Chapter 16
Collaborative Writing 2.0: Socializing Critical, Cross-Cultural Agents Through Online, Project-Based Methodology

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ABSTRACT
Technology-enhanced language learning has broadened the horizons of collaboration in the L2 classroom. At the same time, it has brought the cultural component closer, enriching the overall picture for students when learning a foreign language. This highlights the need for students to develop solid cross-cultural skills regarding the meaning negotiation processes underlying the discursive practices of their respective L2 communities. Only by acknowledging the referential, semiological nature of language and understanding cultural practices in situated terms may students be truly socialized in their L2. This study explores the perception of students regarding wiki-based collaborative writing as a resource in the L2 classroom while paying special attention to the treatment of culture specific elements that may hinder effective cross-cultural communication in their L2.

INTRODUCTION
The way literacy is understood in contemporary settings, following the rapid introduction of ever-changing information and communication technologies, requires particular awareness of the new types of discourses and social practices that shape and justify the introduction of TELL in the L2 classroom (Chun, Smith, & Kern, 2016; Leu et al., 2014). Indeed, as Lam (2000) argues, foreign language education has to do with the development of linguistic skills as much as it does with the progressive socialisation of L2 learners into given discursive communities. These discursive communities, far from being self-existing, are constrained by institutional, social and economic power structures, rendering an overall dynamic, panta rhei model. Therefore, L2 learners, when exposed to such complexity in their foreign language, need to be reminded at all times of “the process by which meaning is produced, circulated,
consumed, commodified, and endlessly reproduced and re-negotiated in society” (Curtin & Gaither, 2007:35). This development of solid (cross)-cultural and critical skills is essential for L2 learners not only in order to detect the situated, constructed nature of social practices, but also to bridge the cultural divide between both communities. At the end of the day, such situated, power-bound notion of culture and social practices highlights the necessity for L2 learners to “be flexible in moving from one cultural context to another” (Chun et al., 2016:71), and, similarly, to be aware that the social practices embedded in a given culture are understood through discursive construction, which, in Foucauldian terms, enables and constrains speakers in aspects related to what can be said, by whom, where, when, and how, thus giving rise to the very subjective experience of learners as future members of a discursive community.

TELL in collaborative learning environments may indeed channel this dynamic, negotiated characterisation of discursive communities and foreign language education. Taking into account how technologies have contributed to global integration and transnational cultural construction, it follows that the introduction of those technologies in the L2 classroom may not only respond to contemporary ways to understand (higher) education but also to the changing idiosyncratic features of mankind and the progressive shift towards an economy based on information computerisation in the so-called Digital Age. The ‘new ways of representing, expressing, and understanding’ reality through technological advances advocate a number of technology-based educational reforms that may indeed help the L2 classroom examine foreign languages as the vehicle through which socio-political and cultural relations are built, perpetuated or rejected. The implicit and explicit mechanisms negotiating cultural identity within a discursive community permeate the foreign language classroom, since it is through language that those stances of reality are conveyed, apprehended, and later on internalised.

Similarly, the introduction of collaborative work in the L2 classroom may also be said to respond to particular classroom models and pedagogical stances based on post-positivist premises. From an epistemological perspective, not only is the situated nature of knowledge and knowledge construction the basis for any given communicative approach to foreign language education, but also the cognitive, social and academic benefits of collaborative, student-centred platforms allow for a positive outcome in regard to what students learn, what their attitude towards the learning activity is and the pace of the overall process. As Elola and Oskoz reflect (2010:52), it is through collaborative learning and collaborative production that “learners engage in a dialogue that impels them to notice gaps in their L2 production and then to test new hypotheses regarding language and literacy acquisition”, an aspect not to be underestimated in this on-going debate. Therefore, it is essential that the L2 classroom emphasises the different narratives and discourses shaping cultural practices and identity features in an attempt to broaden the cross-cultural communication skills of foreign language learners. To this concern, this chapter presents a classroom experience involving on-line collaborative writing in the EFL classroom. Building on the quantitative and qualitative data drawn from the distribution of questionnaires, the analysis of the resulting texts and the implementation of several focus groups, the study attempts to provide an answer to the following research questions:

- What are the perceptions of L2 learners regarding the implementation of wiki-based collaborative writing in the EFL classroom?
- What perceptions do students have regarding the role of culture in text production? How culturally embedded do they perceive texts to be?
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