Russians are more active than Japanese (seek topics).”
- “Mexicans & Russians are friendly, however, “I cannot feel Japanese are friendly from message.”
- “They (sound) more attractive than Japanese.”
- “Mexicans & Russians write their opinion more than Japanese (think more about the topic than Japanese).”
- “Mexicans write in less academic language, Russians in more academic language, and Japanese mostly reply.”

Interestingly, Japanese students' poor participation was characterized by them as sounding not "attractive." Also more Japanese students expressed sensitivity with regards to the length of their messages. For example such concerns as this one: "I was thinking that my introduction was too long and few people read all of the sentence" (Mayako, BB message) was explicitly expressed by several Japanese students. Such behaviour was more likely attributed to Japanese students' previous experience of taking a course in which they were specifically taught about netiquette. Generally, the whole theme of sounding attractive and leaving good impression was very much characteristic to Japanese students, which might have been also attributed to their socially-constructed cultural characteristics.

Interestingly, none of the Japanese students blamed Russian students for plagiarism, and in fact, in their interviews, very few students expressed their dissatisfaction with the Russian cultural topics. They would generally characterize Russian students' messages as: "same and long," they would also note that Russians were "interested very much in culture." When I asked Ruriko, a Japanese student, what she thought about Russian students' writing, Ruriko said that the way the Russians wrote their messages reflected their cultural ways of writing, which should be equally respected. Some students also sensed that Russian students were given an assignment to write on particular topics.

The Russian Students' Reflections on Genre

In comparison, many Russian students said: "Almost everybody in our group and our instructor as well thought that their English and grammar was worse than ours" (Shura, interview). "They write in 'free English' and don't use dictionary. Japanese and Mexicans

are more free: 'hi!' 'Wow!' We wrote 'faithfully your's' ☺ we were not as free as they were" (Zhenya, Interview). The practice of writing "at the moment" and "beforehand" was reflected in students' grammar. As Olya, a Russian student said:

Japanese and Mexican English is different, not as ours, and their sentence structure is different. For example, we pay more attention to grammar and than, we know that "I" should be written in capital letter and they wrote in small. Almost everybody in our group and our instructor as well thought that their English and grammar was worse than ours. And I don't know what they thought about our English. (Interview)

Indeed, many Russian students wrote with minimum errors because they used dictionaries. In Alla's description of her bb use we see how much attention she paid to the form:

I usually go to the WebCT 3 times a week—once at home and 2 times at the University. When I at home I download it and then read and write some topics or replies autonomically using dictionaries. Then I usually make copy of my messages on a floppy disc to send them at the classes. Sometimes I write on the Bulletin Board directly with *dictionaries* too. *Still I have a number of mistakes, but you can correct them through reading correct way of writing in other postings I think* (Mid-interview).

Explanation: Assignment vs. Free Interaction.

Overall, in their interviews, some Russian students expressed their awareness about the reason for differences in participation between three groups of students. They said that,

compared to Japanese and Mexican students, they perceived the interaction as an assignment:

“Our students wrote long and same messages as they viewed the project *as an assignment* and it was boring.” Also:

Japanese and Mexicans did not have *control*, right? – they interacted freely, it seems to me, but we – no. *If we also had the same conditions*, because we were like idiots – write and write they probably looked at our messages with eyes like jars – so many similar topics about republic, everyone writes similar things – give me a break! (Tina, Interview)

There was a situation - the Russian students wrote the large number of messages on the same topics, the foreign students *got tired of them*, did not read them and just interacted *at their own interest* and therefore, did not write much. And we wrote most of the messages. (George, Interview)

The interview revealed that the Russian students were encouraged to post translations from the Russian language texts. This is what Inna, who lay in the hospital during the project and still participated, said in the interview:

Our instructor did not allow us to copy – she said – take the Russian sources and translate them because when you translate you increase your knowledge... I took a thick book about [my republic] from a library which contained all sorts of topics – about holidays, nature, animals, what is produced in our republic, and many other things - there aren't such books in English, and I just translated those texts.

Kira, another Russian student, who also engaged in the literature-based writing practice, said: “I did not like the topic about Intercultural marriages because it was difficult to

find information on this topic.” In contrast, this topic was the most popular among other students from the three cultures who were writing not based on the literature review, but based on their own opinion.

In the following tables I analyze the Russian students’ participation practices:

Table 4. 23 Analysis of Russian Students’ Online Activity

Underlying Motive	Student’s Reflections on Object/Motive	Researcher’s Comments
Rules set by instructor	Suddenly we were told to write on 5 themes. And we were given 5 themes.	The assumption about the official nature of the project was reinforced by Tina’s instructor who introduced the project as a privilege and set the rule to write 5 messages on fixed topics every week.
Object set by instructor	I thought everything will be so official. I thought that <i>we were expected</i> to read from a newspaper and translate it, e.g. or from book – read and translate.	Tina thought that the project would be official, and therefore, expected their genre of writing to be academic and error-free.
Activity	Student’s Reflections	Researcher’s Comments
Participation	We began to search for different sources. ... This about [my republic] <i>I rewrote</i> for sure because at the beginning I did not think... Another topics <i>I took</i> from newspaper.	Tina engaged in searching for literature and translating ready texts from Russian into English.
Learning	<i>And only by the end I started to write topics in my own words.</i>	However, in the course of time, Tina learned that she needed to change the genre of her writing in order to fit in the online community’s discursive norms and rules.

Similarly, Olya’s (another Russian student’s) reflection on her experience of participation in the project can be analyzed as follows:

Table 4. 24 Analysis of Russian Students’ Online Activity

Underlying motive	Students’ Reflections on Object/Motive	Researcher’s Comments
Novelty of the project	Because <i>we did not know what this project was about</i> ,	Olya said that she and other students were not aware what the project would be about.
Object set by instructor	we just thought we <i>were expected</i> simply to write something	She followed the object set by her instructor

Activity	Students' Reflections on Actions	Researcher's Comments
Participation	<i>Those 5 themes I did not write in my own words – I took them from particular sources because all our group took from the sources and translated</i>	which resulted in her online participation being similar to the path of her participation in face-to-face classrooms.
Learning	<i>and by the end we understood that Japanese and Mexicans write in their own words and not in the same style we wrote. (Olya, interview)</i>	Finally, Olya became aware of the inadequacy of her genre of writing and changed her practice, which also indicates her learning.

Theme 2: Did students plagiarize? Why? The study identified the cases of plagiarism among both Mexican and Russian students. In the case of Mexican students, Leticia was the one who posted cut and pasted messages about Architecture. In her case, the reason for plagiarism might have been in her poor English language proficiency, as she had a slightly more than 300 TOEFL score. Due to her insufficient language proficiency and unwillingness to invest more time to write the better revised messages, she was categorized as a surface communicator.

In the case of the Russian students, there were a few students who actually posted the copied messages. Below is the interview with Semyon, a Russian student, who scanned a number of his messages and posted them on the BB:

O: Where did you take these texts from?

S: From the book, telling the truth, I just *scanned* them.

O: Did you have a sense of audience, that people out there would read your messages?

S: Aha, maybe I had. ...Maybe *if I wrote online*, then I would [], but *I wrote off-line* at home in the evening, maybe that is why I wrote messages in the form of essays.

O: For yourself?

S: No, not for myself, but someone should read it.

O: One person?

S: Not necessarily one. *I did not think about it in fact.*

O: Why did not you write the topics by yourself?

S: I entered the forum with delay, therefore, *I was required* to write 15-20 topics to catch up with others. I was supposed to bring the topics the next day and I simply *did not have time.*

Two themes emerged from this interview:

1. Semyon wrote his messages off-line at home, and, therefore, he did not have a strong sense of audience.
2. He was *required* by his instructor to catch up with what he had not posted during previous weeks and, therefore, "copying and pasting" activity was "a means of survival" for him.

The discussion on the topic of Plagiarism which I initiated in all four forums to address Mexican students' complaints, revealed that cutting and pasting (plagiarism) was a temptation to all three universities. All students in three universities had heavy work loads with too many assignments for some, therefore, they were tempted to cut and paste information in order to get all their assignments done in the limited time. The reason why only Mexican students noticed the cases of plagiarism was explained by the reinforcement of the anti-plagiarism program in their university. Valerie, their instructor, was urged to enforce these rules whenever she noticed cutting and pasting. She, e.g., spent the first two weeks of the course dealing only with plagiarism and explicitly prohibited plagiarism in the course outline. Several Mexican students confirmed that the anti-plagiarism policy was enforced by the Mexican university policy oriented toward Western standards and by the instructors who came from the US and Canada:

Message no. 2193[Branch from no. 2116]

Posted by Ines H on Monday, March 11, 2002 1:31pm

Subject Re: What do you think about plagiarism?

Hi! Well here in Mexico plagiarism is not viewed yet as a horrible crime, but the way we look at it is changing.

I have to tell that this is not happening in all the country, I think this is a campaign specially that the [Institute] is taking, because of the values they want to teach. Another rason is because, like Valerie, we had a lot of teachers who came from the United States and Canada, where the plagiarism is view like a crime or something like that. Maybe that's why we are used to refer always the places where we got the information to do our papers.

Ines

In comparison, Japanese and Russian students did not say anything about the enforcement of anti-plagiarism policy in their universities. Moreover, they wrote in their messages that the issue of plagiarism was not problematized in their institutions in Japan and Russia.

4.6.4 Academic vs. Casual, Formal vs. Informal Topics

Theme 1: Academic vs. casual topic. When some Russian students posted many academic and culture-specific topics during the first stage of the project, Paloma, a Mexican student, wrote: "Please just stop bombarding us with *globalization, and ecologic issues*, and lets talk about something more *teenagery*" (online interview). She also complained in the mid-interview:

I'm still going to say *the topics of conversation* do not really inspire me, it's just not something you want to spend 15 minutes or more reading about. And I know, that *we are supposed to learn such things*, but *they are boring*, and I wish this could be the one assignment that's fun to do.

Many other students shared Paloma's willingness to discuss less "serious" issues: "it might motivate me more to deal with issues that *werent so global*, and maybe a little more *personal*, issues that one can relate to, to really know what their life is like."

Theme 2: Formal vs. Informal messages. In another example, feeling happy for his Japanese soccer team who won on the soccer championship, Taro wrote a very emotional and informal message:

Message no. 3393[Branch from no. 1450]
Posted by Taro on Wednesday, March 27, 2002 11:02am
Subject Re: World Cup
yes!!!!!!!!!!!!!! i feel pretty fine this morning
because.....japan's national team beat poland by score
of 2-0!!!!!!!!!! i really wanted to see this match on tv but
i couldn't because i'm in canada right now.... japan is
going to win the world cup!!!!!!(i'm half kidding, half
serious...) hmmm....**sorry for not being academic....**i'm just
excited...

Toward the end of his message, however, he realized that he was too informal and apologized for "not being academic." Similar to Taro, Miki, a Japanese student wrote: "Maybe this is not really an academic topic, but I was just curious!" These examples demonstrate that students clearly faced the dilemma related to the level of formality/informality relevant on the bulletin board.

Theme 3: Writing and Identity. Discussion of casual or academic topics was closely related to students' identities and perceptions of the online activity as an assignment or as an out-of-class activity. This double dilemma was evident in the following exchange between three Russian students:

Shura: *It seemed to me that some students thought it was obligation - they had tasks, topics and they should write. Their letters were formal and not interesting sometimes.*

Zina: I think formal is much better than informal. If it is informal - than it is chat.

S: But our speech should be informal, because *we are young people* (ha-ha)

Z: How could you write informally, say, about social problems - I could not understand! It should be more formal, *it's not "Simpsons."* (Interview)

In this example, Zina, who did not participate actively in the project and who wrote only academic and task-based messages, thought that the bulletin board was designed for academic interaction, whereas, two other students thought that being too serious was inappropriate on the bulletin board. They thought that writing should reflect students' personal, youth identity. Two students who were for informal interaction, said that they did not mind academic style per say, but they were against the fixed academic "formulaic" expressions such as: " 'my country is situated,' 'will you please' - not always business English." In other words, they sensed that there was an incompatibility between their task-oriented and Japanese and Mexican student' person-oriented communication.

Ulyana, a Russian student, also saw a dramatic distinction between what *she really wanted* to talk about as a young woman and what *she was* supposed to talk about, as a student of world economics and a participant of an international project, reflecting her inner identity dilemma:

Message no. 2077[Branch from no. 1946]
Posted by Ulyana on Saturday, March 9, 2002 9:54pm
Subject Re: New start
Hi, Olga! I want to know, what kind of letters should we write? **Letters of our real interest, or letters on political, economy problems.** As for me I am interested in problems of health, sports, fashion e.t.c Best wishes
Ulyana

4.6.5 Culture-Specific vs. Common Topics

Mexican students expressed their complaint about too-culture-specific messages initiated by the Russian students as follows: “Come on, the Russians, for example, start telling about this specific things about their culture that we had no idea they even exist, and they talk about it like it was a global common knowledge” (Teresa). “Russians write about culture-specific things, like it was common knowledge I could understand only 10%” (Maria). “The Russian cultural topics were discouraging because the only thing you can say is - wow! I didn’t know! Maybe you should try to establish some topics that are interesting to all in general” (Alita).

Based on these complaints I infer that students realized that the lack of background knowledge about a particular culture, may not only motivate, but discourage interaction, as students may end up not knowing what to talk about. Thus, for example, Machiko, a Japanese student said: “About Russia, it’s sometimes difficult to talk to, because, I do not know about their culture. I cannot think about what to ask.” Therefore, it turned out, that some students, even though, being attracted to differences, did not like to discuss too culture-specific and unfamiliar things. Rather, students preferred topics they could relate to and had background knowledge on: “I felt that the topic was sometimes too local so that we couldn’t afford to discuss over nationalities.Even if we are not from the same country, we should be able to follow the subjects provided the sense in common” (Mako).

Theme 1: Difficulty to describe culture online. Based on the Russian students’ messages about their culture, many students came to the conclusion that “description of culture might be boring online if you don’t see it.” The difficulty to discuss culture-specific

topics, was related to the nature of the bulletin board itself, namely, to the lack of visual cues that made it hard to learn about different cultures for the following reasons:

- “Accent and gestures are hidden online.” As Fidel, a Mexican student said: “I talk a lot with my hands – on bb you have to give more details instead.”
- “You can’t interrupt when somebody is speaking, even if it’s rude to do it, but valid” (Paloma, MS).
- “When you communicate face-to-face you can see the face, you communicate more, speak faster. It is easier to express your thoughts” (George, RS).
- “We do not know how to express a lot – in school everyone wants to express their opinion, but on bb – it was different” (Fidel, MS).
- “It is difficult to gain impression about other cultures online” (Naoko, JS).

Mayako, a Japanese student, for example, thought that it was inadequate to write long culture-specific topics on the bulletin board, as the long messages did not fit to the format of online international communication. She explained why she did not write much about her culture as follows: “There are a lot of traditional festivals in Kyoto, but if I mention about that now, it will be a *very long*, so I don’t write here” (BB message).

Theme 2: Lack of knowledge about own culture. Many students found it especially challenging to write about traditional culture and history of their own countries as they were concerned that they could give misleading information: “I am afraid to give “mistaken idea” about my culture,” “I have to think and choose topics carefully so that I will not tell those people wrong information or anything like that” (Yuka). As Taro, a Japanese student, wrote: “In order to satisfy the curiosities of Russian and Mexican students, I need to give them as

much information as possible. So I think I need to do some research on Japan because what I already know is very little and not enough for them” (Journal).

Theme 3: Avoidance Strategy. Students were not interested in spending extra-time doing research unless they were really motivated. Therefore, they either provided very little information (“I tried to explain my culture simply” (Fernando)), or avoided altogether to write about their own culture. Many Russian students themselves disliked to write about their own culture and said: “Writing about culture and food was not interesting. We had to look for info in the books because we did not know about the culture.”

Theme 4: Different topic preferences. When asked what topics students liked to discuss, the common opinion was the topic about modern culture: “I want to know more about other students life. How is it to live in another country” (Nurgun). “Maybe we need some specific topics to expose the reality of our countries, what we really feel, and what we have experienced in our daily life” (Yukako, mid-interview). “To my mind it would be interesting to discuss the topics of fashion, because we are all young men. then I would like to discuss the style of thier life. I would like to discuss some problems of our life.” (Shura, Mid-interview). As Kostya, a Russian student said: “We live in the present, not in the past,” thereby, emphasizing the irrelevance of discussing traditional old culture.

Through content analysis of the interaction protocols, I found that, generally, students from three cultures had different topic preferences. Many Japanese students were particularly interested in discussing topics related to the issues of language learning and travel experiences. As several Japanese students traveled to Mexico over the Christmas break, they

tended to discuss their trip to Mexico. They also tended to constantly compare Japanese and Canadian contexts.

The recurrent themes in Mexican messages were religion, family values and national pride. All students were interested in such topics as international marriage, fashion, sport, movies, ecological problems (Appendix F). Several students from three cultures engaged in the open discussion of topics that might be considered taboo in some cultures, such as, for example, homosexuality and alcohol.

Many students were open about discussing social problems inside their countries. For example, Mexican and Russian students engaged in discussing the topic “Corruption.” I asked Olesya, a Russian student, why she had chosen to disclose the negative sides of her country, such as corruption and she said: “It seemed to me that corruption existed everywhere, and I wanted to know to what extent it is spread in their countries, what they think about it and how they fight against it” (Interview).

On the other hand, students seemed hesitant to discuss problems that involved interests of both countries at the same time, such as e.g. political conflicts. As Eriko, a Japanese student wrote in her journal: “It’s also true that I cannot ask them about political things. Is it okay??? It’s difficult to ask them about sensitive question that I really want to know on such BB.” Although Eriko’s instructor told her that it was absolutely fine to discuss such topics on the bulletin board, Eriko chose not to.

4.6.6 Common Topic - Different Cross-Cultural Perspectives

It was sometimes difficult, what they meant. As our instructor told us, they have a different mentality and therefore, when they write they mean one thing and we understand it differently (Shura, Interview).

Although students discussed the same topics, they expressed highly contextual local discourses. These differences, sometimes, caused misunderstanding and difficulty to come to consensus. In her message, for example, Maria, a Mexican student, chose to write about racism toward indigenous people in her country and polarization which existed between white and indigenous people. Alla, a Russian student, responded to Maria the next day. In her message she wrote that she learned something new about the situation in Mexico. Next, Alla wrote that Russia also had indigenous people, however, she expressed a completely different discourse about indigenous people in her local context, namely the discourse of the consequences of cultural contact between dominant and minority groups when minority groups “lose their originality” and when “young people of such nationality don’t want to come back and continue national traditions.”

In response to Alla, Teresa, another Mexican student, confirmed Maria’s point about racism in Mexico and compared the Mexican situation with the situation in the US. She also asked what actions could be taken to fight against racism:

Message no. 2975[Branch from no. 2544]

Posted by **Teresa** on Wednesday, March 20, 2002 9:56am

Subject Re: Social problems

In México we have the problem of racism. **As US have the "black people" racism problem**, we have it with our indians. There is much that can be done about it, but not much that has been done. **It is a national problem**, and we all have to take action in what we can. IT is definitely not a problem that can be solved in a day or a month or even a year, it would take many years and many persons to change it. Are you doing something to solve your countries racism problem? mtmt

Mila, a Russian student, responded that racism was not considered to be a key problem in Russia compared to other social problems such e.g. homeless people and

neglected children. Indeed in Russia, historically, the issue of racism and nationalism had not been problematized and had never been a major concern, despite that this issue has always existed. Such a position was expressed by Mila:

Message no. 3337[Branch from no. 2544]
Posted by **Mila** on Tuesday, March 26, 2002 6:18pm
Subject Re: Social problems
Hi, Mirna! **It's very terrible** to have such problems in your own territory. In Russia there is **no such critical situation** as racism but sometime we have similar problem. I mean nationalism is in our country, especially in our capital. ...But I think that **it is not main problem in our country**, the most important problems are such as **homeless one, neglected (children)** and so on. And I think that we must fight against any social problems.

Finally, Maria, a Mexican student, in her next message stated that “we can’t do it [can not fight social problems] if we are racist people” demonstrating that for her racism was more important issue than other social problems. Maria, like Teresa, asked what actions should be taken in order to overcome this problem, thereby, making an attempt to step beyond mere description of problems toward finding solutions to these problems and to switch from providing facts to critical discussion.

As this discussion demonstrated, in many cases, students posted messages under similar topics, yet, expressed different discourses that prevailed in their local contexts. The result was – both Mexican and Russian students were surprised to hear about two different perspectives on the same topic, that they could not fully understand because of their lack of knowledge of the political, historical and demographic situation of their interlocutors’ countries.

4.6.7 Missed Communication

Shiba, a Japanese student, wrote in his journal: “sometimes the *replies are different from things what I asked.*” Indeed, there were several instances when some students missed the point of their interlocutors by misinterpreting what they were writing and asking about. For example, in his messages, Amador, a Mexican student, wrote about his trip to Southern Mexico and his realization how little he knew about his own culture:

Message no. 3838

Posted by **Amador** on Wednesday, April 10, 2002 7:36pm

Subject How much do you know the world?

Nowadays globalization is a popular discussion subject. Even though we have ways to reach people in far away countries I must ask, do you really know the places you think you know? I just returned from a trip to Guadalajara, one of the 3 biggest cities in Mexico (awesome trip by the way, did you miss me?). By going there I realized that I pretended to know a lot about world issues and all that stuff, but I don't even know my own country. I mean, maybe I do know more about the world than previous generations did at my age as so will the next one know more than me, but we must question more about what we know. What I'm trying to say is that things are much more different depending on the place you are looking from that you can no longer trust completely on the information that comes to you. There may be some people like me out there, a lot perhaps. I'm not referring to those who don't know their own country because they have not been there if you know what I mean, they have only been in very few places, like me. Others have the lucky enough to visit a reasonably amount of the country. No, those are not the people to worry about, what we must worry is about the people who look at other countries or people and judge them without being there or knowing what they really are.

In response, he received quite inadequate feedback from Yuka, a Japanese student, who completely missed Amador's point and began to discuss advantages of independent traveling vs. “packaged” tours:

Message no. 3859[Branch from no. 3838]

Posted by **Yuka** on Thursday, April 11, 2002 7:13pm

Subject Re: How much do you know the world?

If you wanna know more about other places or other countries, I think it's a good idea to live for a while.

That's why I prefer staying for a while, instead of just travelling as a package tours. I do--n't like them. I prefer travelling by myself, looking at maps, asking native people there, taking local transportations and so on. It's really fun!!

Talk to ya later! Yuka

In comparison, Ines, Amador's classmate, understood Amador's point and posted a relevant response. Referring to the irrelevance of Yuka's message, Ines begins her message with the statement "I really got your point." Here is Ines's full message:

Message no. 3867[Branch from no. 3838]
Posted by Ines H on Sunday, April 14, 2002 4:41pm
Subject Re: How much do you know the world?
Hi Ahmed!

I really got your point, and it's very interesting. I completely agree with you and also think that we most know first who we are and from where we come from, and then try to know more about other cultures.

Here in Mexico that's a big problem, specially from people who live here in Sonora, because they don't know their country!. IS difficult for the people here in Sonora to know Mexico, because it is so far from here, but I think that we just have to preffer it than go to the United States and help their economy!

Well, that's it! See you later!

Ines

Such cases of missed communication, as demonstrated in this example, happened because of some students' disengaged reading and their inability to shift from their own frame of references to the one of the interlocutor (Ware, 2003).

4.6.8 Threatened National Identity

Example 1: "Hello People of MEXICA"

Throughout the interaction there were a few salient cases of tension based on students' sense of threatened national identity, such as, for example, when Kostya, a Russian student, posted the message titled: "Hello, People of MEXICA!" A misspelled highlighted

word "Mexico" was hard to ignore and caused various responses from the Mexican students. Kostya opened up his message with a greeting, and closed it with expression of thanks and his signature. He wrote that he knew about Mexico "only from movies" and that "roughly speaking" what he knew was gangsters and narcotics. Kostya's message was about professional rather than personal interest in Mexico. Being an economics student, he asked about the economy of Mexico. In the final part he introduced the economy of his own republic. Here is the full message written by Kostya:

Message no. 2503

Posted by **Kostya** on Friday, March 15, 2002 8:16am

Subject Hello, People of MEXICA!

Hi! I know about your country **only from movies**. **Roughly speaking:** gangsters, narcotics ... And I really interesting in what your country has. Exactly, **what product do you export, what industries do you have, what industry the main, and specialization of your country in a world integration**. About our country republic of Sakha (Yakutya) now I can say, that it is **developing country**, our integration is diamond industry. We export oil, gas, wood to Korea, Japan and others. **The development are going very hard, because of small population and building of new market economy**. It is some information about our country. Thank you! I'm looking forward hearing from you.

Kostya.

Arcadia, a Mexican student, was among the first students who responded to Fyodor. In her message she blamed Hollywood for portraying Mexicans as "lazy, foolish, poor, corrupted" and Americans as "always being the heroes, and never making mistakes":

Message no. 2577[Branch from no. 2571]

Posted by **Arcadia** on Saturday, March 16, 2002 8:38am

Subject Re: Hello, People of MEXICA!

Hi! I also agree that in movies, **especially the hollywood ones, the show the cultures very "stereotyped"**, for example, all this movies, shows the mexicans like if we all were **lazy, foolishs, very poor, very corrupted, and some of this things happen in Mexico**, as in many other countries, but it's not fair to

generalize all the bad and negative aspects of a country and put them on a movie. Also I feel that U.S. people, show themselves in all the movies, like always being the heroes, and never making mistakes, when this isn't true. So, I really think that watching a movie, and making your point of view about some place, country or culture, it's very bad, because you will get a really wrong impression of them.

Interestingly, Arcadia entirely ignored Fyodor's question about the economy of Mexico and focused only on a discussion of stereotypes about Mexico. Kostya assumed that Arcadia was offended by his message and posted his apology in response:

Message no. 2755[Branch from no. 2577]
Posted by **Kostya** on Monday, March 18, 2002 7:19pm
Subject Re: Hello, People of MEXICA!
Arcadia, hello! :) I'm very sorry for my words about your country. I just wanted to know more about **Mexica**.

Kostya

He misspelled "Mexico" again which points out that his mistake was not intentional, rather he thought that this was the actual spelling, because in the Russian language "Mexico" is spelled with an "a" in the end. Four days later after Kostya posted his apology, Andres, another Mexican student, corrected Kostya's error:

Message no. 3146[Branch from no. 2503]
Posted by **Andres** on Friday, March 22, 2002 12:30pm
Subject Re: Hello, People of MEXICA!
Hey Kostya first of all is not Mexica is MEXICO

Again, Kostya reacted in such a way as if he offended Andres and made an attempt to fix the situation by posting a friendly comment:

Message no. 3586[Branch from no. 3146]
Posted by **Kostya** on Monday, April 1, 2002 6:30pm
Subject Re: Hello, People of MEXICA!
Hi Andres! Thank you! :)

We can see from this example that in the online environment lacking visual cues it is very easy to hurt others' national feelings by small things, such as, misspelled words that

carry symbolic meaning, as shown in this example. It is also easy to avoid questions and begin talking about things that do not interest a communication partner, but rather, interest a reader him/herself. Furthermore, because of the time delay, people's spontaneous reaction might be reconsidered and, instead of exchanging offensive remarks, they may avoid tension by posting a brief apology as Kostya did. Thus, the media itself shapes interaction in certain ways by making salient the form/genre and possibility to hide emotions.

Example 2: "Culture Shock in Mexico"

In the next series of messages we will see the tension which took place between a Japanese and Mexican students. Yukako, a Japanese female student, went to Mexico during her Christmas break and saw that in one Mexican village people drank coca-cola in the church. Her tour guide told that local people thought coca-cola was a sacred drink. Yukako wanted to find out from the Mexican students if it was true or not and posted the following message:

Message no. 1911

Posted by Yukako on Tuesday, March 5, 2002 7:12am

Subject Culture shock in Mexico

Hello! When I was traveling around in Mexico, I have experienced a culture shock to see a custom in a small village. There, people had a custom to drink Coca-Cola always, everyday. Our tour guide explained that they have believed that Coca-Cola is good for their health, although people's teeth were almost collapsed. It was totally incredible for me. People drank Coca-Cola or alcohol even in the church. They have related Coca-Cola and alcohol with religious faith that these drinks should purify them because they make us belch after drinking, and this belch can help expel evils from their bodies. And my teacher, he is from El Salvador, said that some people in small villages in his country also think that Coca-Cola is good for their health because it is very nutritious. hmm...is it cultural imperialism???

Yukako

Yukako used a number of negatively charged words as “culture shock”, “collapsed”, “totally incredible,” “belch,” “cultural imperialism???” that signalled her state of being perplexed and reflected her polarization toward people she was talking about. Alano, a Mexican student, reacted to Yukako’s message in the following way:

Message no. 2556[Branch from no. 2525]
Posted by **Alano** on Friday, March 15, 2002 3:32pm
Subject Re: Culture shock in Mexico
Hey: We don't drink coca cola in the church, we drink it out site the church, I think that many people don't know really the culture in Mexico

Based on Alano’s use of a “rude” form of greeting “Hey:” and a complaint that “many people don’t know culture in Mexico” we may assume that he was offended by Yukako’s message. Interesting was the next message in which Slayter wrote: “coca cola is not part of our culture, just we drink it as another drink.” He interpreted Yukako’s message as an attempt to associate something “imported” and “alien” with local, religious, Mexican:

Message no. 2789[Branch from no. 1911]
Posted by **Guest LLED** on Monday, March 18, 2002 9:14pm
Subject Re: Culture shock in Mexico
hi i am from mexico, and we drink coca cola and may be a lot ,but we do not drinking in the church, never ever, if you know mexico is very religios , and another think we do not mixed **coca cola with religios thinks, that is crazy**, i think that your tour guide didnt know much as he said.

Mexico has a lot of culture but coca cola is not part of our culture, just we drink it as another drink.

SLAYTER

Yukako tried to defend her point:

Message no. 2812[Branch from no. 2789]
Posted by **Yukako** on Tuesday, March 19, 2002 12:09am
Subject Re: Culture shock in Mexico
Hello Lios, yes, I had **thought the same way as you** when I was there and I could not understand the situation immediately. But it was real that **Coca-Cola** has been really **religious** stuff. I asked my guide (he was Mexican as well), If someone told these people that

Coca-Cola is just bad for health and not to drink it, what would they do?, then he answered, They just do not trust him/her. If someone in this village told such a thing, the person would be considered as weird. I cannot know whether he is very right or not any more, but actually I saw people who were drinking Coke in the church... I think that was in San Juan Chamulahin San Cristobal de las Casas. I want to confirm you that I did not mean that all Mexicans have such a custom. I understand that in the most regions in Mexico like where you know, there is never such a custom. I just want you to think about how powerful religious influence is... Thanks! ;-)

In her message Yukako restated what she saw. She tried to be as diplomatic as possible, e.g. she used careful reasoning: "I cannot know whether he is very right or not any more, but actually I saw people who were drinking Coke." "I want to confirm you that I did not mean that all Mexicans have such a custom." At the end of her message she inserted a friendly emoticon. Mexican students, on the other hand, were sure that Yukiko's guide tricked her with a mistaken idea about Mexican culture. Therefore, Slayter, in response, stated once again that "coca-cola in all mexico is not a religious staff." To strengthen his argument he wrote that he saw Japanese people with mobile phones in the church, but this did not mean that mobile phones were the part of Japanese religion:

Message no. 3557[Branch from no. 2812]
Posted by Guest LLED on Sunday, March 31, 2002 10:56pm
Subject Re: Culture shock in Mexico
hi yukako , i am so sorry but coca cola in all mexico, is not a religios staff ,actually today i caming back to mexico from japan, and i saw in the temples people with mobile phone and they cannot left their mobile, they are allways using the mobile, it was like a vicios, and the thinks that u say about mexico is like if i say that mobile phones are realigious staff in japan, you see what i mean, dont you?

slayter lios

Later, Slayter, reflected on this interaction in the following way:

Actually i was interesting in japanese culture coz in easter I went to japan so

almost all my topic were about Japanese culture and just one, that *I did not like the stereotype that one Japanese had about Mexicans*, ... because she did not know what she was writting at all she wrote that coca coal was part of catholic religion in mexico that we used in the church haha. (Chat interview)

Thus, national feelings were salient throughout this interaction. Unfortunately, students did not come to a consensus and Yukako's inquiry was not fully satisfied. Yukako remained confused about what she saw and what she was told by the Mexican students. In the case described here this was hard to do because of the asynchronous nature of interaction, which did not allow for faster exchange of opinions and more forceful persuasion as well as students' weak choice of words.

Example 3: Intra-cultural Conflict

One of the interesting moments in students' interaction was the tension that happened between Mexican students. Slayter wrote to Rosalinda a message in which he asked about her native culture and town: "have you got televisions? is colonial town? how the girls are? The name of the mains streets in the town? do you still using horses? or cars?" Here is his full message:

Message no. 2790[Branch from no. 2546]
Posted by **Guest LLED** on Monday, March 18, 2002 9:32pm
Subject Re: TV and children
hi rosalinda some body told me that you have alredy written back my message, but i dont know, i did not see it, may be because some one delated all the messages. so could you send me again the information about **navojoan culture**, how the people live in there? **have you got televisions?** is colonial town? how the girls are? the name of the mains streets in the town? **do you still using horses? or cars?**

slayter

Rosalinda was insulted by Slayter's message as she interpreted it as an attempt to make fun of the place in Mexico where she was from. She wrote the following response:

Message no. 3526[Branch from no. 2790]
Posted by Rosalinda on Saturday, March 30, 2002 5:43pm
Subject Re: TV and children
Hi slayter...i dont like your comments and at this
moment im angry with you.

you know that my city is a beautiful place. We have a
lot of cars..almost all people have a jaguar
there...antoher thing is that i dont like to hear that
you compare mi city with a town...you need to go there
and meet every single part of my place...

Slayter responded in an apologetic tone, e.g., he used a very polite form of address:

"dear Rosalinda", to demonstrate his good intensions:

Message no. 3559[Branch from no. 3526]
Posted by Guest LLED on Sunday, March 31, 2002 11:12pm
Subject Re: TV and children
dear rosalia , you dont have to get ungry, i say that
cause i dont know anything about navojoan culture, i
dont know if is a city as you said, or if is a town, any
way, i think some day i will go there i see it with my
own eyes.

Slayter

This exchange illustrated that much was going on between students from the same culture and that some students did not know well the cultures of their own countries. This example supports Amador's, a Mexican student's, revelation who wrote: "I realized that I pretended to know a lot about world issues and all that stuff, but I don't even know my own country" (BB message).

4.6.9 Coping with Tensions

There was an understanding among some students that the success of interaction depended on their own efforts. As Noburo, a Japanese student, said: "It depends on students whether they make use of WebCT or not." When, for example, Teresa, a Mexican student,

posted a message in which she expressed her frustration with Russian messages, she received the following reply from her classmate:

Message no 1668: [Branch from no. 1119] posted by Maria Fri Mar 01, 2002 14:45
Subject: how do you feel about this forum
Hi to all! I think if you want to talk about general topics, why don't you ask it to somebody?, or put you own topics as Leticia said. Be positive, you get boring if you want, so now smile and put some good topics, and somebody'll send you a reply
Bye

Also, the understanding that they themselves shaped the interaction made several students blame themselves in their poor participation: "maybe I was too lazy☹," rather than various contextual constraints.

4.6.10 Summary: Contradictions

In this section the study identified the following cross-cultural contradictions/tensions students encountered throughout the interaction:

Concerns: to participate or not to participate. I identified 6 types of anxiety associated with students' decision to participate or not in the online activity, such as: 1) novelty/unpredictability of the practice, 2) cultural concerns – anxiety to seem "strange" and to represent the whole country, 3) being afraid to not meet all the project requirements, 4) anxiety associated with the lack of experience with technology, 5) anxiety to seem less knowledgeable than others.

Unequal participation. The main tension within this theme was the one associated with the unequal transfer of information, when, for example, a Russian student complained that instead of writing about their holidays, a Japanese student sent a website.

Clash of genres: “Writing at the moment” and “writing beforehand.” The main issues that came up with regards to this tension was when some Mexican students accused Russian students of plagiarism because the latter perceived this online activity as an assignment, as opposed to viewing it as a free interaction.

Academic vs. casual, formal vs. informal topics.

Culture-specific vs. common topics. Some students found it challenging to write about their traditional cultures online due to the concern to give inaccurate information. Overall there was a dilemma if they should discuss commonly shared topics instead.

Common topic - different cross-cultural perspectives.

Missed communication.

Threatened national identity.

LEARNING

Research question 3: What kind of learning does I-CMC promote?

In this section I present the evidence of students’ learning through focusing on the following processes: 1) comparing and relating 2) dialogue and compromise as facilitating community formation and stretching the language 3) surface approach: avoiding stretching the language and 4) change of perspectives through process writing.

4.8 Learning Processes

4.8.1 Comparing and Relating

Theme 1: Learning through noticing differences. Throughout the project many students engaged in comparing their own cultures with cultures of their interlocutors.

Students found intercultural differences to be particularly interesting. As Kenji, a Japanese student, said:

Mexican and Russian have different opinions, feeling and thinking about specific topics. They have different ways of life although they grew up in the same generation, so I feel the differences between us are *interesting* for me and kinds of environment that we had give us strong influence. (Kenji, Journal entry)

Some other students expressed a similar opinion: "I think that there are much differents between the Russian and Mexican cultures. But these differents are so *interesting* for me" (Olesya). Students found differences to be particularly interesting, because they learned through noticing differences. Thus, for example, Leticia, a Mexican student said: "I think the opinion of the Japanese, the Russian and the Mexican students were always very different, which was good, because in this way we got to learn the cultures better." Tsuki, a Japanese student, brought the following example of intercultural learning:

I found some opinion of Russian student in WebCT. He said Russia is suffering from economic crisis now and there are lots of unemployment people but even he does not be satisfied with current Russian circumstance, he respected a present president. I *was surprised* because if I was in situation like as him I would criticize a present president and I would not show respect to him. So I think it is *interesting* that people have different view and different way of thinking.If I discuss about some issue with Russian people and Mexican people, I will find different answer that I never think of it. Also I may find similarity with them. Those of thing are great discovery for me. (Journal entry)

Theme 2: Learning through noticing both differences and similarities. Students realized that differences and similarities were two sides of the same coin. Kaneko, a Japanese student, wrote:

Mexican and Russian cultures are different from Japanese and Canadian culture, so we can learn different things each other, That's very interesting. For example, we have different holidays and different religions. I think that to learn different things is very fantastic. On the other hand, I also think that to notice similarities is interesting. For instance, although we are in different culture, we love same music, movies, sports and books. Some of the students might be my close friends. That's very good.

(Journal entry)

Theme 3: Learning one's own culture through comparison. In another example, when Elisa, a Mexican student, and Kostya, a Russian student, discussed the topic "Corruption" they compared the situations in their two countries. In the interview Kostya reflected on this interaction and said that the Russian situation is better: "[O.B: So we accuse the system and they accuse themselves in promoting corruption?] Yes, they accuse themselves. If they have such attitude, everything should start changing but nothing changes. And we, compared to them, have changes." In her interview, Elisa also recalled this interaction and, paradoxically, said that, in her view, the situation in Mexico was better:

They gave me the opportunity to compare my culture with theirs... . They are so similar to mexicans in so many ways, but i think that they have more problems than us and now i want to learn more about them, before i didnt think about russians, i only knew they existed, but i hadn't any interesting in them.

Theme 4: Learning about oneself through comparison. Students compared not only their ideas, cultural behaviours and products, but also their writing:

O: Did you compare your writing with other students' writing?

Alla: It is always like this – people always compare. E.g. if a person writes well, why can not I do it as well? And you begin to put efforts

O: ☺ [Who did you like to interact with?]

Alla: I liked Salvador – he is so clever, it is even intimidating (O: Yeah?) Yes. (O: Intimidating to communicate?) Yes. I don't know, you might seem childish compared to him.

4.8.2 Dialogue and Compromise: Stretching the Language

Lamy and Goodfellow (1999) argue that reflective dialogues contribute to development of communicative L2, and, consequently, facilitate community development. In this section we will take a close look at the example of the dialogue between a Japanese, a Mexican and a Russian female students, which stretched their language and promoted community development.

Luda, a Russian student, posted a message “About public values” in which she described the value of mutual help among people who live in the cold climate. Luda's message is a critical narrative in which she provides explanation for the cultural behaviour of people from her country:

Message no. 500

Posted by Luda on Mon Feb 18, 2002 02:03

Subject: About public values...

I think that one of the most important characteristics of our nation is the **kindness and mutual aid**. Earlier, when Sakha people lived in alaaases very far from each other, to travel in winter on a horse was very dangerous. Even now it's very easy to freeze to death if your car is broken, because built-up areas situated far from each other. So, at that times, everyone was ought to receive the traveller as a guest. Or there were neglected houses to stay for a night. And every traveller who stayed there was to prepare the firewood for the next traveller, when leaving. I think that the difficult conditions of the life taught people to help each other. The disinterested assistance is rated highly. Also, the clear conscience is valued very much. A man without conscience is thought to be almost the worst man. **To be a good man is valued more than to be a rich & well-known man.**

Dolores, a Mexican student, replied the next day. From the first two sentences of her message it is evident that she learned something new that she did not know before this interaction. However, Dolores missed Luda's point and, instead, began to talk about the importance of being polite:

Message no. 624:[Branch from no. 500]
Posted by **Dolores** on Tue Feb 19, 2002 09:57
Subject: re: About public values...

Hi Luda
It was **curious** to read your messages about how people tend to be more polite in cold places. **I couldn't actually know very much about it since I live in the middle of a desert.** Winters are actually really cold, but it has never snowed, or at least not in Hermosillo. There are other few places in Sonora, like cananea and yecora, where it has. Going back to the main topic of this discussion I think that public values are really important no matter where you are. **Saying hello, please,** thanks, simple words like that, and being polite in general with everyone even if you don't know that person gives a good image of who you are. And I'm not sure if it's a universal thing, but you know what it's said: "Treat others the way you would like to be treated".

Luda engaged in negotiation of meaning with Dolores. She first thanked her for her reply and then wrote that Dolores misunderstood her message, and explained what she really meant. Luda wrote that she was talking not about verbal politeness, but, rather, about non-

verbal gratitude on a broader level, when every good deed is always paid back, but not necessarily verbally and right away.

Message no. 796:[Branch from no. 624]
Posted by **Luda** on Wed Feb 20, 2002 02:03
Subject: About public values...

Thank you ...Dalia for your answers. But I would like to note, that when I told about the assistance, I **didn't meant the politeness**. Saying "Hello", "Thanks", "Good bye" or "Forgive me" - is not the real kindness. For example, Sakha people almost never say "Forgive me". There are no such words in Sakha language, **we used to feel another person without words**. Sometimes it looks like the Sakha people are very cold people. But it isn't so: **even if we feel the strong emotions we just can't find the words to show it.**

Because Luda was talking about the issue which is characteristic to high-context cultures, her message seemed familiar to Mayako, a Japanese student, who wrote in response:

Message no. 1366: [Branch from no. 796]
Posted by **Mayako** on Tue Feb 26, 2002 20:30
Subject: re: About public values...

Hi! Luda! I was impressed that there are no need to **express with words to get through to other people**. I can feel something warm mentally at the same time . I think that because there are some people who does not do kind action but just says kind words, which make me sometimes not be able to believe people.

After this message personally addressed to Luda, Mayako wrote one more message in which she opened up a discussion about punctuality, another public value. Mayako received responses from both Mexican and Russian students. Interesting is the final message written by Luda in which she expressed her satisfaction with Mayako's understanding of her point:

Message no. 3859[Branch from no. 3838]
Posted by **Luda** on Mon Feb 18, 2002 02:03
Subject: About public values...
Hello, there! I think that at least we came to the **understanding! We are speaking about the same things!** I'm very glad, Maya, that you understood me. So, what about the punctuality, I think that these are the

natural things. But as the Sakha have been technolised not so for a long time, we prefer to talk face to face. And if my friend will say "Thank you" in a few days, but face to face, I think that I won't feel sad. The fact that he didn't forgot about it will be enough for me. May be this is the difference between the Japanese and Sakha.

This interaction made possible due to contributions from three students, and more importantly, due to Luda's investment in the topic. She demonstrated herself as a student who has a deep approach to interaction. She did not give up when she ran across misunderstanding, instead, she made an effort to bring her point through, thereby, practicing her persuasive writing. If we are to characterize this exchange, we can say that this is a dialogue, which has all its characteristics: a) when the meaning is negotiated, b) the interaction is sustained over time, c) the messages are socially contingent and d) end in consensus. As Luda wrote: "I think that at least we came to the understanding! We are speaking about the same things! I'm very glad, Mayako, that you understood me." Several students reported, that consensus, or the sense of the shared world, was accompanied by the sense of a deep satisfaction with interaction.

In another example of interaction between Yasu, a Japanese students and Alla, a Russian student we can again witness the creation of a shared world between these two girls expressed in Yasu's following reflection:

One Russian student introduced us to their traditional food and *I was very curious* about their food. The way of cooking, materials for *the dish sounded very unique* and *I felt like trying the dish* she introduced us. I replied the message and introduced Japanese meals. I wrote about sushi and other meals which I think are good ones to introduce. Then she replied my message again and *I was really happy* to find her

respond today. *I found a joy of communication now.* Even we are in the distant country, *we can still share our knowledge and culture.* (Interview)

Highlighted words in Yasu's reflection reveal that she really enjoyed her dialogue with Anna and demonstrated principles responsive to Safonova's "Dialogue of cultures" (1996) such as "viewing other cultures as equal, yet unique and complimentary to one's native culture." Yasu's reflection was also responsive to Byram's (1997) criteria of the competent intercultural communicator, who demonstrates curiosity and openness toward other cultures.

4.8.3 Surface Approach: Avoiding Stretching the Language

In the next example I ask the opposite question: "In what cases is the language not stretched, intercultural learning does not take place, and the community formation is not facilitated?" Takashi, a Japanese student, posted a message titled "Japanese culture" in which he wrote about gambling:

Message no. 1442

Posted by **Takashi** on Wednesday, February 27, 2002 11:26am

Subject Japanese Culture

Hi, Mikhail. I want to talk about my country, Japan. I think that Japan is one of the interesting countries, because **we have many gamble, like Pachinko, Slot ,and so on.** You are excited in these stuff even if you might loose your money. And we have many **Izakaya** where we can drink beer, and hang over. Of course, we have to go to school, but **it is easy to get credit** because Japanese education system emphasizes on until high school education.

Takashi's message can be characterized as a stream of consciousness, rather than a carefully written encounter of Japanese culture. Takashi used a Japanese word "Izakaya" which was not familiar to Mexicans and Russians, however, he did not explain what it was.

He demonstrated very little awareness of how others might understand his message, and if his message provided complete information about his culture. Zhanna, a Russian student, asked Takashi to clarify what “Gamble”, “Pachinko” and “Slot” were:

Message no. 2313[Branch from no. 1442]
Posted by **Zhanna** on Tuesday, March 12, 2002 8:07pm
Subject Re: Japanese Culture
Hi Takashi! My name is Zhanna. I'am from Russia.
I read your topic it was very interesting. But i don't
understand **what is the Gamble, Pachinko and Slot**. I'm
lookind forward to hearing from you.

Takashi responded that it was difficult to explain what it was through online interaction. Instead, he suggested Zhanna to check it via the Internet and also provided information about another element of modern Japanese culture – namely “Gokon party”:

Message no. 2336[Branch from no. 2313]
Posted by **Takashi** on Wednesday, March 13, 2002 11:31am
Subject Re: Japanese Culture
Sorry, it is **very difficutt** to explain these gambles in
web discussion. **You can check the information about
these via internet.** Instead of these, I want to
introduce other Japanese culture. We have '**Gokon
Party" at our ages.** This party is a meeting for un-
known friends, and if someone likes other one, he or
she ask him or her phone number. To be honest, the
porpose of Gokon is for picking up.

Takashi used the avoidance strategy, because he felt reluctant to explain the terms Zhanna asked him about. He wrote what was easier for him, something that came up to his mind on the spot, and that did not require any cognitive and linguistic efforts. In this example Takashi took a surface approach – he was not willing to engage in constructive dialogue and remained on the conversational “stream of consciousness” level.

Taro, another Japanese student, supplemented the writing of Takashi, which, he thought, was not accurate and not informative enough:

Message no. 2337[Branch from no. 2313]
Posted by **Taro** on Wednesday, March 13, 2002 11:32am
Subject Re: Japanese Culture

hi, TAKASHI OBA and everyone. i'd like to add some information on taro's explanation about japanese gambling culture. yes, i'd say japanese people like gambling. but not all of them. actually, i've never gambled before but lots of my friends are into it and lose pretty much money. i guess takuzo is one of the guys who loses... hehehe.. in japan, gambling, especially horse race, plays an important role in one city's economy. the money that comes from those kind of gambling benefits the city. i guess that's one of the reasons why gambling is popular in japan.

Taro, who demonstrated a critical and deep approach in this exchange was likely to benefit from this interaction more than Takashi in terms of developing his critical thinking and communicative competence. By supporting the dialogue and using social moves and humour, Taro also contributed to community development.

4.8.4 Change of Perspectives through Process Writing

Analysis of interaction protocols allowed me to capture a few moments in which it is possible to trace changes in students' perspectives under the influence of other students' opinions.

Example 1

In the following exchange, Yuka criticized the Japanese system of education, which, in her view, lacked a critical approach and reinforced memorization. Her critique was based on comparison of Japanese education with education in Canada:

Message no. 3096[Branch from no. 3020]
Posted by **Yuka** on Thursday, March 21, 2002 7:24pm
Subject Re: Education
I'm not satisfied with Japanese education system, because we just had to **memorize** all the time when we were in elementary, junior high, and high schools. I didn't like that. I prefer thinking why than just memorizing things. How did or do you study in Russian and Mexico?

So I prefer studying here in Canada than Japan, though I have to go back in one month or so...

What do you think about this?

Yuka

Tina, a Russian student, expressed a totally different perspective on Russian education, which was very positive:

Message no. 3442[Branch from no. 3096]
Posted by **Tina** on Wednesday, March 27, 2002 7:42pm
Subject Re: Education
Hi Yuka! **Here in Russia we have very difficult, but excellent education (I think).** I don't want to be unmodesty, but the greatest scintists, best specialists in the world are from Russia. :) I'm agree with all of you: the whole process of education is too long and boring. Although it depends from your teachers and subjects.

Tina's message made Yuka rethink what she had written before and to take a less critical stance. Yuka recalled that when she was a student in Japan, they did not only engage in memorization, but also discussed different topics, and that their courses were not always boring. In addition, Tina's message evoked Yuka's curiosity in the Russian educational system:

Message no. 3481[Branch from no. 3442]
Posted by **Yuka** on Friday, March 29, 2002 12:43am
Subject Re: Education
Hi, Tina, What do you think is the excellent education?

We just memorized lots of kinds of things in Japan untill high school. I guess I didn't really "think critically" at that time. **I thought that some topics and subjects were interesting, though.**

But once you enter an university in Japan, you have to write essays, papers. **We also have to duscuss in exams, not just mamorixing terms and so on.** we also have to discuss or present in English classes, for example.

The ways of studying are kinda different. **I guess it depends on what we are studying, though.**

Do you guys ask questions in class a lot?

Yuka

This example makes us wonder if this change of Yuka's perspective indicates learning. We can assume that Yuka learned that some Russian students were proud of their education, and that one should be more careful about critiquing elements of one's own culture because national pride is at stake and generalization is not desirable in such kind of communication. Rather, it is important to see both negative and positive sides of one's own culture.

Example 2

In this example, Elisa, a Mexican student, posted her opinion about Spanish or Japanese languages that had a potential to become a lingua franca instead of English:

Message no. 3728[Branch from no. 2635]
Posted by **Elisa** on Friday, April 5, 2002 7:27am
Subject Re: English as a global language
Hi Marc!

Well, English is one of the most important languages right now in part because the economic power of USA and the Internet, because Internet started in USA and most of thing about it are in English, in my world, the computer system world English is very important, all the programming languages are based in English, and most of the information about computers and systems is in this language.

I think that if another language besides English should be an official international language, that would be **Spanish**, because of the large number of countries that speaks Spanish, **or Japanese**, because Japan is a very important country and is becoming even more powerful.

Be happy!!

Yuka, a Japanese student, on the other hand, suggested that Chinese might become a lingua franca because of the large number of its speakers:

Message no. 3743[Branch from no. 3728]
Posted by **Yuka** on Saturday, April 6, 2002 1:15am
Subject Re: English as a global language
Hi, What about Chinese? Regarding the number of people

who speaks Chinese, I think there are a great many people who speak Chinese in the world.

Yuka

Yuka's opinion reminded Elisa the points that she ignored and made her write a new, more thoughtful and critical message:

Message no. 3753[Branch from no. 3743]
Posted by **Elisa** on Saturday, April 6, 2002 1:32pm
Subject Re: English as a global language
Hi there!!

Is true, most of the people in this planet speaks that language, but is **only one country**, but in the other hand we have English and Spanish, if you look at a map, you will see that in extention English for example cover more territory, you have some of the biggest countries speaking English, such as USA, Canada and Australia to name a few, and many countries speak that language. If we see economic power I think English is the best option, the other options are German or Japanese. So I think, that **for extention English and Spanish** are the option, **for power English and Japanese** and by number Chinesse, but English win because have two nominations, so I thing English will continuing as the more spread language.

Be happy!!

In both examples we see the advantages of writing on the bulletin board because students received feedback not only from their instructors, but from their peers. Students engaged in the process writing, which involved several turns before they expressed all their arguments. In the process they were motivated to rethink their arguments and came up with renewed perspectives.

4.9 Learning Outcomes

After discussing learning processes that present evidence of students' development/or not of communicative competence and critical thinking, I now turn to a discussion of students' perceptions of learning.

4.9.1 Improvement (or not) of Intercultural Communicative Competence

In forum "A" learning took place due to the significant increase of critical reflections in the case of Mexican (from 0.5 to 1.7) and Russian (from 0.1 to 1.5) students. However, the number of questions and social interaction decreased across students from three cultures. At the same time, there was an increase in factual messages and phatic interaction:

Table 4. 25 Functions of Interaction in Forum A – Averages per Person

Forum A	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
1.Social interaction	1.2	0.5	1.6	1.1	1.0	0.7
2. Reporting facts	0.7	0.7	1.8	2.4	2.3	3.1
3. Critical reflections	0.6	0.8	0.5	1.7	0.1	1.5
4. Questions	1.0	0.6	1.1	0.4	0.9	0.8
5.Phatic interaction	0.2	0.2	0.4	0.7	0.3	1.0

In comparison, in forum B the number of social interaction and fact-reporting messages decreased in the second round across three cultures. An especially significant decrease of fact-reporting messages could be observed in the case of Russian students – from 2.6 in the first round to 1.4 in the second round. At the same time, the number of critical messages increased significantly and exceeded the number of fact-reporting messages across three cultures. In forum B Japanese and Mexican students decreased the number of questions, whereas, Russian students significantly increased the number of questions. Finally, phatic interaction was not as significant across three cultures in forum B compared to forum A.

Therefore, the interaction in forum B was more successful as more students reported that they had a sense of community and satisfaction with communication.

Table 4. 26 Functions of Interaction in Forum B – Averages per Person

Forum B	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 1	Stage 2
1. Social interaction	1.0	0.7	2.2	0.8	1.5	1.5
2. Reporting facts	0.7	0.6	1.6	1.4	2.6	1.4
3. Critical reflections	0.4	1.1	0.7	1.8	0.4	1.7
4. Questions	1.3	0.9	1.2	0.6	0.1	0.8
5. Phatic interaction	0.1	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.4	0.0

The improvement of interaction in the second stage in two forums was also reflected in a dramatic decrease of unanswered threads initiated by the Russian students (Table 4.22).

4.9.2 Change of Attitudes (or not) toward Each Other

As the survey demonstrated, the attitudes of 38% of Mexican students toward Russian students became less positive (Table 4.27). This might be related to generalization that Mexican students made about Russian students' plagiarism. As Slayter, a Mexican student said in the interview, "I realized responsibility of representing a whole culture - when one does copy-paste, you feel like everyone is going to do it." In contrast, Japanese students, did not change attitudes about Russian students to the worse. Also, Japanese students' perception of Russians might have been influenced by me, their teaching assistant from Russia. As for the Russian students, half of them reported that their attitude toward Japanese and Mexicans remained the same, mostly because they did not receive the kind of

information from Japanese and Mexicans that would radically change their attitudes toward them.

Table 4. 27 Change of Attitude toward Communication Partners

Attitude	Japanese toward				Mexicans toward				Russians toward			
	Mexicans		Russians		Japanese		Russians		Japanese		Mexicans	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
More Positive	25	59.5	27	69.2	21	61.8	14	41.2	18	51.4	14	40.0
Less Positive	1	2.4	2	5.1	3	8.8	13	38.2	1	2.9	2	5.7
Same	16	38.1	10	25.6	10	29.4	7	20.6	16	45.7	19	54.3
Total	42	100.0	39	100.0	34	100.0	34	100.0	35	100.0	35	100.0

4.9.3 Students' Perceptions and Reflections on Learning

... What I've gained are *different points of view* and very direct visions and impressions about other countries as told by residents (Salvador)

As the survey demonstrated, 91.1% of Japanese students reported that they improved their knowledge about other cultures and intercultural understanding. Next thing they thought they improved was their knowledge about their own culture. Most likely, Japanese students pointed at these improvements not as a result of participation in the project, but because of learning through their everyday intercultural experiences in Canada as well as through their courses on intercultural issues.

Table 4. 28 Student Perceptions of Learning

Aspects of Learning	Japanese		Mexican		Russian	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Knowledge about other cultures	41	91.1	29	81.1	34	87.2
Intercultural understanding	40	88.9	30	82.9	17	43.6
Knowledge about own culture	32	71.1	10	29.4	14	35.9

Communication skills in English	31	68.9	22	62.9	29	74.4
Sense of belonging to global community	31	68.9	24	68.6	14	35.9
Reading comprehension	30	66.7	28	77.8	24	61.5
Vocabulary	25	55.6	25	69.4	19	48.7
Informal writing	25	55.6	24	70.6	24	61.5
Critical thinking	24	53.3	20	57.1	15	38.5
Academic writing	11	24.4	17	48.6	21	53.8

Slightly more than 80% of Mexican students reported that they improved their intercultural understanding and knowledge about other cultures. In addition, 77.8% of Mexican students reported that they improved their reading comprehension. As for the Russian students, 87.2% of them reported that they improved their knowledge about other cultures as well as communication skills in English and informal writing.

The Russian students began to participate in the project with anticipation to improve their academic writing, therefore, the higher percentage of Russian participants (53.8%) (compared to 24.4% of Japanese and 48.6% of Mexicans) reported its improvement. More Russian students (53.8% vs. 61.5%) said that they improved their informal writing. For most of them, being familiar only with the genre of writing business letters, informal interaction with the students of the same age was a new experience. As Alya, a Russian student, said:

What we improved is not academic English, but the way to express our own opinion (thoughts). In our classes we have a lack of it. We are not asked “what do you think about this or that?” We are simply given a topic and we must “give a birth” to something. And here you are simply interested and write according to interests.

(Interview)

Interviews also identified the following major themes with regards to students' learning:

Theme 1: BB as the first step toward learning cultures. Some students viewed the interaction on the bulletin board as the first step to learn other cultures, helpful when they would meet representatives of these cultures face-to-face:

[I learned] many basic things about both Japanese and Russian culture, this will absolutely be useful to me in the future where globalization is common and we need to know about other countries and cultures. It can be assessed that its *the first step on learning about their culture to treat them right and know what to expect from them.*

(Francisco, Interview)

Similarly, Nori, a Japanese student, wrote in her message:

Message no. 2996[Branch from no. 2567]
Posted by Nori on Wednesday, March 20, 2002 11:47am
Subject Re: What is your opinion about online discussions?
...It is very important opportunity to know about other cultures. It might be helpful to communicate with Mexican and Russian people when I meet them. Common knowledge about their cultures makes me easy to make friends. I want to go to Mexico and Russia someday. If I have knowledge, I would not be confused when I meet different culture with which I am not familiar, and I can enjoy myself there...

Some other Japanese students shared Naoko's opinion as well. As Tsuki wrote, "If I did not join this WebCT BB, I would not be interested in Russia forever" (Journal). Also:

I feel like that if I do not have opportunities to talk and to know people from a different country, I might not be even interested about the country. However once I meet someone from a country and talk to the person, I will feel like I really want to know the culture and country. It is just like a discovery of new things in my life. ...In

my case, it is a usual signal that I start to learn about new cultures. (Miki, Journal entry)

Theme 2: Learning pieces of information. Instead of gaining a holistic perspective about other cultures, students learned “pieces of information”:

Message no. 2814[Branch from no. 2566]
Posted by Takeshi on Tuesday, March 19, 2002 12:38am
Subject Re: What is your opinion about online discussions?

Now, I found one thing I have to tell. That is we have to absorb **lots of pieces of information** for the arguments of WebCT. **More we talk, more we understand,** which **brings us to study more** about the affairs that we argue. We are not able to talk without any piece of information or knowledge. Thus, **getting pieces of information** and knowledge is surely important.

Today, I have **several talks** about politics, environment, travel, and other issues with Mexicans and Russians, and I am quite enjoying it. I hope I can make nice friends with them through this project.

Some students also learned additional information about other students' personalities and cultural behaviours. Some Russian students, for example, wrote: “I liked the message written by *Akiko - she wrote about war and peace - I never thought of what she wrote about,* I did not think that people might be interested in such issues.” (Shura, interview). “I learned that the foreigners are more relaxed, free, they always express their own thoughts. I noticed that our communicative styles were different - foreigners are more relaxed and free than we are” (Luda, interview). Also:

Mexicans wrote that people think they were poor, but in fact they are not. It turned out that Japanese are more americanized. E.g. many Japanese wrote about their love of baseball, Kenji wrote about his “Harley Davidson.” That was something new to me. (Shura, interview)

Dario, a Mexican student, wrote:

I learned that *russians love to "copy paste"*, but they are also very interesting when they do their work in a correct form. Japanese are not as "closed" as it's said, they are very happy and love to talk about many different topics, they are absolutely more free than I thought. (Mid-interview)

Theme 3: BB as improving intercultural awareness rather than L2. Many students thought that the bulletin board was useful not for the L2 improvement, but for development of intercultural awareness: "For cultural understanding this bulletin board is good idea, but I think this bb is not so good for improving English ability, it's better to include some native English speaker" (Yuko, journal).

Those who did not feel that they improved their L2 said that it was because they were not pointed at errors: "When you are not pointed at the mistakes - how can you improve your English?" (Kenji, Interview) "Even though you wrote a lot and practice, there's no one to correct your mistakes, so you didn't really learn something new" (Dolores, Interview).

Theme 4: Practice as equivalent to learning. Those students who thought that they improved their L2, explained their progress by the fact that *the more one practices, the more one improves his/her language*:

Yes, I feel that every time that we (non-English speakers) are reading, and writing more and more English, we are improving it. I feel that my abilities to write, and my skills to read and understand more things are improving since I'm in this forum.

(Jose)

Some students reflected on their learning in the following manner:

"I do not think I can improve my English directly through this, but I spend some time to post my opinion on it. Composing my thought and tell other students clearly have become easier through this discussion, maybe" (Yukako).

"It makes you think at the discussed problem a lot and moreover think in English! (as for me)" (Alla)

Theme 5: Focus on form as improving L2. Monika said that focus on form and noticing features of language which had not been familiar before was crucial for her language improvement: "you can learn english because, in that way you see what is wrong in their writtings and what is good, because for example, I try to write in the best form I can" (Monika). Teresa added: "Yes, maybe [improvement was] not in my pronuntiation, or grammar, but it pushes me to try to write good, trying not to make many mistakes in my spelling, etc." Similarly, Salvador said:

"It improves my writing in several ways, the first one being, of course, practice. It also helps me reinforce my English because I must "proof read", so to say, the message that I'm reading, picking up the mistakes and thinking of ways of correcting them" (Interview)

Indeed, through interaction protocols analysis I found that students tended to repeat expressions used by other students. For example, Ines, a Mexican student, wrote: "I am a sporty girl, I love almost all sport. I play basketball and weight lifting." Miki, a Japanese student responded: "I think it's cool that you play weight lifting!" In the same message Miki asked: "A California roll is quite popular for Canadians. Do you know what it is?" Later on, Ines repeated this same question in her reply: "About the Mexican food, is delicious too, the most typical food are the "taquitos" that is a tortilla roll (do you know what it is?)" Thus, we

can see that students, in fact, borrowed both correct (“do you know what it is?”) and wrong (“play weight-lifting”) expressions.

In addition, some students reported that they used the following strategies that might have improved their learning:

- “I tried to write in a way so others would want to read my messages.”
- “I compared my own writing/thinking with other people’s.”
- “When I was interested in a topic, I searched for more on it on the Internet.”
- “Before writing something about my country I checked information in the books”
- “I corrected mistakes in the word document.”
- “I tried to write my best to not look less knowledgeable in the eyes of instructors and classmates.”
- “I liked to reread my messages, when I reread, I corrected my mistakes. It is somehow interesting to reread your own writings even when significant time has passed. If I don’t correct, it means I like my messages.” (Alla, interview)

The first statement “I tried to write in a way so others would want to read my messages” serves as an evidence that some students had a sense of audience and made an attempt to sound “attractive” and with minimum errors. In contrast, an approach taken by Shura, a Russian student, was unlikely to lead to any language, culture, and content improvement: “I wrote in simple sentences to avoid mistakes. When interacted I used simple words. I never used dictionary.”

Theme 6: Increased tolerance. Some students also reported that the project made them feel more tolerant toward others’ opinions: “Well, it taught you a little bit more about being tolerant with other, and not discriminate people for having different beliefs I became more

open, and flexible to other people's beliefs" (Dolores, MS). "I became more precocious in dealing with cultures." Also: "I became less picky and more tolerant to others' opinions. ...After project I have such attitude – let them speak, each has his or her own opinion" (Olesya, RS).

Theme 7: Increased self-awareness. Some students increased their self-awareness. For example, they said:

Japanese students:

- "My opinion is not strong enough."
- "My English is not good enough."
- "I am not so flexible."
- "I tend to write short/long messages."

Mexican students:

- "I tend to be overacting and over-prejudiced when see copy-paste – it's not good."
- "I don't like to write too long, I go straight to the point."
- "On the bulletin board I was careful to not offend others, usually I am not like that."

Russian students:

As we discussed in the "Contradictions" section, the Russian students thought that the level of English of Japanese and Mexican students would be much higher than their level. Through the project they found out that other students' level of English was similar to theirs and said: "I was not sure in myself in my knowledge of language. And this project gave me an opportunity to look at their level and compare it with mine; I realized that somebody knows English less than me" (Kostya). "Thanks to this project I finally feel confident to interact with foreigners" (Asya).

In addition, some Russian students were proud that they managed to participate in the project despite the constraints of their local context: "I gained more confidence that we participated in this project, we were not expelled, or punished - we went through it" (Zhanna). Those Russian students who were not electronically literate, said:

- "I increased my speed of typing."
- "I subscribed for e-mail for the first time."
- "I gained some experience in such work."
- "At last I feel myself freely with computers and realize their importance."

Theme 8: BB project as too short to promote learning. Some students who did not feel they improved their intercultural awareness and L2, said: "I need more kinds of interaction with other people to become global," and "My concept of foreign people did not change, I just talked to persons from Japan and Russia."

4.10 Summary: Learning

In this section the study discussed the following processes that manifested students learning:

- Comparing and relating.
- Dialogue and compromise: stretching the language.
- Change of perspectives through process writing.

These learning processes were contrasted with the example of a surface approach to interaction (avoiding stretching the language) which was the opposite to learning.

In order to present the quantitative results of students' learning, I coded interaction in two forums based on Byram's, Lamy and Goodfellow's and O'Dowd's models. I compared

the number of phatic and critical messages in stages 1 and 2 of the project. The study found that during the first stage of the project students tended to be more social, whereas, during the second stage they became more critical which increased their potential of intercultural learning.

The study also found that the project resulted in over 30% of Mexican students gaining negative impression about Russian students because they disliked their genre of writing which they characterized as plagiarism. The study identified the following themes that emerged from the interview data and reflected students perceptions about learning: 1) BB as the first step toward learning cultures, 2) Learning pieces of information, 3) BB as improving intercultural awareness rather than L2, 4) Practice as equivalent to learning, 5) Focus on form as improving L2, 6) Increased tolerance 7) Increased self-awareness, 8) BB project as too short to promote learning.

When the project was over, students responded to the final question of the survey "Would you participate in similar projects again in the future?" in the following manner:

Table 4. 29 Students Willingness (or not) to Participate in the Future Projects

	Japanese		Mexicans		Russians	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	25	56.8	20	55.6	25	73.5
No	3	6.8	4	11.1	0	0
Maybe	16	36.4	12	33.3	9	26.5
Total	44	100.0	36	100.0	34	100.0

As a majority of students from all three cultures responded positively, their answers indicated the success of the project. I would like to finish this section with the words of George, a Russian student who wrote when the project was over:

You do great job by arranging such projects. People far away from the Western University have possibilities to communicate with the students abroad. Of course, it's not a staging tour or exchange program, but it quite interesting and advantageous. I'd like you to arrange such projects in further, but not only for "chosen" ones. It'd be great to offer it to the students who are interested in it, but have no chance to do it.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the summary of the study and important conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter IV. It provides a discussion of the implications for action and recommendations for further research.

5.1 Summary of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a thick and rich description of interpretation and understanding of the complex nature of intercultural telecollaboration, including the relationship between its participants, computer technologies, local and global contexts; cross-cultural contradictions, and learning.

To meet this purpose this study examined the international online computer conference in 4 WebCT forums which joined 52 Japanese, 37 Mexican, and 46 Russian English learners. The following were the guiding questions asked in this study:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between contexts, participants and information technologies?
2. What are the cross-cultural contradictions/tensions of International telecollaboration?
3. What kind of learning does I-CMC promote?

5.2 Review of the Methodology

Sources of data consisted of the written transcripts of the online exchanges as well as interviews, pre- and post- project surveys, journals, project evaluations and participant observation.

In this study I looked beyond the texts of interaction to the broader contextual dynamics that shaped and were shaped by those texts. Therefore, I structured the analysis of data within three broad dimensions: Contexts, Contradictions, and Learning. The dimension “Contexts” included the characteristics of the 1) geopolitical structures, 2) institutional contexts, 3) context of interaction (including elements of the Activity System such as an access to computer technologies, the ways the project was integrated into the courses, affordances and constraints of online environments etc.) and 4) students’ agency. The emphasis was on defining to what extent students shaped the environments and environments shaped students’ participation.

The dimension “Contradictions” captured the “how” aspect of interaction. Contradictions were identified as a result of the analysis of interview data and supported by examples from the interaction protocols. Finally, analysis of the dimension “Learning” focused on learning processes and outcomes of the interaction identified through surveys, interviews and interaction protocol data.

5.3 Major Findings

The findings of this study were based on my ICETA model (Figure 3.3) introduced in the Methodology section. According to this model, the Intercultural online community was viewed as a separate activity system mediated by computer technologies, evolving by its own rules, with the subjects having their own personal and collective objectives, as well as roles they played within the community. This online activity system was embedded in institutional, and geopolitical contexts, which also represented broader activity systems which were interconnected with the online community.

The following is a summary of the key findings based on the exploration of the relationships between participants, computer technologies and contexts; contradiction as well as learning processes and outcomes of the interaction. The discussion of the relationship between contexts, computer technologies and participants is built around two themes: “When contexts shape students’ participation” and “When students shape participation.”

5.3.1 When Contexts Shape Students’ Participation

In the “Contexts” section I analyzed the interplay between three contextual layers: Geopolitical, Institutional, Context of interaction and students’ Agency. Even though students from three cultures engaged in the same task, their participation was shaped by affordances and constraints of the contextual layers and students’ individual differences. First of all, students were positioned subjects who came to the bulletin board with a previous history of participation in other activity systems and certain agendas formed by the discourses of their local contexts and broader geopolitical structures. In particular, there was a relationship between students’ participation and their positioning as socially-constructed subjects caught up in the unequal power relations which some students thought existed between their countries. The students’ imagined sense of community (Anderson, 1991; Pavlenko & Norton, in press) or lack thereof with non-native speakers was an additional variable influencing their willingness to interact with one another as was their pragmatic interest in the countries of their interlocutors. Some Japanese students’ self-perception of being “monocultural” citizens in multicultural Canada evoked their interest in other cultures. The stereotypes about students’ countries, created by mass media, also served as an incentive for interaction in order to dispel or confirm these stereotypes.

Institutional context provided students with tools to enter the online activity system and to mediate their interaction. Whereas in Canadian and Mexican contexts students had unlimited access to computers and the Internet, this was not the case in the Russian context. The limited access to computers and the Internet impacted participation of many Russian students in the following ways:

- Many Russian students wrote their messages off-line, and demonstrated very limited online reading activity
- Participation in the project was more time consuming for them than for the Japanese and Mexican students.
- Many Russian students had higher anxiety levels associated with their limited experience with computer technologies.

The large number of participants and differences in their goals and needs, as well as the inconvenient organization of threaded discussion and message overload, constrained community development. Instead of forming one community of learners, students tended to form multiple communities based on the commonalities of their interests and personal attraction.

Online context became the place where the diversity of students' identities and approaches to interaction and learning came into direct contact and were re-negotiated. In this context it was the student agency that became the most important in shaping interaction supporting the proposition that "it is not a question of different culture and language systems which confront each other in cultural encounters, but of interacting individuals who produce, negotiate or defend meanings and capitals" (Christensen, 1994, p.37; translation by Byram, 1997; p. 40). This study found that students' participation was influenced the most by the

institutional context and context of interaction, rather than by broader geopolitical structures. This can be explained by the fact, that the farther apart personal relationships between students were, the weaker the links between them became. On geopolitical and institutional levels these links were imagined. As soon as students gained actual access to interaction, the distance between them decreased and their imagined affiliations were reconsidered.

These findings also fit within Claxton's (2002) "social historical discourse" and the discourse of the "irreducible situated moment" framework with regards to learning and development. According to social historical discourse, the individuals find themselves 'positioned' within structures, practices and 'discourses' that have a cultural, rather than psychological reality. "Irreducible situated moment" or "mediated action" discourse has a micro-level focus on situated immediate actions. Claxton argues that the social historical discourses "being abstractions and tendencies ... are never able fully to catch the intricate complexity of the unique moment in which a person interacts with an unprecedented material, social and cultural setting" (p. 25).

5.3.2 When Students Shape Participation

According to Rassool (2002), online environments allowed us to move away "from being mere readers and spectators to becoming *active participants* in the shaping, deconstruction and re-construction of text, literally, experientially and metaphorically" (p. 176). Potts (2002) found that in her study the bulletin board contributed to the students' learning in a way that "it seemed to go beyond affording agency and to actually facilitating the exercising of agency" (p. 204). Similarly, in this study the bulletin board facilitated students' agency. I analyzed students' participation or not through the focus on

communicative need (object/motive), division of labour, emerged community and students' decision making. Learners themselves shaped the interaction based on their individual approaches to learning and interaction as well as by the communicative choices they made.

Students had to adapt to online environments, characterized by multiple discussions taking place simultaneously and by a large number of messages through making purposeful choices about what messages to read or not to read and what messages to reply to or not to reply to as well as how much effort to invest in this activity. By doing this, they engaged in the process of shaping the environment. The interaction evolved due to the students' contributions – in this regards, quality and quantity of their participation became instrumental in keeping the bulletin board functioning and rolling in different directions. Such factors as forms of greetings and closures, choices to interact with their own classmates vs. foreign students, and dialogues vs. phatic interaction facilitated or hindered community formation.

The study found that students' agency operated in accordance with their identities of deep, strategic or surface communicators. Although all students participated in interaction, not all of them engaged in true dialogue of cultures that would result in creation of a new cultural meaning. Some students did not enter the core inner circle (Figure 3.3) because they remained on the level of surface interaction or because they were interested solely in students from their own cultures. There was no correlation between quality and quantity of students' participation, though. Thus, deep learners, such as Taro from Japan, Amador from Mexico, and Zina from Russia were passive writers. On the other hand, the surface learners such as Karl and Sierra from Mexico, and Natasha from Russia were among the most active participants.

5.3.3 Contradictions

The study found a number of contradictions that echo some of the tensions identified in the studies by Chase et al. (2002), Kramsch and Thorne (2002), O'Dowd (2003) and Ware (2003, forthcoming), among which were the following:

Unequal participation. Many Russian students complained that Japanese and Mexican students did not provide them with sufficient information about their countries and initiated significantly less threads. Lopsided interaction was also found in Ware's (2003) study.

Clash of genres: writing "at the moment" and writing "beforehand." Similarly to finding by Kramsch and Thorne (2003), the clash of genres became the main tension that students encountered. Interestingly, the Japanese and Mexican students interpreted the Russian students' dispassionate style of writing in two different ways. Many Mexican students accused the Russian students of plagiarism (cutting and pasting), whereas some Japanese students assigned the Russian genre to the cultural features of the latter or to the fact that they might have received an assignment to write in that certain style. This reveals the shaping force of the broader institutional level when Mexican students were influenced by the anti-plagiarism program running at their university and transferred their concerns to the BB.

Academic vs. casual, formal vs. informal topics. Students had a dilemma of choosing between the level of formality/informality that was predetermined by the overall object/motive of students' engagement in this activity and their professional or personal (youth) identities. This finding echoes findings by Chase et al. (2002) and Ware (2003). Chase et al., for example, attribute the rich mix of communication styles to cultural gaps that

sometimes exist between speakers and the dominant “cyberculture,” as well as between individual speakers.

Missed communication. Similarly to the finding by Ware (2003), who coined the term “missed communication” there were incidents of missed communication in this study as well when learners appeared to be communicating, yet, were talking about two different things and not reaching consensus. The main reason for missed communication was the students’ lack of attention, or failure to de-centre or approach the text from the perspective of their communication partners. Missed communication was also facilitated by technology itself due to such features as the delayed response time and the lack of social consequences for dropping topics allowing participants to be less active conversational partners. In addition, the ability to engage in communication at a deeper level of intercultural inquiry was impeded by the online discourse norm that favoured brevity over sustained attention (Ware, in press).

Concern: to participate or not to participate. The study identified that students experienced six types of anxiety: 1) novelty/unpredictability of the practice, 2) cultural concerns – anxiety to seem “strange” and anxiety to represent the whole country, 3) Being afraid to not meet all the project requirements, 4) anxiety associated with the lack of experience with technology, 5) anxiety to seem less knowledgeable than others. Overarching cultural anxiety might be related to the proposition of Gudykunst (1994) that the greater the cultural gap between communicators is, the greater is the “anxiety” on the part of communicators.

Culture-specific vs. Common topics. As Russian students strictly followed the plan, they posted the largest number of messages introducing aspects of their culture which contradicted other students’ preferences. It turned out that most students preferred to discuss

topics on modern issues, and topics they had background knowledge on, rather than topics unfamiliar and irrelevant to their immediate context of interaction.

Common topic – different perspectives. Students discussed common topics, but reflected their local discourses. In the example of interaction between Mexican and Russian students on racism, students expressed different discourses on that issue prevalent in their local contexts, which at times led to the difficulty to reach the understanding and agreement.

Threatened national identity. In the examples provided in this study, Mexican students were offended by the misspelled name of their country “MEXICA” instead of “MEXICO” (written in capital letters) and by mentioning negative stereotypes about Mexico such as “gangsters and narcotics.” This example points at the emotional involvement of students in the interaction activity and the power of text as a mediating channel. This intercultural online communication reminded some students of the diversity and internal complexity of relationships which existed not only between countries but within their own countries, evident in the heated exchange between two Mexican students – Rosalinda and Slayter. In what follows I will discuss the underlying reasons for all the contradictions found in this study.

Differences in Educational Traditions (Curricular vs. Interactive)

Similarly to the finding by Sandholtz, Ringstaff, and Dwyer (1997) in their 10-year-long study of the use of technology in US public schools, this study found that sociocultural context strongly influenced how computers were used by students and that this influence was mediated by beliefs of individual teachers and their experience with technology. Chase et al. (2002) also found that the online culture reflects the values of its developers and “is overtly

maintained by guideline creation, and covertly maintained by facilitators and participants” (p. 5).

In this study I characterized the approach of the Japanese instructor as “democratic and multitasks,” the approach of the Mexican instructor as “balanced and social justice” and the approach of the Russian instructor as “authoritarian and teacher centered.” Whereas the Japanese and Mexican instructors advocated the interactive learning paradigm, the Russian instructor was a proponent of the curricular paradigm. Both approaches were described by Lemke (1998) as follows:

The curricular paradigm assumes that someone else will decide what you need to know, and will arrange for you to learn it all in a fixed order and on a fixed timetable. This is the educational paradigm of industrial capitalism and factory-based mass production. It ...resembles them in its authoritarianism, top-down planning, rigidity, economies of scale, and general unsuitability to the new information-based “fast-capitalist” world.

The interactive learning paradigm assumes that people determine what they need to know based on their participation in activities where such needs arise, and in consultation with knowledgeable specialists; that they learn in the order that suits them, at a comfortable pace, and just in time to make use of what they learn. It is the paradigm of access to information, rather than imposition of learning. It is the paradigm of how people with power and resources choose to learn.

Students also came from the traditions favoured by their instructors and educational contexts. The interactive learning paradigm, reinforced by the forum, contradicted the Russian instructor’s and students’ expectations. Thus, many Russian students reported that they expected the project to be “official”, requiring preliminary preparation. When they

began to participate, they realized that the project was different from what they expected as Japanese and Mexican students were very social and informal. However, not all Russian students were happy with the bulletin board being informal as it was in conflict with the educational tradition they came from oriented toward a high degree of control and formality. The suggestion of some Russian students such as this one: "May be it'll be useful to have some additional materials on the BB? Listening exercises, some on-line text-book on the English language" (Alla) - indicates, that students were representing the curriculum learning paradigm favouring fixed grammar drills and exercises ("writing beforehand"), which differed drastically from an interactive learning paradigm based on spontaneous interaction ("writing at the moment").

Despite representing the different educational tradition, many Russian students demonstrated flexibility and readiness to change their interaction style which was evident in how they decreased the number of fact-reporting messages and increased the number of critical messages and questions in the second stage of the project (Tables 4.25, 4.26).

The finding of the transfer of learning approaches from one educational context to another supports the findings of other researchers who also found that students' schema for classroom interaction and learning can be easily transferred to on-line spaces. The researchers of the use of CMC in work groups (Zack & McKenny, 1995) found that social structures are carried over from the physical world into the on-line space. These researchers expressed their concern over students' failure to use on-line spaces to engage in deeper and more reflective conversations (see e.g. Angeli, Bonk & Hara, 1998; Bonk & King, 1998).

Differences in Approaches to Culture Learning

Another reason for misunderstanding in online environments stemmed from students' different frames of reference with regards to what culture learning should be about. When some students engaged in a description of their cultures, they were coming from a *behaviorist* perspective, based on the understanding of culture as a static and fixed commodity - the 5th skill to be acquired. Opposite to this approach was a symbolist approach, when students negotiated the meaning around issues raised from the context of interaction.

Differences in Individual Background Knowledge (Schemas)

Contradictions also took place because students had different schemas (background knowledge) evident in their different interpretations of the information, which was based on what they wanted to hear rather than what their interaction partners really meant. Differences in schemas often resulted in "missed communication" described in the example of the interaction between Amador and Yuka.

In addition, whatever students discussed, their views were based on the discourses prevalent in their cultural contexts (as in the example of interaction between Teresa and Alla), reflecting the argument, that: "Materially constituted within specific ideological milieu, texts enter into dialogue with social and political discourses and the institutions, processes and practices in which they are embedded" (Rassool, 2001; p. 158-159).

Approaches to Communication: Deep vs. Strategic vs. Surface

This study found that there was a clash between deep, strategic and surface communicators. Thus, deep communicators produced long, error-free and critical messages.

When they received short, phatic and full of errors responses of surface communicators, there was a clear incompatibility between their genres of writing.

Differences in Cultures-of-Use of Computer Technologies

More importantly, contradictions were caused by differences in cultures-of-use of computer technologies across 3 socio-cultural contexts, and, therefore, students from three countries had different participation and learning experiences. The Japanese and Mexican students' participation was mediated by instructors in a democratic regime in that they had freedom to write on the topics of their personal interest and during the time convenient for them. They also interacted directly online due to their free and unlimited access to the Internet. The Russian students' participation, on the other hand, was constrained by their lack of access to computer tools and was heavily mediated by instructor's control. The Russian students began their participation cycle in the library, continued at home where they typed their messages in the word document, saved them on the floppy disk, proceeded in the lab where they posted their messages, gave the floppy disk to their instructor for a control check up every week and then began this cycle again. In case of the Japanese and Mexican students, their local contexts with free access to the Internet afforded them more options, as opposed to the Russian students. For example, they could make printouts of interaction, download messages from all four forums at once, they could bookmark the page and go to the BB at any time. Thus, the differences in students' cultures-of-use of the electronic bulletin board was another important underlying reason for the differences in students' participation and cross-cultural contradictions.

5.3.4 Same Task: Different Activities

To sum up, all identified contradictions/tensions students came across in this study had their origin in:

- Different cultures-of-use of the computer technologies in three socio-cultural contexts that students have been interacting from.
- Identities of deep, strategic and surface learners.
- Students' different frames of references with regards to:
 - Approaches to learning in general (curricular, teacher centered vs. interactive) and valuing different cultural discursive norms.
 - Approaches to learning culture (behaviourist vs. symbolist).
 - Individual background knowledge (schemas).

5.3.5 Learning Outcomes of Interaction

Learning by Expanding within an Activity System

Chase et al. (2002) and Reeder et al. (2004) argue that there is an "Internet culture" or "cyberculture." Features of the observed cyberculture include "etiquette, rules of formality/informality, flexibility, interaction style (including greetings/farewells, use of apology), expectations of response speed, and work ethic (tensions between relationship building communications and 'on-task' communications)" (p. 5). Similar to the process of socialization in the second culture, learners socialize in the cyberculture through learning how to co-exist with others and master new values and discourses. In this study, those students who had unlimited access to computer technologies and who found the interaction to

be interesting, engaged in the process of expanding their participation from the periphery to the center. The evidence of students' learning to participate in online environments was well captured in Tina's and Olya's reflections (Tables 4.23, 4.24) as well as in what many Russian students said: "*we understood by the end that we need to simply interact, and not to write academic essays.*" Therefore, I argue, that some students learned how to participate in highly interactive online environments. Students' expertise developed dynamically through continuing socialization in the community's discourse.

Students learned what was appropriate and what was not through running across contradictions. These contradictions resulted in the emergence of the rules/norms the online interaction evolved by and which participants understood and agreed upon. In this case *competence drove experience* when, in order to achieve the competence defined by a community, newcomers transformed their experience until it fit within the regime (Wenger, 1998). These rules were not imposed by anyone, rather, they emerged as a result of students' negotiating new ways of acting together. The tension around the discussion of the appropriateness of culture-specific vs. global and academic vs. casual topics illustrates an example of students' negotiation of new norms and rules. In addition, students seemed to appreciate common human values – such as humour, honesty, and charismatic personalities. Through reading and analyzing messages, some students figured out that the genre of debate was quite stimulating and desirable for them. Reeder et al. (2004) argue that the genre of questions/debate is valued by aggressive/competitive individualistic behaviours of Anglo-American engineers and scientists "seeking quick and open access to others like themselves" (Anderson, 1995, p. 13; cited in Reeder, et al. 2004). It is interesting that some student in this study who came from Japanese, Mexican and Russian youth cultures also favoured the genre

of debate which indicates that they were highly influenced by the Internet culture and globalization in general.

Learning/or not Language, Culture, and Content

“There are differences among us, but I still don't know them well enough to say which are attributable to their *culture and which to their own personality*” (Salvador, IRC interview).

The study found evidence for both learning and not as a result of students' participation in I-CMC. First of all, the interaction ran across missed communication, when students failed to decentre and did not understand or avoided the points expressed by their communication partners. Examples of missed communication were found in the description of contradictions: “Missed communication” and “Threatened national identity.” Next, an analysis based on the Byram's (1997), Lamy and Goodfellow's (1999), and O'Dowd's (2003) models identified that students wrote a large number of phatic and fact-based messages, thereby, avoiding engagement with intercultural reflective dialogue. Thus, it is legitimate to say that learning opportunities for students had been avoided or shut down in several instances.

On the other hand, the assumption that learning language and culture took place cannot be denied either. Many students reported the improvement of those aspects of language and culture that they wanted to improve (table 4.28). I demonstrated the learning processes through the examples of the interaction between Mayako, a Japanese student, and Luda, a Russian student, as well as Yasu and Alla who engaged in a “dialogue of cultures” (Safonova, 1996) resulting in an emergence of the third place (Kramsch, 1993) (Figure 3.3). I compared these learning moments with the surface approach demonstrated by Takashi (a

Japanese student) who used an avoidance strategy by refusing to respond to a question asked by Zhanna (a Russian student), thereby, shutting down possibilities for community development and stretching his language. It was found that students were using such cognitive strategies as comparing (focusing on differences and similarities) and relating in order to gain inter-cultural awareness. This replicates the finding by Gray (1999) who in his study of how school-children form the understanding of their online peers found that they used three strategies: description, inference and comparison. It also indicates that some students had an awareness that they were participating in the intercultural community as they were constantly alerted about the differences they could encounter any minute, and, therefore, were always in a state of comparing and relating the cultures of their partners with their own cultures. The analysis of social interaction demonstrated that the number of messages containing critical reflections increased in the second stage of interaction, indicating increased chances for students' intercultural learning (Tables 4.25 & 4.26). Thus, in this study I found evidence for both learning and not in the online context.

Due to the short time period of the project, deep changes in students' world-views can hardly be expected; rather, the study captured minor changes in their perspectives. Instead of gaining a holistic view of the issues discussed, students gained "bits and pieces" of information. This is not unique to online environments: "Neither the nature of the learning nor the factors that contributed to learning are unique to electronic bulletin boards. They are familiar to anyone who has experienced a good learning space, physical or virtual" (Potts, 2002; p. 190). We gain an impression of learning "bits and pieces" when we talk with our friends, read newspapers or watch TV. This information does not always seem educational, however, at times, a single phrase heard from various sources may prove to be really

educational and insightful, shedding light on things that were hard to understand before.

These educational moments are individual and depend on students' schemas and background knowledge. Therefore, I argue that individual students had different educational moments through participation in online activity and through being exposed to "bits and pieces" of diverse information. Personally, the most educational moments for me were when I read messages that touched me emotionally (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002) such as well-written textured narratives, like the one written by Semyon about his pet. In relation to this, Lamott (1994) argues that when people write a little every day (as the students in this project), they end up writing about the drama of humankind. "Life is complicated, and we grapple with events that can be confusing [and difficult to understand in other ways]. Sometimes writers are so gifted that they can shed a little light on these events" (cited in Garner & Gullingham, 1996; p. 49).

This project resulted in some Mexican students' gaining a negative impression of Russian students because of the cross-cultural contradictions and tensions described above, and, particularly, because many Mexican students were disappointed with the dispassionate messages of some Russian students that they interpreted as plagiarism. No matter how much effort students invested in their writing and how much content they transferred, when their genre of writing was formal and dispassionate, Mexican students tended not to relate it to the differences in frames of reference and cultures-of-use of the bulletin board, but rather interpreted it as the Russian students' arrogance and lack of consideration. In relation to this, it is important to remember that impressions are made based on the genres of writing that, according to Kress (2003),

deal not with what is talked about, ...but with who acts ...in relation to whom, with the question of purposes. This is directly in the domain of social interaction: the questions that arise are questions such as “who are the participants involved in the social action as it takes place?” and “what are their social relations with each other?”(p. 84).

Lam (2000) also argues that: “...a prominent aspect of CMC is the use of textual and other semiotic tools to create communal affiliations and construct social roles and narrative representations of self” (p. 477). Online texts seemed to be perceived by students as an image, a symbolic personification of an individual. Such signs as emoticons, capital letters, habitual ways of opening and closing messages used by some students served as the virtual representation of students’ actual personalities. Given this, students could strengthen or weaken their virtual representation by the consistent use of certain types of signatures, capital letters, and other forms of expressing their personality.

5.4 Toward Communicative Competence in Intercultural Online Environments

Kramsch & Thorne (2002) argue, that we need “to prepare students to deal with global communicative practices that require far more than local communicative competence” (p. 100). The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing discussion of what it means to be communicatively competent in a global online environments that connect speakers of English as a second language interacting from various parts of the world in the virtual zone of contact.

Theme 1: Appropriateness vs. Desirability. Communicative competence refers to readers/users’ ability to participate adequately in discourse with regard to the

appropriateness of contributions to the context of interaction (Rassool, 2001). However, we should not forget that successful communication means different things in different socio-cultural contexts. Therefore, Norton and Kamal (2003) working within the critical approach argue that theories of communicative competence need to address not only what is “appropriate,” but what is desirable in the teaching of English internationally.

Furthermore, they argue that “rules of use” is an inadequate pedagogical goal if teachers are concerned with the relationship between language, identity, and power and if they ask “whose interests do such rules serve?” Similarly, Kramsch and Thorne (2002) express their concern that “those who own personal computers and email accounts may unwittingly impose their genres globally onto others ...at the expense of other... discourses” (p. 99, see also Reeder, et al., 2004). The question raised is whether culturally diverse students should change their communicative behaviour in order to better fit to one another’s frames of conversational norms and rules or further reinforce their cultural ways with words, thus, contributing to dialect diversity. Belz (2003) proposes a constructive balanced perspective, which I share as well. In her view, “becoming interculturally competent may be not so much about adopting the words and interactional norms of the other in his or her language as it is about *performing judicious acts of linguistic hybridity in a broadened discursive space*” (p. 22). The concept of linguistic hybridity was also well-articulated by the New London Group (1996):

Instead of core culture and national standards, the realm of the civic is a space for the negotiation of a different sort of social order: where differences are actively recognized, where these differences are negotiated in such a way that they complement each other, and where people have the chance to expand their cultural

and linguistic repertoires so that they can access a broader range of cultural and institutional resources (p.69).

Indeed, in this study students were satisfied the most when the CMC was used to assist them in expressing their own voices and critically choosing among new genres and discourses. The communication was successful when students were expressing their own opinions, instead of recycling facts. Students were interested in reading messages reflecting personal opinions and were reluctant to read dispassionate, distanced and formal messages. In contrast, as a means of imposing control and structure, and transferring facts, online communication came across resistance and contradictions.

Theme 2: ICC as an interactive process. According to Rassool (1999, p. 23), communicative competence within a technological global world is the interactive process in which meanings are produced dynamically between lived experience and information technology. As Norton and Kamal (2003) argue, “the extent to which we are informed will, in turn, affect the extent to which we respond to and act upon our understanding.” This study found that the extent of being informed and operating with the “quality of information, and the level of efficiency in acquiring, processing, and applying it” (Rassool, 1999; p. 238) was directly linked to students’ access or lack thereof to computer technologies and differences in their cultures of use.

The study found that those students who had free access to computer technologies and had an adequate level of electronic literacy, had more opportunities to actively shape interaction. Olya and Tina, for example, were disappointed when Japanese and Mexican students, instead of “describing” cultural aspects of their countries, suggested them to find this information on the Internet. Whereas for Japanese, Mexican, and some Russian students

there was a clear distinction between research (information search) and communication functions of computer literacy, there was no such understanding for Olya and Tina who were restricted by slow and expensive Internet connection. In comparison, those Russian students who were on the other side of the digital and information divide, engaged in the activity similarly to Japanese and Mexican students. Thus, I argue, that access to technology, prior experience of working on a highly interactive bb and encountering otherness helped students to critically approach the rules set by their instructor and shaped interaction in their own ways.

Therefore, as this study demonstrated, it is not enough to have “knowledge” about tacit cultural aspects, rules of discourse, and culturally desirable forms of communication, it is important to have an adequate culture-of-use of the computer technologies which allows for flexible participation and reinforcement of an interactive learning paradigm. To be communicatively competent is, therefore, to be aware of the relationship between people, contexts, artefacts and material and economic differences which exist between haves and have-nots. Participants need to have an understanding of how different literacy practices might depend on resources available to learners in different socio-cultural contexts. With regards to material and economic differences between interaction partners, Thorne (2003) raises a profoundly important issue as to whether inter-cultural communication needs to explicitly take into account cross-class and cross-social material condition differences.

Theme 3: Importance of human agency. The study emphasizes the importance of human agency in intercultural projects, mainly, learners’ sensitivity to one another’s cultural identities and communicative styles. The success or failure of communication in online environments depends on learners’ agency in the same way as in face-to-face

communication. Being able to engage people is the art demanding an extraverted personality, a willingness to share and relate, diplomatic curiosity, and, most importantly, readiness to work toward the common goal.

5.4.1 The Crucial Role of Instructors

I agree with researchers of CMC (Kern, 2000; Warschauer, 1999; Kramsch & Thorne, 2002; Belz, 2003; Ware, in press) who argue that instructors play the key role in shaping online learning experiences for their students. This study also emphasizes the importance of teacher involvement in “discerning, identifying, explaining, and modelling culturally-contingent patterns of interaction in the absence of paralinguistic meaning signals” (Belz, 2003). In this study instructors mediated rules and objects of the interaction in accordance with their different educational philosophies and experiences with computer technologies. Differences in objectives/rules instructors set for their students were more than mere differences between teaching traditions – curricular paradigms associated with the acquisition metaphor and interactive learning paradigms associated with the participation metaphor - it was about instructors’ different levels of computer literacy. Therefore, I argue that instructors have a responsibility for adequate mediation of the project, and that they, themselves, need to have an adequate level of computer literacy and be ready to work collaboratively with other instructors and students.

5.5 Implications for Practice

Miki’s, a Japanese student’s reflection that the online environment is specifically designed to discuss cultural topics points to the fact that students come to the international

bulletin board with an increased level of intercultural sensitivity. Intercultural and online environments give students the opportunity to cross cultural borders evident in their cognitive processes of comparing and relating, and saliency of their cultural identities evident in tensions that took place because of their threatened cultural identity. Therefore, such international projects is a good instructional tool, which can help students develop their intercultural and global identities. Implementation and analysis of this project helped to identify the following implications for practice:

Raising an Awareness about the Relationship between the Word and the World. It is important to teach students about the relationship between the 'word' and the 'world', between textual and larger sociocultural practices (Lankshear et al., 1997). Learners should consider how different cultures-of-use, frames of references and practices might produce different outcomes, as happened in this study: "FLT needs ... to go beyond linguistic realizations of politeness to take account of the ways of living out of which others speak and write" (Byram, 1997; p. 4). Instructors need to provide learners with opportunities "to explore the extent to which social practices, ways of doing and being, and forms of knowledge are historical, contingent and transformable, rather than neutral, fixed and immutable" (Lankshear et al., 1997; p. 156). The ICETA model (Figure 3.3) can be used by instructors to assist students in understanding the complex interrelationship between contexts, computer technologies, and participation outcomes.

Teaching Genres. This study supports Kramsch and Thorne's (2002) argument that what needs to be negotiated is "not only the connotations of words... but the stylistic

conventions of the genre (formal/informal, edited/unedited, literate/orate), and more importantly, the whole discourse system to which that genre belongs” (p. 98). Therefore, instructors need to call students’ attention to how their writing genres demonstrate particular stances and carry traces of a wide range of contextually and culturally situated views.

Students need to see the differences that exist between online and off-line interaction. In online environments, for example: 1) Communicative “norms” can be displaced when moving from the physical to the virtual 2) A database of online interactions can increase the potential for a face-threatening context 3) Goals and pedagogical use of the exchange can be subverted (Ware, 2003). In addition, it is more difficult to operate the WebCT bulletin board, than with e-mail, as the network of interlocutors and discourses increases. Therefore, instead of trying to catch up with every message, students should be prompted to read messages selectively, based on their personal interest.

Emphasizing engaged participation. In online exchanges there is a need to stay engaged so the interaction does not develop into “missed” communication (Ware, 2003). In order to facilitate engagement, it is important to place an emphasis on *reading activity*, (understanding what exactly the interlocutor means, and reflecting on what was read) as well as to introduce netiquette “stances” that value intercultural engagement. Emphasis should be made on the investment of sufficient time in this activity and the increase of background knowledge of students’ communication partners’ countries.

As the findings of this study demonstrated, some students tended to easily withdraw from the online activity as soon as they ran across constraints inherent to bulletin board interaction, such as difficulty to navigate the large number of messages. Therefore, the

learners should be taught to be resilient; that is, to develop an “ability to stay intelligently engaged with a complex and unpredictable situation.” The opposite of resilience is fragility or – “the tendency to get upset and withdraw at the first sign of difficulty, and to shift from ‘learning mode’ into a defensive, self-protective stance” (Claxton, 2002; p. 28).

Moving away from the discourse of “otherness” and reinforcing “dialogue.”

Instructors should encourage less focus on cultural “otherness” and more focus on “how language opens up and closes down particular roles for partners” (Ware, in press). The focus should be on finding common ground and developing the sense of a common world through a “dialogue of cultures” (Byram, 1997; Safonova, 1996). When people are united around a common object, they have a lot of things to talk about, consequently, in online environments it is important to join students around speech activities that would evoke their communicative need and would be mutually desirable, satisfactory, emotionally charged, and engaging for everyone.

Facilitating students’ agency. It is instrumental to give students the freedom that would allow them to demonstrate their agency investment (Carey, 1999a,b: 2002). This recommendation supports’ Lamy and Goodfellow’s (1999) proposition that learners should negotiate not only the correctness of forms, but content so they can be positioned as experts by controlling what they discuss, thereby, increasing their chances for language acquisition.

As this study found, such “trivial” topics as “pets” can prove to be much more useful for students’ development of communicative competence than, e.g. the topic on “global warming.” The instructors, however, might disregard students’ choices, still dictating their own preferences, thereby, undermining one of Chapelle’s (2001) criteria of communicative

L2 development: “positive impact of a Computer Assisted Language Learning task.”

Therefore, it is of great importance to consider students’ interests when designing and selecting CMC tasks.

Focusing on identity development. This study reinforced the importance of personal differences with regards to participating in I-CMC interaction. Like in face-to-face communication, those students who offered interesting topics for discussion and were both social and critical, turned out to be the most popular among other students and linguistically and culturally benefited from the project. Therefore, instead of developing students’ discrete skills, it is important to educate them to be better communicators, learners, and people in general, remembering that education is about their identity formation (Cummins, 1996; Norton, 2000). It is important to go “beyond focusing only on cognitive development, but taking into account the whole person – body, mind and spirit” (Wells & Claxton, 2002; p. 5; Mahn & John-Steiner, 2002). The model of the deep learner who is a critical thinker, seeking common ground with others and having a well-rounded personality should be reinforced.

5.6 Recommendations for Further Research

Given that this study focused on three broad dimensions - Contexts, Contradictions and Learning in the intercultural online environment, it was based on an analysis of the most salient themes across these dimensions. Future research could focus on experiences of a few students or investigate in-depth one or two variables identified in this study, using micro-analysis and providing more specific theoretical background.

This study classified students into deep, strategic and surface learners, demonstrating

that students took different roles in interaction. However, more specific behavioural patterns can be investigated further. In particular, future studies may focus on how students positioned themselves and their partners in online discourse (cf. Belz, 2003), and how this positioning is both a product of and a producer of students' locally and culturally situated perspectives. The interesting and promising area is the investigation of how different styles of moderating influences student participation. There is substantial potential behind the linguistically grounded research techniques that can be used for the exploration of various aspects of online interaction. The study found that students' emotional involvement was crucial for their interest in interaction. More studies need to explore the affective factors of students' participation. It would be interesting to investigate the dynamics of students' participation over the longer time period and with other communication partners (Carey, 2000). Finally, the issue of how virtual cross-cultural encounters are woven back into real-time, in-class conversations remains a very interesting and an ambitious direction for future exploration (see discussion initiated by DePourbaix, 1992).

5.7 Significance of the Study

In the Introduction and Chapter Two I discussed the importance of studies that would provide a complex multi-layered picture of international telecollaboration. While this study cannot claim to have provided answers to all questions about the nature of international telecollaboration, it has provided tentative explanations for many of its aspects within Contexts, Contradictions and Learning dimensions.

This study is unique in that it involved a large number of culturally diverse students from other than the USA and European countries interacting in English on the electronic

bulletin board. The study broadened the contextual scope of research by conceptualizing the international telecollaboration as an Activity System embedded within the institutional, cultural and geopolitical contexts. Framing international telecollaboration within broader contexts addresses the gap in North American Sociocultural Theory which tended to neglect “the wider political and ideological settings in favour of a detailed concentration on the micro-dynamics of the individual family or classroom... and the local characteristics of ‘ZPD’” (Claxton, 2002; p. 26).

In my attempt to graphically represent the complexity of multi-layered telecollaborative activity, I developed the model of Intercultural Context-Embedded Telecollaborative Activity (ICETA) (Figure 3.3) which has both pedagogical and theoretical implications. It can be used by educators and researchers in developing similar projects and research design. By including into the research scope all elements of activity system such as tools, objects/motives, community (students and instructors), division of labour, rules/norms, contradictions and outcomes as well as broader contexts in which it was embedded, it was possible to demonstrate the multifaceted, complex nature of intercultural online environments. Thus, using both deductive and inductive methods, the study provided a thick and rich description of interpretation and understanding of the complex nature of intercultural telecollaboration, including the relationship between its participants, computer technologies, local and global contexts; cross-cultural contradictions and tensions, and the nature of learning through international telecollaboration.

Another theoretical implication of this study is that, based on the models by Byram (1997), Lamy & Goodfellow (1999), and O’Dowd (2003), I developed a model and a list of coding to measure the development of Intercultural communicative competence (Table 3.6).

The findings of this study contribute to the ongoing discussion of what it means to be communicatively competent in the intercultural online environments. Kramsch and Thorne (2002) argue that differences in students' frames of reference with regards to discursive norms of language use (genre) is instrumental in understanding communicative competence in global networking:

Between the global and the local lies genre, the social and historical base of our speech and thought. An understanding of this neglected dimension of foreign language teaching may lead to a reassessment of what we mean by "communicative competence" in a global world and what the communicative contact will be, upon which trust is based. (p. 100)

Thorne (2003) adds that radically different cultures-of-use of the Internet communication tools catalyze these genre differences: "When cultures-of-use do not minimally align, derived as they are from social-material conditions, the ideational worlds of intersubjectivity and phatic communion become a challenge to envision and difficult to achieve" (p. 47).

I elaborate on previous studies by demonstrating the importance of 1) students' frames of reference with regards to interaction and learning 2) students' cultures-of-use of computer technologies, mediated by instructors as it was in this study; and 3) students' agency in defining the meaning of being communicatively competent in International/Intercultural Online Environments.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Students' Descriptions of their Local Contexts

Alla (Russia)

Hi, yuka! Sorry for making you wait. As for the weather I want to say that [here] we have now -20 degrees because it's end of winter, but usual winter temperature here is -35-50 degrees. At the same time in other regions of [my republic] it may be 70 degrees below zero or like in [other town] -20 degrees. This wide difference maybe explained by the vast territory of the country (more than 3 million square kilometers). In summer we usually have +30 +35 degrees. I think it's rather hot. As for me I prefer +20 degrees, not higher. Alla P.S.: Please, tell me about [your] exchange program.

Arcadia (Mexico)

Hi Alla! My name is Arcadia, I'm 18 years old female and I'm Mexican. Let me tell you that in the place where I live, that is the northeast of Mexico, we have a very long summer and also very hot, we have temperatures about 45 C and 48 C, so you can see we live in kind of desert...now we are in the winter that is very nice, is not cold and also is not hot, is very comfortable! I heard that in Russia you have freezing temperatures about -20 C or something like that, I really shocked; but anyway I would like to meet Russia someday, cause I never had been there. Bye, see you!

Yuka (Japan)

Hi, Arcadia, I'm Yuka. I'm Japanese, but I'm studying in Vancouver, Canada now. It's nice there because it's not that cold, nor hot! Here, it's not so cold as in Russia, but it's raining all the time especially in Winter. It was clear last week, but it started raining again. How about in Mexico? Do you have nice weather? I wanna go down to Mexico some day!

Kaneko (Japan)

I live in Osaka which is kind of in Southern part of main land (Tokyo, capital of Japan is located about middle of the main land). Although we all speak same language, Japanese, there are lots of dialects depend on the area which people live. So I speak Osaka dialect which is quite strong and fast. Osaka is famous for commerce, so some of Osaka dialect came from their language. Recently a big theme park was built in our area which is really famous American theme park "Universal studio Japan". I've never been there, however there are tons of people and tourists go there since they opened. There are lots of people in our city, so when I go to university I always have some difficulties to get to there. I take two trains and bus to get there since my university is located quite far from my house (it's in [another city]). The trains are always crowded and there are thousands of business people or school students in a station. I really hate crowd, but it can't be helped.... Some of my friends live alone in apartment or mansion which is near from our university. My favourite place is maybe my room, because it's the best place to relax... ha-ha. And maybe in a café! There are many cool and pretty café, and I really love to just sit and relax as listening some cool music and reading some magazines or books. It's really nice and quiet. I really love that... The café has many style such as European style, Mexican style, Asian style.... And I also like to try some of their new menu, too!! Hummm....yummy!!

Salvador (Mexico)

Hello! I'm Salvador Hernandez, and I'm a 19 year old student of a [technical university] It's one of the widest spread universities here in Mexico, with campuses all over the place. Oh, and I study Information Systems Engeneering (it sounds geeky, but I spend sufficient time away from school, don't worry).

I live in the Mexican state of Sonora. Sonora is one of the northern states in Mexico, and it directly borders the American state of Arizona, and it's just to the right of Baja California. It's bordered in the south by the state of Sinaloa (where Mazatlan is). It's a mostly desertic state, so that means that it gets really hot in the summer (usually around 40C or 120F), but there is also high ground, where small forests grow, and there are beaches.

And now, about myself. I like to spend some time in the internet, chatting or sending e-mails, but I also like to hang out with friends, going to parties having fun and dancing. I really like cars, so I also like to spend time driving (if only there were better roads here☺). And I like to listen to all kinds of music, but I generally like to listen to rock (especially from bands like Pearl Jam, Stone Temple Pilots, and Tool).

Sorry for making this message long, but I got carried away, I'll happily answer any questions you have about my country and culture, so don't be shy and ask! Thank you for reading!

Sardana (Russia)

I'd like to tell you about traditions of my family. My family lives in the settlement far from the [] the capital of [our] Republic. We have private large wooden house. Sometimes being [in the city] I miss my native house very much. Sometimes I dream that it looks like big kind bear with bright large eyes, which is covered by snow. It seems to me that he is very happy to see me again. It was just opening. Our family has a lot of traditions. When member of our family leaves home for a long time or must accept a serious decision in his future life of has problems our mother asks guardian of fire to protect her children, to help them in their difficult moments, to support them, then she feeds it by a pancake with butter. As for holidays, we always celebrate holidays all together. Holiday day begins at the early morning. Every person has his own duty. For example, I usually cook a cake, my sister makes salads, my mother cooks piroshki – the national Russian dish. It looks like oval bun, inside of which there is a force-meet with rice. Also we have an unusual tradition to pass gold ring from one generation to another one. My grandmother gifted this ring to my mother when she was 18 years old. Then my mother presented me with the ring when I celebrated 18's birthday. As for me I continue family tradition and I will gift it to my daughter. And the last one is that our family likes sport very much. My mother likes volleyball, I like skating, sister goes in for tourism. Every summer our family enjoy watching national sport games such as wrestling, tag-of-war. They are the most interesting and the most popular games in our Republic. We like to have a rest in the forest near the river. We gather berries, mushrooms, swim and have fun. I like my home, my birthplace, nature, each berries, each trees, each flowers. I love my family and respect family traditions. I would like to know about your family traditions. Thank you for your time, Enjoy yourself.

Appendix B Survey Questions

Language and Technology and Intercultural Awareness Pre-Surveys

Demographic Information:

1. Age: 18-22 22-above
2. Gender: Male Female
3. Nationality

4. Do you own a computer?

Yes No

5. Do you have an Internet connection at home?

Yes No

6. How do you get online more often:

- A. From your room
- B. From computer lab
- C. From other place

7. How often do you use a computer for the purposes listed below? Please mark the appropriate response:

	Very often (5-9 times/week)	Often (1-4 times/week)	Not often (1-4 times/month)	Never
For word processing				
For searching for information on the WWW				
For sending E-mails				
For chatting on the Internet				
For playing games				

8. What frustrates you most about the WWW and technology?

9. Generally speaking how would you estimate your knowledge of:

	Very good	Good	Poor	None
A. American culture				
B. Canadian culture				
C. Japanese culture				
D. Mexican culture				
E. Russian culture				

10. Have you ever traveled/lived abroad? If your answer is yes, indicate where you went, how long you went for and your age at the time of the trip:

11. When you heard about participation in the Seminar what was your reaction (please circle one):

- A. I was excited and could not wait to start interacting with Mexicans and Russians
- B. This is a part of the course and I am neither excited nor indifferent
- C. Honestly, I don't want to participate in this activity
- D. Other:

12. What do you expect to learn from participation in this Intercultural Seminar?

Post-Survey

1. Did interaction on the bulletin board help you to improve (enhance) your:

a. academic writing	yes	no	may be
b. informal writing	yes	no	may be
c. reading comprehension	yes	no	may be
d. vocabulary	yes	no	may be
e. knowledge about other cultures	yes	no	may be
f. knowledge about own culture	yes	no	may be
g. critical thinking	yes	no	may be
h. communication skills in English	yes	no	may be
i. intercultural understanding	yes	no	may be
j. sense of belonging to a global community	yes	no	may be

2. What were your goals (select from 1 as the weakest to 5 as the strongest goal):

a. to learn more about other cultures	1	2	3	4	5
b. to practice and improve my English	1	2	3	4	5
c. to break stereotypes about my culture	1	2	3	4	5
d. I hoped to establish relationships with some of the students for the future partnership/travelling	1	2	3	4	5
e. to learn more about use of technology	1	2	3	4	5
f. to expand my knowledge in general	1	2	3	4	5
g. I did not have any particular goals					

3. Did you achieve your goals: a) yes, b) not really, c) some of them (please specify which ones, e.g.: a, b, c...): _____

4. What was your motivation for participation (select from 1 as the weakest to 5 as the strongest goal):

a. It was a course requirement	1	2	3	4	5
b. I was determined to achieve my goals	1	2	3	4	5
c. I was motivated by freedom to choose and offer topics and little instructor's control	1	2	3	4	5
d. I found the project quite interesting and I began to enjoy it	1	2	3	4	5
e. I was motivated by belief in the usefulness	1	2	3	4	5

- of the project for my professional growth
- | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| f. This was a unique opportunity to practice my English, and I did not want to miss it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| g. This was a unique opportunity to interact with students from these particular countries, and I did not want to miss it | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

5. What factors prevented you from posting messages at times or from participation in general (please circle as many as applied):

- a. I focused on other assignments instead
- b. I was overwhelmed with a number of messages
- c. I was afraid to seem less knowledgeable than others
- d. I was not satisfied with the topics and level of the discussions
- e. I expected more structure and control
- f. I did not want to put effort into reading & composing messages
- g. Technical problems
- h. Limited Internet access
- i. I had other reasons

6. Indicate how the project changed your attitude toward people from two other countries (please indicate your attitude toward Japanese and Russians separately):

- a. My attitude toward (a. Japanese, b. Russians) became more positive
- b. My attitude toward (a. Japanese, b. Russians) became less positive or
- c. My attitude toward (a. Japanese, b. Russians) remain the same

7. What is your attitude toward interaction with non-native speakers:

- a. positive b. negative c. neutral

8. Would you participate in similar projects again in the future?

- a. yes b. no c. may be

Age:

Gender:

Name (optional):

Appendix C Interview Questions

Online Mid-Interview

1. How do you feel about participation in this Intercultural online communication with Japanese/Russian students?
2. What motivates/discourages you to participate in this interaction?
3. Whose postings are you interested to read the most – Japanese, Russian or postings of your classmates? Why?
4. What do you think about practicing your English through interaction with non-native speakers (Japanese and Russians)?
5. Do you feel that this interaction improves your English skills (if yes, specify which ones)?
6. How often do you go to WebCT and how much time do you spend reading and writing messages on the average per day?
7. Additional comments, suggestions, concerns....

WebCT Project Follow-up: Questions for Students

1. What were some of the strongest features of this experience?
2. What did you learn? How might this be useful to you in your future?
3. Did you experience any frustration? Explain
4. What ideas do you have for improving the WebCT intercultural project?
5. Is there anything else you would like to add?

WebCT Project Follow-up: Questions for Instructors

1. Please describe:

- the context and conditions you were working in
- the course you were teaching (including readings)
- the students

2. Describe how the project was introduced to students and how it was implemented in your context

3. What were some of the strongest features of this experience?

4. What did you learn? How might this be useful to you in your future?

5. Did you experience any frustration? Explain

6. What ideas do you have for improving the WebCT intercultural project?

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Appendix D Students' Travel Abroad Experience

JAPANESE	n	%	MEXICANS			RUSSIANS	n	%
Asian countries	22	61.3	USA	24	63.2	Never traveled	10	35.7
USA	19	52.8	Canada	6	15.8	China	3	10.7
Europe	11	30.6	Western Europe	4	19.5	England	3	10.7
Australia	7	19.4	Puerto-Rico	1	2.6	Malta	3	10.7
Mexico	7	19.4	Acapulco	1	2.6	Turkey	3	10.7
England	5	13.9	Never traveled	2	5.3	Bulgaria	2	7.1
New Zealand	4	11.1	Total	38	100.0	Cyprus	1	3.6
Peru	2	5.6				France	1	3.6
Brazil	1	2.8				Greece	1	3.6
Balkan peninsula	1	2.8				Mongolia	1	3.6
India	1	2.8				Total	28	100.0
Moldive	1	2.8						
Never traveled	0							
Total	36	100.0						

Appendix E Students' Knowledge of Cultures

Japanese students

Knowledge of	V. good	Good	Poor	None
A. American culture	2.3	58.1	37.2	0.0
B. Canadian culture	16.3	79.1	4.7	0.0
C. Japanese culture	39.5	60.5	0.0	0.0
D. Mexican culture	4.7	37.2	41.9	16.3
E. Russian culture	0.0	27.9	27.9	44.2

Mexican students

Knowledge of	V. good	Good	Poor	None
A. American culture	51.6	45.2	3.2	0.0
B. Canadian culture	3.2	51.6	45.2	0.0
C. Japanese culture	0.0	34.4	56.3	6.3
D. Mexican culture	83.3	16.7	0.0	0.0
E. Russian culture	0.0	9.4	56.3	34.4

Russian students

Knowledge of	V. good	Good	Poor	None
A. American culture	23.3	51.2	20.9	4.7
B. Canadian culture	2.4	19.5	48.8	29.3
C. Japanese culture	7.3	43.9	41.5	7.3
D. Mexican culture	0.0	12.2	58.5	29.3
E. Russian culture	73.7	26.3	0.0	0.0

Appendix F The Most Popular Topics

CASUAL TOPICS – MODERN YOUTH IDENTITY

Intercultural marriages
How do you see yourself in the future?
Sport in our life
Meals
Fashion
What do you think about young marriages
Your opinion about horoscopes
St.Valentine's Day
alcohol, alcohol, alcohol
Corruption
Pets
Friends
Lord of the Ring
Cinema or TV? TV and children
Press
Computers
Superstition

GLOBAL ISSUES – GLOBAL IDENTITY

Environment
International Women day
What do you think of corruption and power of money?
September 11th 2001
Olympic Skaters: judges Blow It!

LOCAL CULTURE-SPECIFIC TOPICS – LOCAL IDENTITY

Japanese holidays
Japanese Culture
Greetings from Mexico
From Mexico!!!!!!
Something about Russia
Traditions of my native people
How young people can earn money in my country
Sports in my country

TOPICS ABOUT LANGUAGE AND CULTURE - INTERCULTURAL IDENTITY

Cultural stereotypes, Images, and Objective reality
Culture shock in Mexico
My ethnic, multilingual and global identities
National Identity
About Nationality and Language...

ACADEMIC TOPICS - PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY & LANGUAGE IDENTITY

What do you think about plagiarism?
What do you think about research ethics?
Nonverbal communication
My opinion about African Americans
Learning second language
English as a global language
Writing in English: enjoyable or painful?

Appendix G Breakdown of the Interaction Functions

Forum A (Stages 1, 2)	Japanese				Mexicans				Russians			
	F		M		F		M		F		M	
	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
1.1 Expressing agreement, solidarity	9	15	0	0	14	16	6	8	4	8	3	2
1.2 Thanks, invitation for interaction, positivism	31	2	2	0	14	4	6	1	19	9	4	3
1.3 Apologizing	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
1.4 Giving advice	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0
1.5 Explicitly stating interest/curiosity/learning	15	9	0	0	10	7	3	1	6	2	1	7
1.6 Expressing readiness to provide more details if asked	1	0	0	0	6	2	2	0	5	2	2	1
Social interaction (total)	58	26	3	0	44	30	17	10	36	21	12	13
1.7 Expressing disagreement, tension	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	1	1	0	0
1.8 Stating one's nationality	3	3	1	0	5	7	7	3	1	2	0	0
1.9 Referring to existing theories/articles/books	1	2	0	3	0	0	0	3	4	5	4	7
1.10 Leaving e-mail	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	7	0	4	0
2.1 Reporting information about one's own culture	12	15	2	1	15	31	13	16	43	36	9	27
2.2 Reporting negative sides of one's culture	4	6	0	1	2	11	2	5	2	6	1	7
2.3 Reporting information about other topics	2	1	2	0	2	0	1	0	6	13	7	3
2.4 Personal stories	8	0	0	0	13	0	3	0	14	0	9	0
2.5 Reporting info + personal story	7	12	1	1	10	18	4	9	11	32	5	19
Reporting facts	33	34	5	3	42	60	23	30	76	87	31	56
3.1 Critical reflection on home or target culture	19	26	2	3	15	33	3	26	1	27	4	34
3.2 Comparing 2 cultures	9	10	1	0	0	3	1	2	0	4	0	4
Critical reflections	28	36	3	3	15	36	4	28	1	31	4	38
4.1. "What do you think about it?"	2	2	0	0	1	2	1	1	2	3	0	7
4.2. "How about your country?"	8	6	0	1	1	2	0	1	0	1	0	2
4.3. Actual wording of the question	28	15	2	0	11	7	11	1	8	6	9	10
4.4. Personal questions: "Do you like...? Do you know?"	7	5	1	0	7	1	4	0	10	3	3	4
4.5 Asking about own culture	3	3	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	1
4.6 Request for additional info - Can you send me info?	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	6	0	2	0
Questions	48	31	3	1	21	12	18	3	27	13	14	24
5. Phatic interaction	11	7	0	3	3	9	13	16	8	35	7	11

Forum B (Stages 1, 2)	Japanese				Mexicans				Russians			
	F		M		F		M		F		M	
	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II	I	II
1.1 Expressing agreement, solidarity	4	12	4	1	8	5	9	9	5	19	1	1
1.2 Thanks, invitation for interaction, positivism	17	11	14	1	18	3	17	3	49	14	1	0
1.3 Apologizing	1	1	0	0	1	0	2	0	3	0	0	0
1.4 Advice	0	1	3	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0
1.5 Explicitly stating interest/curiosity	4	6	4	2	8	5	11	0	10	27	0	1
1.7 Expressing readiness to provide more details if asked	0	0	2	0	4	1	4	0	0	5	0	0
1. Social interaction	26	31	27	4	40	15	43	13	67	65	2	2
1.6 Expressing disagreement, tension	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1.8 Stating one's nationality	1	0	0	0	10	0	5	0	4	1	0	0
1.9 Referring to existing theories/articles/books	1	2	0	1	0	0	2	1	3	0	0	1
1.10 Leaving e-mail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	6	3	2
2.1 Reporting information about one's own culture	6	6	3	3	10	10	12	4	29	7	7	4
2.2 Reporting negative sides of one's culture	1	2	0	0	2	2	4	3	0	2	1	2
2.3 Reporting information about other topics	7	1	4	0	3	1	2	2	5	4	0	2
2.4 Reporting personal story	6	11	9	0	8	15	8	8	21	25	1	4
2.5 Reporting info + personal story	1	7	0	0	7	4	4	5	17	5	0	2
2.6 Reporting copied info	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	29	8	9	1
2. Reporting facts	21	27	16	3	30	32	30	22	99	51	18	15
3.1 Critical reflection on home or target culture	8	35	5	11	10	34	15	25	17	62	1	9
3.2 Comparing 2 cultures	4	6	4	3	0	5	0	2	1	8	0	1
3. Critical reflections	12	41	9	14	10	39	15	27	18	70	1	10
4.1 "What do you think about it?"	3	7	4	3	2	7	3	1	0	5	0	3
4.2 "How about your country?"	6	1	2	3	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
4.3 Actual wording of the question	17	15	8	3	10	7	10	2	0	10	1	8
4.4 Personal questions: "Do you like...?"	10	11	7	1	7	2	3	3	0	7	1	2
4.5 Asking about own culture	5	1	4	0	2	0	6	0	0	0	0	0
4.6 Request for additional information	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
4. Questions	41	35	25	10	22	17	22	6	22	3	14	
5. Phatic interaction	3	2	0	0	4	4	3	7	15	1	2	0

Appendix H WebCT Project Materials

INTRODUCTION TO INTERCULTURAL SEMINAR

We live in a highly interdependent and fragile world. The tragedy in New York on September 11, 2001 made us realize this once again. Obviously, there is a need for constructive dialogue between people and nations that would promote intercultural understanding and friendship. Therefore, we decided to offer you (our students and professors from four different countries - Japan, Mexico, Russia and Canada) an opportunity to participate in this on-line global seminar.

The aim of the Seminar is to give you opportunities to:

- Encourage intercultural understanding through dialogue by communicating with your peers globally.
- Practice and improve your academic English writing and critical thinking.
- Become familiar with cutting-edge communication technologies.
- Make international contacts and friends.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS

Once you logged in, please do the following:

1. Read how to use bulletin board (Go to Homepage and click **Bulletin Board Instructions** link)
Bulletin board is a space where you can read and post your messages. In this Seminar the bulletin board includes 4 students' discussion forums (groups) and a common forum - **Main**, where you will find:

- Instructors' Self-Introductions and
- All announcements and Seminar updates.

You will also meet new people here. On weeks 3 or 4 the guests might join **Main** forum, so all of you are required to visit it for updates every time you log in.

2. Read the Schedule

3. Read Course materials:

- Introduction
- Rhetorical Styles
- Assignments

When you write your messages try to use different Rhetorical styles - narrative, description, exposition, cause and effect, argument, process analysis, comparison or contrast. In this way you will have a chance to practice and master various styles of academic writing.

4. Go to Web-Resources and explore the websites about Japan, Mexico and Russia. Update your knowledge about geography, culture and history of these countries.

5. **Communication Tools** and **Study Tools**. **Communication tools** offer you a possibility to have a synchronous chat with any seminar participant. You can also send a private mail to anyone, simply by clicking the Private mail link. You can also create your personal Web-page using **Study Tools** (click on that link and follow instructions).

6. Read messages posted in your group and write your feedback. You are expected to write at least 5 messages per week, and read as many messages as possible. Remember that you can write good messages only if you read other students' postings first. Your final mark will be calculated based on the number of messages you will write and read, as well as on their quality.

Every week one or two major topics will be provided for discussions. These topics will be selected to:

1) Be responsive to the diversity of the participants.

2) Fit in the content of your face-to-face courses.

Some of the topics will be adopted from the LLED 226 course outline for Japanese students. We believe that all of you have sufficient background knowledge on various intercultural issues. In addition, because Japanese, Mexican and Russian students have different text books, we strongly encourage you to read the seminar on-line resources.

You are not required to strictly follow suggested topics. Feel free to offer and discuss other related topics of your interest. Simply, hit the "compose" button with a new theme to start a new threaded discussion. Depending on your topic you might write a little more or a little less. The content is more important than the number of words. Because you will be exposed to the writing of other students and have an opportunity to learn new vocabulary and grammar from one another, write as best as you can. Writing in academic language is highly encouraged.

SCHEDULE

Week 1 (January 21/28)

Writing an introductory letter to the group you are assigned to

Prepare a letter of introduction so that the students in the project will know something about you, your family, place of your birth (whether it is a small village or a big city). Be sure to include something memorable about yourself: a talent, an interesting hobby or experience.

Week 2 (February 4)

Comparative cultural patterns and values

Suggested topics for discussions:

- Customs, traditions, national holidays in your country

- Family traditions

- Value-orientations in your country:

- *Man-nature orientation.* How do people view their relation to nature (superior, inferior, or harmony)? What are the religious beliefs of your people?
- *Activity orientation.* Do people passively accept events, change events that are already happening or initiate events on their own? Do people in your country think of change as good or bad?
- *Time orientation.* Do people focus more on the past, present or future?
- *Relational orientation.* Is relationship between people in your country based on hierarchy, on group orientation (collectivism) or individualism?

Week 3 (February 11)

Comparative cultural patterns and values continued

- Please discuss any relevant topics of your interest (e.g. sports, music, books etc.)
- Discussion with a Guest speaker in the Conference Room (subject to change)

Week 4 (February 18)

Contact between cultures

- Suggested topics:
 - Globalization
 - Indigenous people of your country and European civilization
- Topics of your interest
- Discussions with the Guest speaker in the Conference Room

Week 5 (February 25)

Contact between cultures continued

Week 6 (March 4)

Challenges facing intercultural communication

- Suggested topic:
 - Intercultural marriage
 - Topics of your interest

Week 7 (March 11) - Week 11 (April 8)

Discussion of the topics of your interest

Weeks 11-12

Evaluation of the seminar

Additional Topics:

- Ethnicity
- Globalization
- Cultural stereotypes
- World economy
- Ethnocentrism
- Languages in contact
- Religion intolerance
- Tourism
- Gender issues
- Study abroad programs.