



Preliminary Results from a Telecollaborative Exchange between Japan and Taiwan using Facebook Groups

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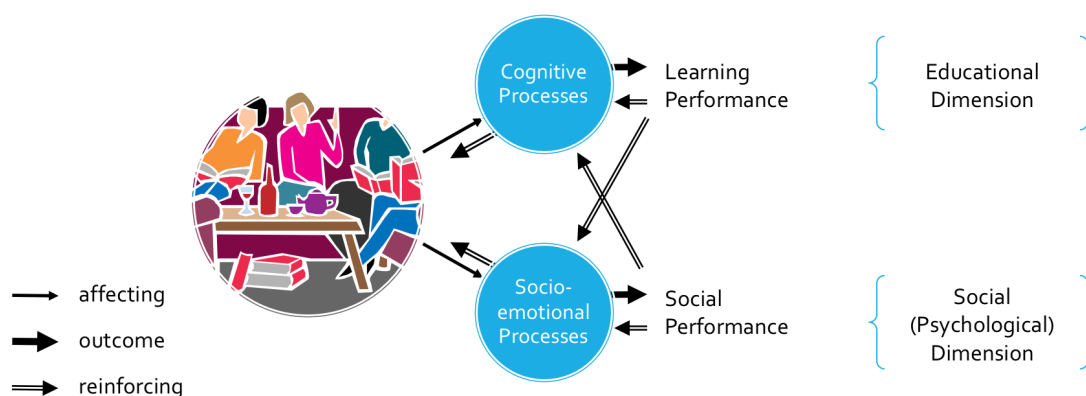


According to David Crystal[1], a British linguist, nearly 3 out of 4 English users are "non-natives". From a sociolinguistic perspective this means that English is no longer the language of the few, but the lingua franca of the many[2][3][4]. Mutual ownership of English as a lingua franca comes with the shared responsibility of intercultural communication[5][6]; however, this can be particularly challenging for those from a homogeneous society like Japan[7]. And yet, the Japanese Ministry of Education[8] has decided that exchanges between Japanese students and East Asian students are vital to Japan's

future. Therefore, finding ways to increase Japanese students' intercultural experience is paramount.

SOCIAL LEARNING BENEFITS LEARNING PERFORMANCE

Social learning offers the potential to increase learning performance[9][10][11]. One interdependent learning model emphasises its importance, specifically in cases of computer supported collaborative learning.



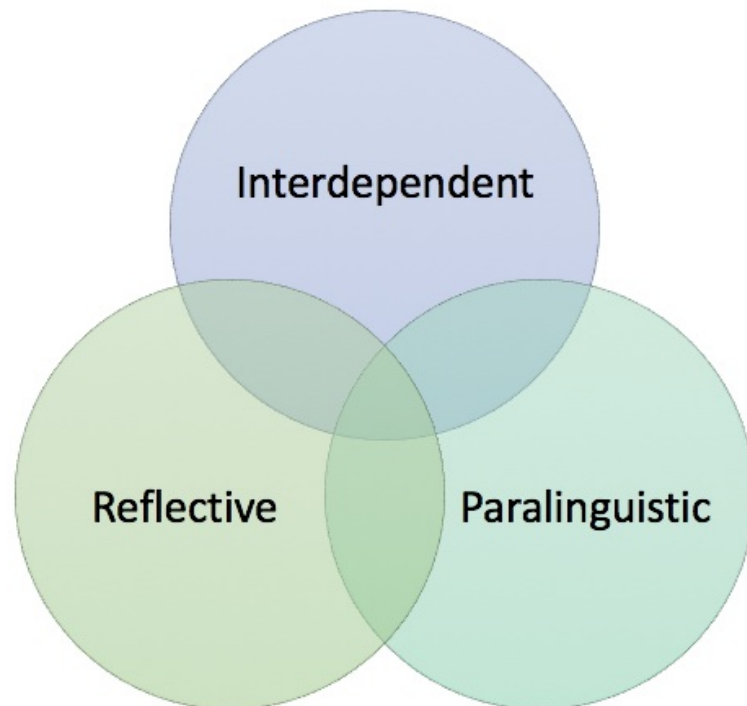
Adapted with permission from Kreijns, Kirschner & Jochems, 2003, pp. 342

Social media seems to offer the most accessible platform for distance social learning. However, according to Kreijns et al.[12], we should not rely on the platform to instigate communication.

THE THOEORY: DIGITAL SOJOURN

Digital Sojourn is an idea that has been on my mind ever since reading Michael Byram's[13] description of the sojourner, and the way one develops through prolonged interaction with another culture. Since then, I have been trying to come up with a method for implementing digital sojourn.

The goal of digital sojourn is to engage learners in a deep enough level of interaction that they can develop interculturally. I have come up with three key components which I believe are important to this method: (1) interdependence, (2) support for paralinguistic communication, and (3) incorporation of reflective activities.



THE EXPERIMENT: AN EIGHT-WEEK FACEBOOK EXCHANGE

In order to test out this method, I solicited the help of a teacher / researcher from Taiwan named Brent Kelsen. We first met through Research Gate <researchgate.net>.

After a few Skype chats, we decided to engage our students in 8 weeks of intercultural exchange using Facebook. For our initial pilot study we placed the students into Facebook groups which had on average 4 Taiwanese students and 4 Japanese students in each group.

Each week these students shared digital artifacts on topics such as food, music, movies and anime, tourists destinations, and the like. We also made sure to include a few weeks of free choice topics at the end.

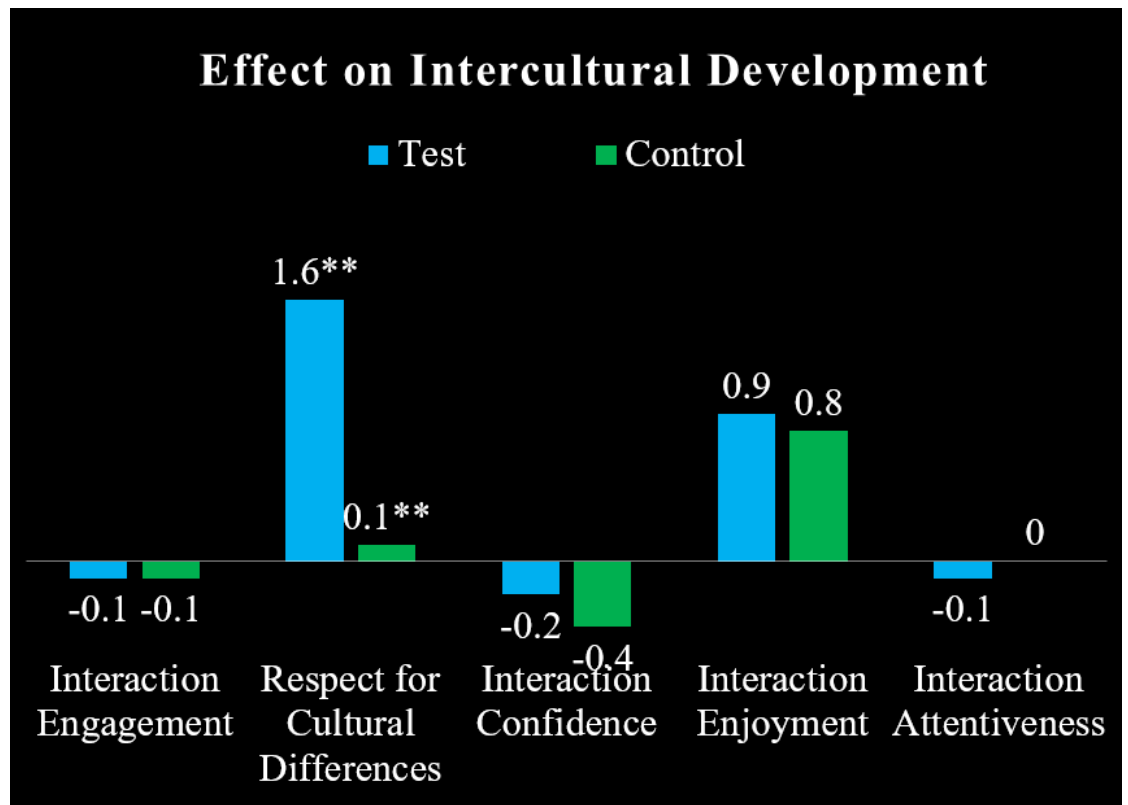
As teachers we were concerned about whether students would participate, so we modeled the interaction ourselves each week by posting our own content.

In addition to sharing digital artifacts, students in Japan also engaged in weekly classroom based reflections on the exchange. They discussed the value of the exchange and what they hoped to get out of it, and how they could best engage the Taiwanese students in the exchange. At the end of the term, they also gave presentations in class concerning what they learned from the exchange and how it had helped them grow.

In order to measure intercultural development, I gave my students a questionnaire designed to measure intercultural sensitivity once before the exchange and once again after the exchange. The instrument I used was Chen and Starosta's^[14] Intercultural Sensitivity Scale, a 24-item self-report questionnaire measuring 5 factors of intercultural sensitivity.

THE RESULTS: AN INCREASE IN RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Results showed a marked increase in respect for intercultural differences among participants ($M_{diff} = 1.6$, $SD = 1.2$) over control ($M_{diff} = 0.1$, $SD = 2.5$) with the conditions ($t(52) = 2.73$, $p < .01$, $d = 0.7$).



** = $p < .01$

Exchange Metrics

I used a tool called Netvizz[15] to "scrape" the Facebook posts and found that a total of 26,494 words were exchanged. Participants also supported their communication through paralinguistic means by sharing 94 photographs and 77 videos.

Posts	Words Posted	Photos	Videos	Likes	Comments	Comment Likes	Total Engagement
290	26494	94	77	875	315	321	1511

Here is a wordle made from the 26,494 words exchanged by participants.



According to the results of the Intercultural Sensitivity questionnaire, participants learned to respect cultural differences. It was good to see that even when the exchange was not a physical one, intercultural development could be supported through the mixed methodology of digital sojourn. I feel that classroom reflections were the most interesting part of the exchange, as I was able to see how students grew through the process. With that in mind, I will close with a reflection from one of those students.

I wanted to see Japan objectively, so I asked the question, "What images of Japan do Taiwanese have?" According to them, they think Japan is a traditional, innovative, and high quality country because of old structures, culture, nature, economy, and technology. However, some people hate Japan due to historical problems. This fact made me a little depressed, but one of the Taiwanese students mentioned that these problems can be resolved by communication and respect. I was amazed at his words and admired his thoughts, and then I realized that such exchange between younger generations are crucial to deepen mutual understanding. Therefore, I'll find opportunities that bring me to exchange with foreign people again, and make efforts toward mutual comprehension.

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