ACQUIRING INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN AN ASIAN NETWORKED LANGUAGE LEARNING CONTEXT

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Abstract

This presentation introduces a best practice in the form of a program called the Korea University (South Korea)-Waseda University (Japan) Cross-cultural Distance Learning Project (KWCCDLP). The goal of the KWCCDLP is to foster learners’ intercultural communicative competence and social skills through authentic interaction with speakers from different language and cultural backgrounds using English as an international language in networked contexts. The KWCCDLP consists of courses and networked interaction in the form of synchronous computer-mediated communication (CMC) (e.g., video-chat, videoconferencing) and asynchronous CMC (e.g., online discussion board). The program has undergone several phases of revision and changes since its inception. The phases are introduced and reflected upon to show how this cross-cultural distance learning program has evolved and is continuing to evolve. In addition, the facilitative role of CMC in enhancing intercultural communicative competence is discussed from the results of in-house and cross-country surveys. This best practice suggests that CMC can be a powerful pedagogical tool for promoting intercultural communicative competence and raising intercultural awareness and that a program like the KWCCDLP can be applied in other language learning contexts.

Keywords: intercultural communicative competence, networked language learning, computer-mediated communication.

1 INTRODUCTION

While cross-cultural distance learning via computer-mediated communication (CMC) is no longer novel, it is not as widespread as other e-learning methods in university settings due to barriers such as cost, management, and maintenance. Running such a program requires resources from the institution and commitment from managers and instructors at the faculty level. Cross-cultural distance learning has been found to be especially effective in teaching foreign languages, especially in contexts where exposure to the target language is lacking. Thus, technology via networks is used to provide a means for input and exposure to English to learners.

This presentation focuses on a program called the Korea University (South Korea)-Waseda University (Japan) Cross-cultural Distance Learning Project (KWCCDLP). This program has been running between the two universities since 1999 and has expanded to include Tamkang University (Taiwan) in 2015. The KWCCDLP is part of a larger program initiated by Waseda University called the Digital Campus Consortium. The KWCCDLP was the first distance learning program for English learners at the tertiary education level launched in South Korea. According to Park [1 pv], “The KWCCDLP is a unique project... The program fosters the development of mutual understanding and friendship among students from different cultures and motivates them to use and learn English as a communication tool by lowering their affective filter.”

The goal of the KWCCDLP is to foster learners’ intercultural communicative competence [2 Byram] and social skills through authentic interaction with speakers from different language and cultural backgrounds using English as an international language in networked contexts. The specific goals of the program are as follows: 1) To deepen students’ cross-cultural understanding among Asian countries through the means of English; 2) To foster understanding of different cultures based on sound comparisons; 3) To acquire the willingness to participate in discussion; and 4) To acquire such skills as discussion skills, facilitation skills, and presentation skills.

Networked English language learning (NELE) is the pedagogical foundation on which the KWCCDLP is realized. NELL in East Asia was initiated by Waseda University of Japan in 1998. The vision of NELL was to provide a form of education through which the Internet and technology could be utilized to provide a “network of English learners.” [3 Nakano et al.] The nodes of this network would be the participating universities and the various countries in which they are located. The learners in the network would be able to participate in real-time, synchronous and asynchronous, authentic
interaction that could transcend geographical location. The KWCCDLP was the output of NELL for East Asian contexts where native English speakers are barely existent so that non-native speakers could use English authentically with one another as an international language.

2 METHODOLOGY

This best practice is first presented from a chronological perspective since its inception. The various phases it has gone through will be briefly introduced. The phases show how the KWCCDLP has evolved and is continuing to evolve. Next, the results from in-house and cross-country surveys are selectively presented. A sampling of answers to multiple choice and open-ended questions are given.

3 RESULTS

The following subsections outline the various aspects of this best practice.

3.1 Phases

The phases of the KWCCDLP [4 p5-6, 5] and their descriptions are briefly provided below.

Phase 1 1998: Inception
- initiated and funding provided by Waseda University, Japan
- first established in the College of Liberal Arts

Phase 2 1999-2002: Initial operation
- Multi-media Education Room in College of Liberal Arts opened
- started with two computers; use of CUSeeMe, TeleMeet
- started with two courses
- 2000-2001: Dept. of Japanese and Chinese courses included

Phase 3 2002-2010: Elective course run
- run as elective courses by the Institute of Foreign Language Studies
- focus on English language learning courses
- text-based chat

Phase 4 2011-present: Major-related course run
- run as Dept. of English Language and Literature major-related courses
- use of LiveOn and video-chat
- 2015: Tamkang University, Taiwan joined

Phase 5 2017: Revision stage
- courses currently under revision to reflect current learning contexts
- focus on project-based learning

3.2 KWCCDLP Courses

The KWCCDLP, as currently manifested at Korea University, consists of five undergraduate credit courses and two non-credit courses. The courses are composed of networked interaction in the form of synchronous CMC (video-chat, videoconferencing) and asynchronous CMC (online discussion board). A typical credit course would be run as a combination of face-to-face group interaction via online video-chat sessions, posting of reflections on the course page of a learning management system site, responding to reflections, and a number of class-to-class video conferences where student groups present on specific topics. The following are the courses listed in the KWCCDLP.

(1) KWCCDLP courses

Credit courses

ENGL 161 Global Literacy 1
ENGL 162   Global Literacy 2
ENGL 163  Cross-Cultural Communication in English 1 (Social and Global Issues)
ENGL 164  Cross-Cultural Communication in English 2 (Media)
ENGL 166  Cross-Cultural Communication in English 3 (International Career Path)

Non-credit courses
   World Englishes and Miscommunication I
   World Englishes and Miscommunication 2

Additional activities
   Out-of-class oral chat

As can be seen from the above, for the credit courses, three courses have themes and textbooks while the two other courses are relatively more student-centered. The two non-credit courses are conducted on a recruit and volunteer basis and consist of five videoconferences among four universities. The out-of-class chat activity is where students in other university-wide courses are paired with overseas counterparts and engage in oral chat outside of class time.

3.3 Selected Survey Results

Data from surveys show that students in the program are generally satisfied with the courses which enabled them to engage in authentic communication through a global network. In past surveys, students reported that they were able to enhance their speaking abilities and acquire facilitating and elaborating skills when dealing with potential miscommunication problems in online communication. Engaging in intercultural interactions, students were able to actively voice their opinions through synchronous and asynchronous means, which eventually enabled them to gain more confidence when communicating in English. Moreover, such interactions offered students opportunities to understand cultural similarities and differences, which led them to broaden their perspective while learning to design their talk to communicate effectively and appropriately with others.

The following are a sample of some survey questions which are asked every semester to all the participating universities and students. The following answers are from the Korea University side for the latest data set from the 2016, fall semester and are presented in decreasing order of frequency. The answer choices reflect the goals and purposes of the KWCCDLP.

(1) Ex. 1) Which skills do you think you have developed the MOST through this CCDL course?
   speaking skills > cultural understanding > listening skills > discussion skills/intercultural translation skills > writing skills/clarifying skills > facilitation skills > presentation skills

(2) Ex. 2) What do you think was the main benefit of taking this course?
   understanding about partner university’s culture/using English to communicate with people from other culture > understanding more about myself and my culture > understanding more about other people’s viewpoints > expressing my opinions clearly > learning communication skills I can put to use in daily life > using communication technology more effectively

As the courses in the KWCCDLP are focused on the productive skills of speaking and writing, it seems natural for students to perceive their speaking skills to have developed. As for the second example question, through the KWCCDLP, students become more aware of the cultures of the participating universities and the role of English as a lingua franca in communicating with speakers from different language backgrounds. However, one note that should be made is that the survey respondents did not seem to think they learned to use communication technology more effectively. This may imply that the technology used to communicate in long distance contexts while at the inception of the program was novel it is no longer the case nowadays as students use SNSs and other technology and applications in their everyday lives.

The following are some additional sample responses from the open-ended questions in the latest data set (2016, fall semester) from the Korea University students.

(4) Excerpts
• “I got opportunities to learn cultures of other countries and also could learn other students’ viewpoints on some specific topics. Most importantly, the course did help me improve my speaking skills.”

• “Before taking this class, I wasn’t fully aware of how foreigners view our country and could share different opinions.”

• “The class provided me with a great opportunity to meet people from diverse backgrounds and share thoughts and opinions with them.”

As can be seen from the sample responses, the KWCCDLp’s goals seem to have been met by the students. They realize that from taking the courses their intercultural communicative skills have been enhanced and their awareness of cultural differences has been heightened.

4 CONCLUSIONS

There are several challenges and limitations to running the KWCCDLp. Technological problems with equipment and Internet bandwidth still abound. In addition, a steady increase in the number of international students enrolling in the participating universities has changed the landscape of the student bodies and campuses. It is no longer unique to speak with non-native English speakers from other countries via the Internet as such students are present on campus and can be easily contacted through SNSs. In addition, the technological tools and programs used in the KWCCDLp are no longer considered advanced and are even considered “old” by the students who use the latest communication apps on their cell phones.

The above are some reasons why the KWCCDLp is being revamped this year. The classes will also have a project-based focus so there are clear learning goals and concrete learning outcomes. This best practice suggests that CMC can be a powerful pedagogical tool for promoting intercultural communicative competence and raising intercultural awareness and that a program like the KWCCDLp can be applied in other language learning contexts.

REFERENCES


