

Blending Italian “down-under”: Toward a theoretical framework and pragmatic guide for blending tertiary Italian language and culture courses through Skype-enhanced, pre-service teacher-centred telecollaboration

Giovanna Carloni, Brian Zuccala

Università degli Studi di Urbino (<giovanna.carloni@uniurb.it>)
University of the Witwatersrand (<brian.zuccala@wits.ac.za>)

Abstract

This contribution draws on the article by Carloni and Zuccala (2017), that offered a preliminary discussion of a joint telecollaborative project between Italian Studies at Monash University and the University of Urbino. The present work aims at providing a theoretical, as well as pragmatic, starting point for developing a Pre-Service Teacher-centred model for a “sustainable”, cross-institutional, blended mode of delivering foreign language and culture tuition in the field of Italian studies (in Australia) through online intercultural exchanges.

Keywords: blended learning, Pre-Service Teacher training, task design, telecollaboration, transnational pedagogy.

*1. Introduction*¹

Beginning in 2016, and drawing on the global rise in both the research on and use of telecollaboration in general and videoconferencing in particular

¹This article is the result of the joint efforts of its two co-authors. However, should a distinction be made for institutional reasons: Giovanna Carloni wrote sections 2 and 4; Brian Zuccala wrote the abstract as well as sections 1, 3, 5, and 6. A significant portion of data collection was conducted at Monash University (where Brian Zuccala completed postgraduate studies). A special note of thanks goes to the Unit Coordinator and then-Coordinator of the Italian Studies Major, Dr Annamaria Pagliaro, who made implementing the project possible and enabled data collection throughout its duration.

(see O'Dowd 2016)², for foreign language and culture Teaching and Learning (TaL hereafter), the Italian Studies program at Monash University (Melbourne, Australia) and the University of Urbino (masters' course in Teaching Italian to Foreigners) have jointly developed a blended, Skype-mediated format³. The format is suitable for some of the Italian Studies Units offered at Monash as part of the Italian program and/or Italian Major. The outcome of the first (academic year 2017) and second (academic year 2018) pilot trials hitherto conducted have not only resulted in a publication (Carloni, Zuccala 2017)⁴, but they have also been presented and discussed nationally and internationally on multiple occasions (ACIS Prato, 2017⁵; LCNAU Adelaide, 2017⁶; Diaspore Italiane Melbourne, 2018⁷; Unicollaboration Cracow, 2018⁸; AAIS Sorrento, 2018⁹). The project has, in fact, attracted scholarly interest beyond the Italian TaL field (receiving expressions of interest from teachers and curriculum developers from other institutions and other languages, including technical colleges and non-European languages¹⁰).

Upon such occasions, a scholarly space, as well as a pedagogical need for expanding both the theoretical scope and the concrete implementation of this project beyond their current reach, have emerged. A two-fold need has come to the fore: that of both filling in the theoretical gaps left unaddressed by the previous essay (Carloni, Zuccala 2017) especially in relation to the

² On the effectiveness of Skype specifically, and not only at tertiary level, there is plenty of scholarly evidence, amongst which it will suffice to refer to – in chronological order – Elia (2006); Eaton (2010); Cuestas Verjano (2013); Yen, Hou, Chang (2013); Angelova and Zhao (2016), Terhune (2016); Kozar (2016, 2018). From this succinct overview it appears evident how the research on Skype-mediated pedagogy comes predominantly from the field of teaching English as a second and/or foreign language.

³ The theoretical framework of the project and the digital teaching materials have been devised collaboratively by Giovanna Carloni, Giorgia Bassani, Margherita Bezzi, Alessandro Droghini, Luca Mă, Maira Marzioni, Ilaria Pasquinelli, Jacopo Pettinari, and Ilaria Puliti.

⁴ As well as one forthcoming book chapter (see Carloni, Zuccala, forthcoming 2019).

⁵ Biennial conference of the Australasian Centre for Italian Studies: <<http://monash.it/events/acis2017/program>> (11/2018).

⁶ Annual Language and Culture Network in Australian Universities colloquium: <<https://www.lcnau.org/colloquia/national-colloquium-2017/>> (11/2018).

⁷ Conference on three continents on Italian diasporas: <<https://www.diasporeitaliane.com/melbourne-4-8-april-2018>> (11/2018).

⁸ Third annual conference for trans-institutional (tele)collaboration at tertiary level <<https://www.unicollaboration.org/index.php/krakow2018/programme/>> (11/2018).

⁹ Annual American Association of Italian Studies conference: <<https://aais.wildapricot.org/conference-program>> (11/2018). This was a session illuminating various aspects of the format. As will be addressed more thoroughly throughout this study, it is noteworthy that some of the speakers had also been co-developers of the blend.

¹⁰ The interest raised amongst upper-level secondary school institutions, such as the LOTE Department at Footscray College, is an indication that a version of the model proposed here may have potential for secondary-level implementations. This, however, remains to be explored.

employment of Pre-service Teachers (PST hereafter) and their training, and that of answering pragmatic, “how to”-type questions, concerning the logistic replicability of the same framework and the same model across a spectrum of different institutions and educational contexts.

In order to meet both these “empirical” and theoretical demands, the scope of this essay is both theory-driven and deliberately pragmatic. This essay is aimed not only at expanding and refining the framework within which the Monash-Urbino collaboration has been developed over the past two years, but also at providing some practical, hands-on and step-by-step guidelines, both for those curriculum developers (mainly, but not exclusively) at tertiary level, (mainly, but not exclusively) located in Australia, who may be leaning toward implementing a similar Skype-mediated, PST-enhanced blended mode for one (or more) of their courses, and for those PST trainers (mainly, but not exclusively) in Italy who might see the benefit of exposing PSTs to this kind of training. Thus, alongside the theoretical scaffolding which is pivotal in the elaboration of any pedagogically sound teaching framework, this essay attempts to cover in details also many of the practical and logistical issues related to the development and implementation of the blend. Given, despite obvious differences, the many similarities characterising the various tertiary programs offering foreign languages in Australia, and the similarities in L2/LS teachers training programs in different European countries, it is envisioned that this essay may provide some broader guidelines also to a “non-Italianist” readership. It should be stressed that this “double” target audience – Italian PST trainers, located in Italy or abroad, and curriculum developers overseas – lies at the heart of the (intended) innovativeness and comprehensiveness of this contribution. Likewise, it is this double frame, that has guided the structuring of this piece, that has also determined the choice of not providing one unified section for the methodology, but, rather, of embedding the relevant parts of it into each of the two macro-sections of this essay.

Along these lines, the essay unfolds in six sections and it is structured as follows: it begins by describing Italian language and culture teacher training in Italy (section 2); which is followed by a cursory overview of foreign languages and cultures TaL in Australian upper-secondary and tertiary education, that focusses on Italian Studies at Monash as a case-study (section 3). This section aims to uncover and illustrate what can be conceptualised as an inherent and quantitative discrepancy existing in terms of foreign language immersion and exposure for learners transitioning from either the Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE hereafter) or the pre-VCE LOTE (Italian) tuition, to first year tertiary education, and how such discrepancy can be addressed through the systematic (as well as, we argue, sustainable) deployment of PSTs at the placement stage of their graduate education. Drawing on this arguably under-used PST teaching potential, sections 4 and 5 illustrate the resources and guidelines underpinning the framework which can be used for developing

the blend, from the perspectives of both the unit designer(s) and the PST trainer(s) in collaboration with whom the blend is developed. These sections, therefore, do not overlook the wide range of logistical, organisational, and technical issues either practically encountered at some point during the Italian-Australian cross-institutional collaboration upon which this piece draws, or theoretically implied by the combined features of the format itself. Section 6 offers a tentative evaluation of some of the model's affordances, as well as some concluding remarks about the format's further potential.

2. Italian as a second and foreign language teacher training in Italy

Masters' degrees in "Teaching Italian as a second and foreign language", which are usually one year-long education and training programs granting 60 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System¹¹) credits, have developed extensively in Italy over the last few decades. These degrees provide Pre-Service Teachers (PSTs) of Italian with a wide range of courses focusing on both theory-driven pedagogical topics (such as Second Language Acquisition, teaching Italian as a second and foreign language, Content and Language Integrated Learning, and technology-enhanced foreign language teaching/learning) and intercultural-based topics (such as intercultural practices and contrastive analysis methodology). Furthermore, under the supervision of experienced teachers of Italian as a second and/or foreign language, PSTs engage in school- or university-based field experiences. During the practicum, PSTs first observe how experienced teachers teach Italian to foreigners at various proficiency levels and afterwards try out the teaching strategies and practices, studied previously, with students in class. During their supervised field-based teaching experiences, PSTs carry out action research and reflective teaching. After finishing the practicum, with the support of a university mentor, PSTs write a case study analysis report focusing on the action research carried out in class during their supervised field-based teaching experiences. PSTs then have to discuss the case study analysis report in front of the masters' program committees in order to graduate.

2.1 Telecollaboration and internationalisation in teacher training

In online intercultural exchanges (OIEs), at least two groups of language learners and/or PSTs – attending institutions located in different countries –

¹¹ "ECTS credits represent the workload and defined learning outcomes ('what the individual knows understands and is able to do') of a given course or programme. 60 credits are the equivalent of a full year of study or work" (<https://ec.europa.eu/education/resources/european-credit-transfer-accumulation-system_en>, 11/2018).

engage in technology-mediated learning activities, operationalised through transnational telecollaborative projects:

Online intercultural exchange (OIE), also referred to widely as telecollaboration or virtual exchange, is [...] [the] nomenclature [used] for denoting the engagement of groups of students in online intercultural interaction and collaboration with partner classes from other cultural contexts or geographical locations under the guidance of educators and/or expert facilitators. (Lewis, O’Dowd 2016a, 3)

Online intercultural exchanges aim to foster students’ foreign language improvement and intercultural competence. Scholarly works show the overall effectiveness of online intercultural exchanges in promoting students’ foreign language skills (Belz, Vyatkina 2008; Ware, O’Dowd 2008; Guth, Helm, O’Dowd 2012; Jin 2013; Kern 2014; Porto 2017), intercultural awareness (O’Dowd 2006; O’Dowd 2012; Liddicoat, Scarino 2013; Vinagre 2016), and interlanguage pragmatics (Sykes 2018). Learners’ autonomy development represents another positive result of virtual exchanges (Fuchs, Hauck, Müller-Hartmann 2012). This ever-growing scholarly corpus has also brought to the fore a number of critical aspects. Research shows, for example, that online intercultural exchanges entail challenges in terms of culture-specific interactional styles, such as directness and irony, which may lead to problems in communication between partner classes (O’Dowd, Ritter 2006). Getting students to engage in deep intercultural knowledge development seems also to emerge as a challenge for telecollaborative project designers and participants (Ware, Kramsch 2005; Helm 2013). Logistical features of virtual exchanges, such as the different timetables of the institutions involved, represent another critical element (Helm 2015).

Furthermore, during telecollaborative exchanges, learners need to be provided with language-focused feedback, which is pivotal in fostering language learning and making learners aware of their language improvement (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 131-133; Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017, 10). In this respect, however, a challenge has emerged over time; noticeably, it has been found that students often lack the skills and strategies necessary to foster their partners’ language development: “sufficient opportunities for focus on form, negotiation of meaning and corrective feedback do not occur naturally in online exchange and need to be promoted through careful task design and training of the learners to work as linguistic guides and tutors for their partners” (Lewis, O’Dowd 2016b, 66). As a result, the involvement of PSTs, who have the pedagogical skills suitable to enhance students’ language development, has steadily increased in virtual exchanges in recent years. From this perspective, it is noteworthy that masters’ degrees, focusing on the formation of Italian language teachers, increasingly foster the development of PSTs’ digital, pedagogical, language teaching competences through online intercultural exchanges. Telecollaboration is thus perceived as being particu-

larly significant in this formative process, not only, but also, for the way it relates to the notion of internationalization.

Internationalisation has become a key dimension of higher education in recent years: “Internationalization of higher education is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (European Parliament 2015, 281). On the one hand, internationalisation abroad entails staff and student mobility (De Wit 2016, 71). On the other hand, in internationalisation at home (IaH), global and intercultural components are integrated into curriculum-based activities carried out on campus (Beelen, Jones 2015, 9), which makes the process more inclusive (De Wit 2016, 73-74). In the European Union, IaH mediated by digital technologies has become an important objective in higher education: “the European Commission is considering digital learning as a key dimension of its internationalisation policy” (*ibidem*, 79). Within this framework, online intercultural exchanges can be classified as a form of IaH fostering the development of global teachers through teacher training internationalisation (Kissock, Richardson 2010).

3. Italian foreign language and culture tuition: From secondary to tertiary level

After looking at the Italian landscape of graduate courses in teaching Italian as a second and foreign language (section 2), it becomes obvious that many Pre-Service Teachers trained on a yearly basis, require telecollaborative teaching competences. For a cross-institutional, telecollaborative project to be understood as a viable and systematic option for an (Australian) Italian language and culture program at tertiary level, we shall try to combine this evidence with both the existing room for increasing students’ foreign language and culture exposure through video-conferencing and the arguable need for such an increase, as both appear to have been confirmed, albeit on an admittedly small scale, by the student perception surveys collected at Monash during our 2017 and 2018 pilot trials.

As the scope of this study does not allow for a thorough overview of tertiary programs offering Italian in Australia, it does not appear inappropriate to utilise Monash as a case study. Italian Studies at Monash University has delivered instruction in Italian since 1989. It has a particularly active engagement in relation to Italy and its linguistic traditions, which is revealed by the fact that Monash University – a founding member of the Group of Eight (Go8 hereafter) – was the first of only a few Australian institutions to establish a stable presence in Italy with its Monash University Prato Centre (MUPC, 2001). Selecting Monash as our main exemplary tool must, therefore, be understood not as a way to narrow the scope and reach of the discussion,

but, rather, as a means through which grounding it into the concrete pedagogical practice of one of the (Australian) institutions which have been more proactive in forging the relationship with Italian and Italy at tertiary level.

In order to enable one to fully understand the course-structure and program-structure that underlie the digital project prompting this study, it is appropriate to thoroughly illustrate the course- and program-layout. In the table below the core structure of Italian Studies at Monash is illustrated per level of proficiency, and subdivided between prevalently Language-focused Component and prevalently Culture-focused Component, as per Unit Guides. The table also highlights the entry points which are the crucial feature through which students gain access to the program¹²:

Unit's title as per level of proficiency	1) Culture-focused Component	2) Language focused Component	3) Entry points
Introductory 1	1h ¹³ Culture w. ¹⁴	2h =1.w + 2h =1.w	1
Introductory 2	1h. Culture w.	2h.=1.w + 2h.=1.w	2
Intermediate 1	2 hs. Culture w. or 2 ws. 1h. each	2 h. = 1.w.	
Intermediate 2	2hs. Culture w. or 2 ws. 1h. each	2 h. = 1.w.	3
Proficient 1	2hs. Culture w.	2 h. = 1 w.	

¹² Apart from the courses listed here, mention must be made of the so-called elective Units, where the focus may range from Italian cinema (that is the case of “Italy on Film”) to Italian contemporary and/or experimental fiction (that is the case of “New Writing”) and should by definition be regarded as predominantly culture-focused. As mentioned elsewhere, Monash Unit Guides are only available to Monash staff and students with Authcate credentials. Since the Monash-Urbino collaboration started, three years ago, the undoubtedly simplistic and yet historically widespread “language component” vs “culture component” dichotomy has undergone some restructuring, including the introduction of the notion of “workshop”, which entails a more interactive form than the one traditionally associated to an *ex-cathedra* lecture, for most culture-based classes.

¹³ H(s). = hour(s).

¹⁴ W(s). = workshop(s).

Proficient 2	2hs. Culture w.	2 hs. 1 w.	
Advanced 1	2hs. Culture w.	2 hs. 1 w.	
Advanced 2	2hs. Culture w.	2h 1. w.	

A table of this kind aptly lends itself to both a ‘horizontal’ (i) and a ‘vertical’ (ii) reading. What can immediately be seen, from following the progression of this chart horizontally (i), is that predominantly linguistic and communicative competence-centred workshops seem to decline, at least in quantity, as learners’ proficiency increases; while, conversely, the number of (predominantly) culture-based interactions either remains steady (thus incrementing proportionally) or increases. More specifically, there appears to be a 50% shift (four weekly hours of grammar, and oral/aural language classes to two weekly hours) occurring when progressing from first year (Introductory 2) to second and third year (intermediate and/or proficient, and advanced), while the predominantly culture-based component increases twofold (from 60 to 120 minutes per week). Such a shift cannot be understood simply as a decrease in exposure, but must instead be understood as a “shift in language acquisition from a grammar and oral/aural type of class to an approach which favours language learning through the interaction with literary and filmic text-based cultural topics” (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 119) It is nonetheless plausible to think, as will be clarified further, that this shift may have an impact on the way students perceive their own linguistic progression.

This table acquires greater meaning when the entry points (row 3), through which students make the transition from secondary level schooling to university, and the different shifts occurring for them throughout such transition, in terms of sheer in-class ‘exposure’ to the foreign language they are learning, are considered. Entry Point 1 refers to learners with no formally acknowledged prior knowledge of Italian¹⁵. Entry Point 2 refers to two sub-categories of learners: those who have previously undertaken secondary level studies in Italian up to VCE and have a total of less than 30 unscaled

¹⁵ Yet, a placement test is required, which is aimed at separating “authentic” beginners from students who have variously acquired some linguistic competence and may therefore begin their tertiary studies of the language at an intermediate level.

final score and those who have studied Italian but not a VCE level¹⁶. Entry Point 3 refers to learners who come from previous Italian studies at VCE level and have an above 30 total unscaled final score (or else who have shown an equivalent proficiency in the placement test).

The above-described entry point-system is of particular importance (not exclusively but also) in the Australian context. It is, in fact, through the distribution of those entry points across the continuum of linguistic proficiency reproduced by the structure of the program that curriculum designers (and, at a higher level, both institutional and governmental program developers) regulate the student intake in relation to linguistic proficiency, particularly with respect to secondary school intake. This ‘vertical’ reading of the chart thus prompts one to draw some comparisons with what happens at secondary level, to which at least two of the entry points refer directly, and in particular with upper-secondary. Examining final secondary level Italian examinations country-wide or even State-wide would be not only well beyond the scope of this contribution, and is not an easy task, not only in itself but also because of the flexibility with which single schools can implement general guidelines.¹⁷ Yet, at least a quantitative and rather rudimentary comparison is possible, which might nonetheless be sufficient to highlight the core features of moving from secondary to tertiary level.

To remain within the context of the State of Victoria – home to most of Monash Italian Studies students – the current “Victorian Certificate of Education Italian Study Design”, elaborated in 2005¹⁸, recommends at least 50 hours of class tuition per Unit, which each of the four VCE Units covering one school semester. When translating this information into weekly amount of class instruction, learners appear to be receiving at least 220 minutes of tuition per week during VCE preparation (variously subdivided).

Therefore, on an hours-per-semester basis, there appears to be almost an equivalence between the 50 hours of VCE (recommended) preparation and the 48 hours of university instruction for intermediate and proficient levels (that is, the Post-VCE levels), with said 48 hours, however, to be subdivided between 50% “culture” and 50% “language”. Approximately the same proportion applies in terms of weekly hours, with the Proficient and Advanced

¹⁶Those who have not previously (and formally) studied Italian but placed, for whatever reason, at an equivalent level in the test.

¹⁷Such flexibility emerges from the periodical reports on “The State and Nature of Languages in Australian schools”, such as that by Liddicoat, Scarino, Curnow, Kohler, Scrimgeour and Morgan (2007). We thank the Head of Languages at Footscray City College and Ph.D candidate in intercultural communication, Natasa Ciabatti, for her assistance in navigating Australian, and specifically Victorian, policies and guidelines for foreign language instruction at secondary level.

¹⁸And its updated version, to be implemented from next year and accredited for the 2019-2023 period.

Units' four weekly hours (usually in two blocks), sub-divided into a language-focused workshop and a culture-based workshop. Thus, also from this "vertical", secondary-to-tertiary perspective, one can see how the same nearly 50% shift in the sheer amount of class exposure to the language appears to take place¹⁹. With formal and informal class feedback (2012-2016) showing students' tendency to perceive the number of contact hours dedicated specifically to language structures and oral practice as comparatively "declining", it is reasonable to argue that the combination of the two above-described trends is of relevance in defining how particularly second- and third-year students come to assess their Italian-related university experience. Such perception, as stressed in Carloni and Zuccala (2017), was one of the reasons for blending in the first place.

While, as mentioned previously, a comprehensive overview of the Italian Studies landscape in Australia and/or each State is well beyond both the domain of our competence and the reach of this essay, it will suffice to point out that the structure just described for Monash University appears to share a number of similarities across the Go8 members offering Italian Studies, albeit with some variations both as to the terminology used to frame the components and as to the specific number of hours allocated to each competence²⁰. Thus, it can be postulated that the specific scenario emerging from a specific case study at Monash may not, in fact, be unique in the context of transitioning from secondary to tertiary level in Victoria and/or within the Go8. If that is the case, then, the highlighted combination and, one could say, "structural" discrepancy between the mostly unexploited potential of PSTs, and the need (or at least, the room) for increasing the students' chances to engage in oral exchanges with properly trained native speakers – whether in person or in a videoconferencing mode –, may offer

¹⁹ That without taking into account the fact that school (two) terms per semester are by nature longer than teaching semester nor the different teacher-student ratio. On this comparative basis, it may therefore be argued that Victoria Certificate of Education (VCE) graduates beginning Italian Proficient 1 – being those who experience the most significant shift in the approach to language learning (see above) – would greatly benefit from a weekly, Skype-enhanced, oral interaction with a native instructor in Urbino (see Carloni, Zuccala 2017).

²⁰ Note for non-Australian readership: The Group of Eight (Go8) is the consortium (established in 1999) of the most prestigious and internationally highly regarded tertiary institutions in the country. As to the differences and similarities between programs, one may refer (alphabetically), as to ANU, to <<https://programsandcourses.anu.edu.au/Search?FilterByCourses=true&Source=Breadcrumb>> (11/2018); as to University of Melbourne to <<https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/soll/study/italian-studies>> (11/2018); for the University of Queensland to <<https://degrees.griffith.edu.au/Program/1021/Courses/Domestic#0000010669>> (11/2018); as to the University of Sydney to <http://sydney.edu.au/handbooks/arts/subject_areas_italian_studies.shtml> (11/2018); as to The University of Western Australia to <<http://handbooks.uwa.edu.au/majordetails?code=MJD-ITLST>> (11/2018).

some productive pathways outside the boundaries of Monash University. It is, therefore, both on this empirical and yet potentially quite “systemic” evidence, that a more theoretical foundation for employing PST, and more specific guidelines on how to do so in the context of telecollaborative projects of the kind illustrated here, may be laid.

4. Telecollaborative project development

This section aims to illustrate the competences that PSTs are expected to develop in order to plan and carry out telecollaboration successfully, to provide PST trainers with an outline useful in the promotion and development of PSTs’ telecollaborative planning and teaching skills, and to elaborate a guideline suitable for developing telecollaborative projects.

4.1 Telecollaborative teaching competence development

To devise effective online intercultural exchanges, specific pedagogical and digital-driven competences are necessary (Goodfellow *et al.* 1996; Blake 2009; Guichon 2009; Murphy, Shelley, Baumann 2010). PSTs engaged in online intercultural exchanges, thus, need to develop telecollaborative-specific teaching skills, such as organisational, pedagogical, and digital competences along with a set of attitudes and beliefs (O’Dowd 2015, 66). On the basis of O’Dowd’s framework, PSTs are expected to acquire pedagogical competences, such as: devising tasks in keeping with the project objectives; creating tasks focusing on the topics included in students’ school curricula; scaffolding students’ activities; scaffolding students’ reflection on culture-specific practices and interactional patterns; creating intercultural-driven tasks fostering co-construction of knowledge, collaborative enquiry, and dialogical interaction; designing customised assessment rubrics; and preparing detailed guidelines (*ibidem*, 67-68). To plan and implement online intercultural exchanges, PSTs need also to develop some digital competences necessary to: select the digital tools suitable to carry out online tasks and to communicate effectively; identify the pedagogical affordances and challenges of the various digital technologies, especially those used to implement synchronous DVC (desktop videoconferencing); scaffold students’ autonomous use of digital tools; and create a safe online learning environment where students can experience positive social presence (*ibidem*, 68). To implement telecollaboration effectively, PSTs should also develop a series of attitudes and beliefs, such as negotiating with partner-teachers in terms of task design, digital tools, and project structures (*ibidem*, 68-69). Further competences that PSTs need to develop are those strictly related to online task and lesson management, such as handling time management in general, managing time allocation for the various tasks in particular, and providing students with clear instructions (Ernest *et al.* 2013, 16-18).

To teach successfully in screen-based environments, such as Skype (<<https://www.skype.com>>) and Zoom (<<https://zoom.us>>), PSTs need to develop semio-pedagogical skills necessary to use digital technologies and their modalities artfully: “Semio-pedagogical skills [...] [are] the capacity to mediate a pedagogical interaction by combining or dissociating modalities (written, oral, and/or video) that are adapted to objectives and to the cognitive requisites of the task” (Develotte, Guichon, Vincent 2010, 293). PSTs’ ability to exploit to the highest degree the affordances of desktop videoconferencing is pivotal in telecollaboration. To this purpose, before starting online intercultural exchanges, PSTs need to be introduced to Develotte, Guichon, and Vincent’s research-based five-degree framework, which classifies specific practices that instructors are likely to use during synchronous webcamming²¹ (*ibidem*, 293):

- Degree 0: the teacher trainee does not appear on the video window, [he/]she is standing outside the camera focus or it is not possible to use a video medium.
- Degree 1: the teacher trainee does not look at the computer screen.
- Degree 2: the teacher trainee looks at the open video window on the computer screen.
- Degree 3: the teacher trainee looks at the open video window on the computer screen and [...] uses facial expressions and/or gestures to back up [his/]her message. [...]
- Degree 4: the teacher trainee looks straight into the webcam, giving [...] [the] interlocutor the impression [of] looking directly at [him/]her. (*Ibidem*, 305)

The development of three pivotal online language pedagogy skills, namely “other-regulation skills, self-regulation skills and media regulation (Henderson, Cunningham 1994; Guichon, 2009)” (*ibidem*, 310), is also crucial for effective online teaching. Through other-regulation skills, PSTs can reflect on how they can affect distant learners during screen-based learning: “Other-regulation skills correspond to the capacity to evaluate the effect one has on a distanced interlocutor, using the appropriate semiotic system to maintain a learner friendly environment and contribute to learning, and to measure the comprehension level of a learner in order to adapt one’s pedagogical strategies” (*ibidem*). The development of self-regulation skills enables PSTs to manage their own image in desktop videoconferencing, orchestrate the simultaneous use of various tools in screen-based teaching, and deal with unexpected technological challenges skillfully (*ibidem*). Furthermore, through media regulation skills, PSTs can select the most suitable modalities, associated with the various digital technologies, for each type of task effectively (*ibidem*).

²¹ “Webcamming is defined [...] as the interlocutors’ voice and image accessible through two of the DVC windows allowing for potentially rich interactions” (Develotte, Guichon, Vincent 2010, 297) occurring, as Develotte et al. suggest, in various contexts and in keeping with the set telecollaborative objectives (*ibidem*, 294).

4.1.1 *Reflective teaching*

To foster the development of telecollaborative teaching competences, teacher trainers need to help PSTs to engage in reflective teaching while planning and taking part in online intercultural exchanges (Meskill *et al.* 2006, 283):

Telecollaborative exchanges organized in teacher education courses as a form of experiential learning (Hong, 2010; Hubbard & Levy, 2006) serve as an ideal educational environment in which future teachers can first discover, then experience and, finally, reflect on the mutual relationship between technology and pedagogy in authentic linguistic and intercultural contexts. (Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017, 8)

Reflection on action, that is “thinking [...] after or before [practice]” (Connelly, Clandinin 1986, 294), thus takes central stage in PSTs’ telecollaborative professional development. For pedagogical growth to occur, PSTs need to reflect on their own teaching practices, that is their theories-in-action, to detect their own belief systems, namely their espoused pedagogical theories (Argyris, Schön 1978). As Williams and Burden suggest in this respect: “The task of the reflective practitioner is to make [his/her] tacit or implicit knowledge explicit by reflection on action, by constantly generating questions and checking [his/her] emerging theories with both personal past experiences and with the reflections of others” (1997, 54). PSTs can carry out reflective teaching through both online journals, such as Penzu (<<https://penzu.com>>), and/or self-evaluation questionnaires, which can be created with Google Forms (<<https://www.google.com/forms/about>>); the latter have been implemented in the Monash-Urbino project successfully (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 127).

4.2 *Telecollaborative task design*

Through reflective teaching, PSTs can develop telecollaborative task designer skills: “shift to new media/new learning sees educators and their learners as designers, builders, producers and critical evaluators of content, rather than receivers of pre-packed content” (Meskill, Anthony 2014, 178).

4.2.1 *Digital technologies*

For digital tools to be used successfully in telecollaborative language teaching, PSTs need to be able to select suitable digital technologies and evaluate their affordances and limitations in terms of content and language learning (Stickler, Hampel 2015, 60-61). While planning the Monash-Urbino telecollaborative project, selecting the digital tools suitable to create the various technology-enhanced activities (namely, the brainstorming activities, the activities aimed at introducing key vocabulary items and/or concepts, the while-viewing and post-viewing activities) (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 125-129)

was rather challenging. In task design, PSTs thus have to bear in mind that “[t]he suitability of tools needs to be considered both on a technical level and on a social, intercultural and communicative level (Pasfield-Neofitou, 2011)” (Stickler, Hampel 2015, 65). To this purpose, Hampel and Stickler’s model, which classifies seven skill levels connected to online pedagogy (Hampel, Stickler 2015, 15-16; Stickler, Hampel 2015, 58), can be especially useful to PSTs experimenting with telecollaborative task design. Hampel and Stickler’s model includes the following skill levels: managing basic ICT, using specific software, selecting suitable digital technologies for the various tasks within an online pedagogical framework, enhancing successful online communication and socialisation patterns, developing pedagogical creativity through context-specific task design, and discovering one’s own online teaching style (Hampel, Stickler 2015, 15-16; Stickler, Hampel 2015, 58).

The DOTS (Developing Online Teaching Skills; <<http://dots.ecml.at>> <http://dots.ecml.at>>) approach, developed at the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) (Stanojević 2015, 123), is another framework that PSTs can use to select the digital technologies catering to the characteristics of the telecollaborative tasks they are planning:

- Is this tool/resource relevant for your course?
 - Does it fit with your teaching approach and aims?
 - Does it add more linguistically and culturally relevant material to what you are already doing?
- Is this tool appropriate for your learners (age, level, interest ...)?
 - Is the level appropriate for the intended users?
- Can the tool accommodate learners with a range of levels?
- Is the language used in the instructions and reference material suitable?
- For which skills and activities do you think this tool/resource is best used?
 - Does it allow for interactive activities to maintain student interest?
 - Are there a variety of exercises and tasks that can be built with this tool?
- How user-friendly is the tool?
 - Is the tool/resource clear and easy to use for your students?
 - Does the tool/resource necessitate some training activities for your students?
- Communication-related considerations
 - If the communication is oral: Does it have a visual element (e.g. video-conferencing)? Does it allow simultaneous speech by both parties? What will this mean for the communication and the task? Are there any specific turn-taking techniques required? Will the speaker be able to receive instant backchannel information from his/her collocutors and in what way (such as emoticons, text chat)? Are there any other communication facilities that the tool has and do they require specific consideration?
 - If the communication is written: Is the communication synchronous or asynchronous? What will this mean for the communication and the task? Are there any special ways to include your attitudes (e.g. emoticons, text highlighting)? Are there any other communicational facilities that the tool has and do they require specific consideration?

- Technical considerations
 - What equipment and technical support is required?
 - Is this available in your institution?
 - What on-going costs are involved (e.g. licences for software)? (*Ibidem*, 129-130)

4.2.2 Foreign language development

As previously mentioned, online intercultural exchanges aim to foster foreign language learning. Telecollaborative projects are implemented within a sociocultural framework, that views learning as a social practice (Vygotsky 1978; Wertsch, 1991; Lantolf 2000; Lantolf, Thorne 2006). In these virtual learning environments, the sociocultural framework is combined with a socio-constructivist perspective, which “brings in the social element to build on constructivism, a theory of knowledge that assumes that humans construct their own knowledge and make sense of the world based on their own experiences in a complex and non-linear process” (Hampel, Stickler 2015, 15). In particular, the socio-constructivist theory highlights “the need to link new information to something the student already understands; making the topic of learning relevant to the student’s own perspectives and understanding” (Marsh, Pavón Vázquez, Frigols Martín 2013). Within a sociocultural and constructivist framework, meaning is socially constructed through dialogical interaction (Vygotsky 1978; Lantolf 2000; Lantolf, Thorne 2006). In this light, second language acquisition envisages human cognition as mediated by language, which is instrumental in linking cognitive processes with the outer world (Lantolf 2000; Lantolf, Thorne 2006):

Talk – whether teacher or learner talk – provides a real-time window into thinking, an immediate snapshot of how someone understands a concept or engages with an activity. Moreover, talk provides a space between educational participants, a place for interthinking (Mercer 2000) and dialogic engagement (Wegerif 2010). (Moate 2011, 18)

In a sociocultural perspective, language is the medium through which meaning construction and negotiation are mediated. As a result, foreign language learning and knowledge construction emerge as the product of dialogical interaction (Vygotsky 1978; Lantolf 2000; Lantolf, Thorne 2006). Within this theoretical framework, PSTs need to learn to design telecollaborative tasks²² fostering dialogical interaction in the target language. In this respect, task-based learning seems especially suitable to online intercultural exchanges (Hampel 2010; Hauck 2010; Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017). As Kurek and Müller-Hartmann suggest in relation to task-based learning:

²² A task is “an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language” (Van den Branden 2006, 4).

When it comes to Task Pedagogy, we recognise the importance of task attractiveness, which we see, among others, in task relevance to students' needs, its communicative potential, relevance to the real world, open-endedness and choice as well as cognitive challenge. (2017, 15)

In screen-based learning environments, tasks (such as problem solving, decision making, opinion-exchange, and jigsaws) can thus promote dialogical interaction focusing on real-world issues effectively:

telecollaborative tasks generally involve different linguistic and cultural communities and thereby have a strong possibility of producing negotiation of meaning and providing opportunities for the exploration of different cultural perspectives. This makes them particularly suited to recent approaches to task-based learning, which include a focus on issues related to intercultural communication, such as the development of empathy and tolerance and critical stance (Candlin, 1987) and the inclusion of information about the target culture (Corbett, 2003, p. 23). (O'Dowd, Ware 2009, 174-175)

Task design plays a pivotal role in virtual exchanges. Therefore, it is of paramount importance for teacher trainers to help PSTs to develop telecollaborative task design competences, including the integration of digital and pedagogical skills (Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017, 10).

4.2.3 Intercultural awareness

Besides promoting language learning, telecollaborative tasks need also to foster the intercultural analysis of the practices and values of the cultures of the groups involved in the virtual exchanges: "a telecollaborative activity [...] [should] prompt the development of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) and the integration of tools affording online collaboration" (Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017, 11).

Intercultural competence, which is one of the key objectives of telecollaboration along with foreign language learning, consists of "a set of cognitive, affective, and behavioural skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennett 2008, 16). From this perspective, critical cultural awareness is conceived as "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" (Byram 1997, 53). Fostering intercultural awareness entails the development of an intercultural speaker, who "acquires a deeper understanding of the relationships of languages and cultures" (Wagner, Byram 2017, 2), – or a mediator (Byram 2008b, 68) – who is bound to undergo a transformative process: "the cultural values subjects bring to the interaction are creatively transmuted into co-constructed hybrid cultures. It is such a model that will help [...] address the intercultural negotiation of agency and power in the translocal spaces of

contemporary globalization” (Canagarajah 2013, 222). In particular, an intercultural speaker, who “has the skills to understand and represent the values, beliefs, and behaviours of his/her own and other groups and their cultures, and the differences and similarities among them” (Wagner, Byram 2017, 2), can “act as ‘intercultural mediator’ for others who do not have these abilities” (*ibidem*). In particular, Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), which consists of six stages (denial, defence, minimisation, acceptance, adaptation, and integration), shows how, by moving from the denial to the integration stage, people may shift from an ethnocentric to an ethno-relative socio-cognitive view of culture:

the more ethnocentric orientations can be seen as ways of avoiding cultural difference, either by denying its existence, by raising defences against it, or by minimizing its importance. The more ethnorelative worldviews are ways of seeking cultural difference, either by accepting its importance, by adapting perspective to take it into account, or by integrating the whole concept into a definition of identity. (Bennett 2004, 63)

In keeping with Bennett (1993) and Belz (2002), Liddicoat and Scarino hold that in virtual exchanges learners need to engage explicitly and critically with intercultural-driven dimensions embedded in telecollaborative culture-based tasks: “exposure to interaction of itself does not necessarily equate with intercultural learning. [...] To be able to contribute to learning, the interaction must first become available in some way for students to reflect on and interpret” (Liddicoat, Scarino 2013, 112). Thus, telecollaborative task design needs to promote intercultural awareness, helping “learners in moving between cultures and reflecting on their own cultural positioning and the roles of language and culture within it” (*ibidem*, 117). In this respect, the increasingly global citizenship-related dimension of online intercultural exchanges envisions learners as active global agents able to tackle world challenges (Leask 2015, 17). Here, telecollaborative tasks are expected to foster not only students’ foreign language skills and intercultural awareness but also learners’ engagement with global problems tailored to local contexts: “intercultural citizenship education [...] mean[s] [...] that learners would be encouraged to act together with others in the world and that those others would be in other countries and other languages. The purpose would be to address a common problem in the world” (Porto, Byram 2015, 24).

Byram’s concept of intercultural citizenship (2008b), developed from the intercultural communicative competence model (ICC) previously elaborated as part of foreign language learning (Byram 1997), entails:

- Learning more about one’s own country by comparison
- Learning more about ‘otherness’ in one’s own country (especially linguistic/ethnic minorities)

- Becoming involved in activity outside school
- Making class-to-class links to compare and act on a topic in two or more countries. (Byram 2008a, 130)

Byram's intercultural citizenship construct, strictly connected to foreign language learning (Wagner, Byram 2017, 1), has evolved from the intercultural speaker and mediator concepts (*ibidem*, 2) mentioned above. A key dimension of Byram's new construct is "Active citizenship' [...] [, which implies] being involved in the life of one's community, both local and national" (*ibidem*, 3). In this light, intercultural citizenship is instrumental in promoting the development of foreign language speaking citizens who are able to act in multilingual and transnational spaces effectively (*ibidem*). Wagner and Byram's most recent definition of intercultural citizenship follows:

- causing/facilitating intercultural citizenship experience, which includes activities of working with others to achieve an agreed end;
- analysis and reflection on the experience and on the possibility of further social and/or political activity;
- thereby creating learning that is cognitive, attitudinal, behavioural change in the individual;
- and a change in self-perception, in relationships with people of different social groups. (*Ibidem*, 3-4)

In intercultural citizenship-driven online intercultural exchanges, learners' translocal identities take centre stage: "education for cosmopolitan citizenship emphasizes the reality of complex and multiple identities, and allows a space for the exploration of identity in the context of citizenship" (Porto, Houghton, Byram 2017, 5). Within this theoretical framework, telecollaborative foreign language learning also entails the development of students' intercultural citizenship, which "occurs when people who perceive themselves as having different cultural affiliations from one another interact and communicate, and then analyse and reflect on this experience and act on that reflection by engaging in civic or political activity" (Barrett 2017, 9). As a result, online intercultural exchanges informed by intercultural citizenship pedagogy need to:

- create a sense of international identification with learners in the international project;
- challenge the 'common sense' of each national group within the international project;
- develop a new 'international' way of thinking and acting [...];
- apply the new way to 'knowledge', to 'self' and to 'the world'. (Byram *et al.* 2017, 29-30)

While engaged in intercultural citizenship-focused telecollaboration, partner groups analyse topics related to their own societies within an intercultural framework together; as a result of the co-participated analysis, each national

group plans and carries out a form of civic action in its own community to foster social changes (Porto, Houghton, Byram 2017, 6): “[language] learners [...] would decide on a project of significance in their community, share ideas and plans with each other, critically analyse the reasons/assumptions in their plans by comparison with the plans of the other group, carry out and report to each other their projects” (Byram *et al.* 2017, 26).

Through critical intercultural awareness (Byram 1997, 53), implemented in an intercultural citizenship perspective, the participants of online intercultural exchanges are likely to undergo a multifarious transformation at personal and social level:

‘transformation’ is a process of conscious and deliberate personal and social transformation flowing from the critical exploration, analysis and evaluation of self and other. It becomes central in intercultural citizenship education where critical thought is realized in action which may involve both the critical self-reflection and the refashioning of national views and traditions which Barnett (1997) refers to as ‘transformatory critique’ or ‘critique in action’. (Porto, Houghton, Byram 2017, 3)

Seen from this perspective, telecollaborative tasks need to foster intercultural-driven transformative processes in students. In this respect, in virtual exchanges, as Liddicoat and Scarino suggest, “[t]he goal of learning is to decenter learners from their pre-existing assumptions and practices and to develop an intercultural identity through engagement with an additional culture. The borders between self and other are explored, problematized, and redrawn” (2013, 29).

The adoption of an intercultural citizenship pedagogy is thus emerging as a new and challenging dimension of telecollaborative instructional design. In this perspective, O’Dowd’s “strong approach to telecollaborative task design” (2016, 286) seems to cater to intercultural citizenship-driven virtual exchanges effectively:

- Tasks reflect themes of social justice and intercultural citizenship
- Tasks engage students in active collaboration together
- Tasks include reflection on the role of the medium in online communication
- Tasks include stages of cultural self-reflection and critical evaluation
- Tasks avoid stereotyping and forced culture clash. (*Ibidem*, 286)

4.2.4 Task design and assessment

While engaged in telecollaborative task design, PSTs need to bear in mind that successful task completion also depends on the implementation of scaffolding, which “‘implies graduated assistance from the [...] expert’ [and/or digital technologies] and also ‘ascribes an active role to the [...] [learner] in interactions with [...] [experts]’ ([Stetsenko] 1999, 243)” (Lantolf, Thorne

2006). Tasks and scaffolding are devised on the grounds of learners' language proficiency and the digital technologies adopted to implement the various activities. As research shows: "Task factors that the trainees recognised as crucial for telecollaborative contexts was the balance between task support and task demand realised mainly through clear task structure and adequate technology support" (Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017, 15).

Three main types of tasks have been identified as the most widely used in telecollaboration: information exchange, which "involves learners providing their telecollaborative partners with information about their personal biographies, local schools or towns or aspects of their home cultures" (O'Dowd, Ware 2009, 175); comparison and analysis, which "requires learners not only to exchange information, but also to go a step further and carry out comparisons or critical analyses of cultural products from both cultures (e.g. books, surveys, films, newspaper articles)" (*ibidem*); and collaboration and product creation, which "require[...] learners not only to exchange and compare information but also to work together to produce a joint product or conclusion" (*ibidem*, 178).

As Kurek and Müller-Hartmann suggest in this respect: "These different task types are usually sequenced in a general order of three stages, namely an introduction phase, a comparative phase and a phase of intense negotiation to produce some piece of work" (2017, 9). Thus, telecollaborative task macro-sequencing usually consists of three phases: an information exchange phase, an analysis and comparative phase, and a collaborative production phase (Müller-Hartmann 2007; O'Dowd, Ware 2009). Each of these phases, as well as each telecollaborative lesson, can be further organised into three-step cycles, namely pre-task activities, desktop videoconferencing tasks, and post-task activities (Guth, Helm 2012, 44). On the one hand, pre-task activities aim to provide learners with the content and language knowledge necessary to manage the tasks to be carried out during screen-based learning; on the other hand, post-task activities are targeted at fostering students' self-reflection on the cultural, intercultural, language, and multi-literacy dimensions involved in DVC tasks (*ibidem*, 46). Post-task activities can also be targeted at fostering PSTs' reflection on the pedagogical aspects of telecollaborative teaching. This kind of reflective teaching is instrumental in helping PSTs to become both "task designers and task evaluators" (Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017, 15):

Bearing in mind that the mere transfer of pedagogy from a conventional classroom to online settings is not pedagogically productive (e.g. Anderson, 2008), [...] candidate teachers [need to] experience [...] telecollaborative task performance and task design first hand and, then, engage [...] in critical reflection on the integration of technology and pedagogy. (*Ibidem*, 11)

To design technology-enhanced telecollaborative tasks, PSTs engaged in planning online intercultural exchanges may find especially useful Kurek and Müller-Hartmann’s taxonomy of pedagogical criteria provided below:

Criteria for designing telecollaborative tasks:	
Criterion	Evidence
Yes/No	
Task pedagogy	
1. Tasks have the potential to support learning if they involve and challenge learners	
Interest and appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the tasks relevant to students’ (language) learning needs? • Do the tasks activate learners’ resources?
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the tasks have a clear communicative focus and an audience? • Do the tasks prompt intensive communication between participants?
Meaning focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the primary focus of the tasks on meaning?
Real-world relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the tasks likely to occur outside the classroom? • Do the tasks use authentic resources and/or communication channels?
Open-endedness and choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the tasks avoid pre-determined answers? • Do task procedures lend themselves well to modification and negotiation? • Do the participants have a choice of resources, also in the sense of technologies and communication channels?
Engagement of cognitive processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do task instructions prevent copy-and-paste use of information? • Do the tasks activate various levels of cognitive processing (e.g. analysis, synthesis, evaluation)? • Do the tasks stimulate further learning (e.g. application to new contexts, exploration of new technology solutions, further information search, language etc.)? • Is the learner prompted to reflect on processes involved in task completion?
2. Tasks need to be clearly communicated and structured	
Clarity and self-explicitness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are task instructions clearly formulated? • Are task objectives clear and easily identifiable to the learners? • Are the tasks divided into achievable steps? • Have intended task outcomes been specified? • Have evaluation criteria been provided?

Balance between task demand and task support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are task demands met by sufficient task support? For example - Linguistic demands → vocabulary support, sentence starters - Interactional demands → group formation processes, who makes the first step? - Technical demands → tutorials for tools, practice phases in the local classroom
Task sequencing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the tasks varied in terms of outcomes and types of interaction? • Do tasks build up on each other? • Are the tasks arranged according to their complexity? • Does the task sequence follow established structures (pre-, while-, post-tasks and/or information exchange, comparison/analysis, and collaborative tasks)?
Technology and tasks	
Affordances	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is the learner prompted to exploit affordances of new tools? • Is the learner prompted to notice pedagogical affordances of the tool?
Choice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can participants choose technologies to match their individual preferences?
Authenticity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the use of technologies have relevance to real-life contexts?
ICC learning and multiliteracies	
Attitudes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the learners prompted to encounter the partners in a way that supports openness and triggers curiosity? • Are the learners prompted to acknowledge other's values and perspectives and discover their own understanding of these? • Does the choice of tools help learners to engage on a personal level?
Knowledge of culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the tasks support the learning of cultural knowledge and practices? • Do the tasks make learners aware of their cultural dispositions and practices? • Do the tasks make learners aware of their cultural dispositions and practices? • Do the tasks make learners work with specific discourses? • Does the choice of tools support representation of cultural knowledge and practices?

Intercultural discovery and interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do the tasks allow for discovering new, interesting, similar or different aspects of the engaged cultures? • Are the learners prompted to operate cultural knowledge, attitudes, and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction? • Does the choice of tools allow for varied forms of interaction ((a)synchronous)?
Intercultural interpretation and relation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the learners prompted to interpret and explain documents, artefacts and concepts from different cultures and their own and create links between them? • Do the tasks enable learners to transfer their knowledge and competences to other contexts and participate in or create new discourses? • Does the choice of tools support negotiation of cultural practices and values?
Critical cultural awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the learners prompted towards intercultural evaluation on the basis of explicit criteria? • Does the choice of tools allow for negotiation of cultural practices and values?

(Kurek, Müller-Hartmann 2017, 16)

For telecollaborative learners to perceive the added value of online intercultural exchanges, tasks need to be organically integrated into students' course syllabi in terms of topics and assessment. The integration of the Skype-mediated lessons into the course syllabi has been rather successful in the Monash-Urbino telecollaborative project, where the digital tasks devised (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 125-129) enabled students to further analyse some of the topics discussed during face-to-face classroom instruction: “The videos, made available on the project websites, dealt with contemporary Italian cultural topics deeply connected to the literary topics presented in class. For example, Italy's brain drain was selected as a contemporary topic connected to issues dealt with in *Ultime lettere di Jacopo Ortis* (2011 [1816]) [...] by Ugo Foscolo” (*ibidem*, 125).

Telecollaborative curriculum-based tasks, such as the following, may be devised:

- Practicing information-seeking and information-evaluating skills.
- Exploring a topic of inquiry or finding answers to a particular question.
- Reviewing multiple perspectives upon a topic.
- Collecting data remotely.
- Assisting authentic problem-solving.
- Publishing information syntheses or critiques for others to use. (Harris 2001)

Harris's classification of telecollaborative tasks may be especially useful to implement engaging learning activities:

Information collection and analysis [...]

- Information Exchanges: Students and teachers in different locations collect, share, compare and discuss information related to specific topics or themes that are experienced or expressed differently at each participating site. [...]

- Pooled Data Analysis: Students in different places collect data of a particular type on a specific topic and then combine the data across locations for analysis.

Problem Solving [...]

- Information Searches: Students are asked to answer specific, fact-based questions related to curricular topics. [...]

- Peer Feedback Activities: Students are encouraged to provide constructive responses to the ideas and forms of work done by students in other locations. [...]

- Parallel Problem Solving: Students in different locations work to solve similar problems separately and then compare, contrast, and discuss their multiple problem-solving strategies online.

- Sequential Creations: Students in different locations sequentially create a common story, poem, song, picture, or other product online. Each participating group adds their segment to the common product.

- [...] Problem Solving: Students simultaneously engage in communications-based real-time activities from different locations [...] [d]eveloping brainstormed solutions to real-world problems via teleconferencing. [...]

- Simulations: Students participate in authentic, but simulated, problem-based situations online [...] collaborating with other students in different locations.

- Social Action Projects: Students are encouraged to consider real and timely problems, then take action toward resolution with other students elsewhere. Although the problems explored are often global in scope, the action taken to address the problem is usually local. (*Ibidem*, 2001)

Creativity plays a pivotal role in online intercultural exchanges. Therefore, tasks need to enable telecollaborative learners to become creative foreign language users: “In developing an identity as L2 creative writers or producers, students can evolve from being L2 learners to being L2 users [...]” (Stickler, Hampel 2015, 64). A telecollaborative task design process enhancing students’ creative use of the foreign language entails:

- Selecting creativity-enhancing (online) tools
- Introducing and supporting the use of these tools without over-emphasising the technological aspect

- Ensuring that creativity is a necessary element of all learning

- Explaining the pedagogical value of creativity in language learning

- Providing supportive evaluation and positive feedback

- Clearly demonstrating the delineation between re-use and plagiarism

- Furthering critical self-evaluative skills in learners. (Stickler, Hampel 2015, 63-64)

Telecollaborative learners thus need to be provided with the opportunity to use language to devise collaborative digital artefacts fostering their agency and creativity. In the Monash-Urbino telecollaborative projects, students were required

to create multimodal intercultural-driven presentations discussed during screen-based lessons; in this context, through student-generated artefacts, students acted as creative knowledge and language producers while at the same time experiencing a high degree of autonomy and agency (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 129).

Telecollaborative project assessment also needs to be integrated into the course syllabi. Online intercultural exchanges are time consuming (Guth, Helm, O’Dowd 2012, 44); to be sufficiently motivated to engage extensively in OIE tasks, it is important for learners to know – right from the beginning – that all the work done will be assessed and the assessment will be included in the course final grade (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 122). Furthermore, progress and formative assessment, provided through digital customised assessment and self-assessment rubrics, are likely to be especially effective in virtual exchanges.

4.2.4.1 Telecollaborative socialisation and interaction patterns

Socialisation is pivotal for telecollaborative exchanges to succeed (Stickler, Hampel 2015, 59). In online intercultural exchanges, it is important for PSTs and students to get to know each other before the first desktop videoconferencing meeting. An example of ensuring this, is for both groups of participants to create five-minute videos to introduce themselves; PSTs and students can use the same template to create video self-introductions. Watching PSTs’ videos can be made more interesting for students by asking them to carry out fun activities, such as identifying their telecollaborative partner by detecting specific clues included in the video self-introductions (Carloni, Zuccala 2019 forthcoming). Furthermore, groups engaged in a telecollaborative project may devise technology-enhanced activities aimed at introducing the other group/s to the geographical contexts, such as cities or regions, where they are based; this type of activity has been successfully implemented in the Monash-Urbino project.

For successful task completion in telecollaborative exchanges, PSTs need also to prepare their students to communicate and interact successfully online in a foreign language providing them with:

- A training phase for exploring the tool to be used [...]
- Appropriate activity design (which could include warm-up activities to support the development of group cohesion, and tasks that focus on the use of particular modes of communication to facilitate interaction)
 - Ground rules for participation (including an online netiquette)
 - Close monitoring of interaction (particularly in the early stages)
 - Moderation of online communication
 - Regular feedback, encouraging learners to reflect on the experience. (Stickler, Hampel 2015, 63)

4.3 Telecollaborative projects: a set of guidelines

Task design, structuring, and sequencing are pivotal telecollaborative competences that PSTs are expected to develop in order to plan online intercultural exchanges. To help PSTs to devise effective telecollaborative projects, including task design and task sequencing, a telecollaborative project guideline, provided below, has been elaborated²³:

Stage 1: Information exchange²⁴

*Pre-task activities*²⁵

- Autonomous learning:
 - Objective: to enable learners/PSTs to familiarise themselves with the place where the telecollaborative partners are based.
 - o Digital interactive activities aimed at introducing learners/PSTs to the geographical contexts, such as countries and cities, where the partner groups are located.
- Autonomous learning:
 - Objective: to enable learners and PSTs to get to know each other before the first meeting in DVC.
 - o Multimodal self-introductions of students and PSTs. Students and PSTs watch each other's video self-introductions.

Stage 2: Comparison and analysis

Pre-task activities

- Autonomous learning or collaborative learning:
 - Objective: to activate students' prior knowledge on the topic of each DVC meeting.
 - o Brainstorming activities implemented, for example, through digital interactive mind maps that learners have to complete.
- Autonomous learning or collaborative learning:
 - Objective: to introduce the key vocabulary items and/or concepts necessary for students to understand/discuss the input/topic of the lesson.
 - o Introduction of key vocabulary items and/or concepts, for example, by means of matching activities implemented through digital noticeboards or other digital technologies.
- Autonomous learning or collaborative learning:

²³ PSTs can embed their telecollaborative tasks in free, user-friendly Weebly websites, which can be easily customised by beginner instructional designers.

²⁴ The macro-sequencing (information exchange; comparison and analysis; collaboration and product creation) suggested by Müller-Hartmann (2007), O'Dowd and Ware (2009), and Kurek and Müller-Hartmann (2017) has been adopted.

²⁵ As Guth and Helm suggest, each stage has been further organised into 3-step cycles (namely pre-task activities, desktop videoconferencing tasks, and post-task activities) (2012, 44).

- Objectives: to help students understand the input, such as videos and/or written texts provided and to monitor students’ comprehension of the input.
 - o While viewing/reading: students carry out activities while watching the videos or reading the written texts selected as input.
- Autonomous learning or collaborative learning:
 - Objective: to help students become autonomous in selecting online materials critically.
 - o Students can be required to find materials, such as videos and/or written texts, focusing on the topic selected for each lesson. Using digital technologies, students can outline and share with peers/PSTs the main points of the materials selected; the ideas pinpointed can then be discussed during DVC.

Tasks

- DVC learning environments:
 - Objective: to make the beginning of the lesson less face threatening for students.
 - o Ice-breaker activities.
- DVC learning environments:
 - Objectives: to promote the analysis of the topic of the lesson; to foster intercultural awareness and/or intercultural citizenship; and to enhance dialogical interaction in the target language.
 - o Post-viewing or post-reading activities that learners/PSTs carry out through dialogical interaction during Skype- or Zoom-mediated lessons.
 - Suitable tasks can be problem solving, decision making, opinion-exchange, and role plays. Other tasks can also be implemented.

Post-task activities

- E-journals:
 - Objectives: to foster learners’ metacognition; to enhance PSTs’ reflective teaching.
 - o Through e-journals, students share their perceptions and reflections on the DVC lessons with their peers using a template, namely answering a few open-ended questions focusing on issues such as topic engagement, intercultural competence awareness/intercultural citizenship, language development;
 - o Through e-journals, PSTs share their reflections on the pedagogical and technological aspects of the DVC lessons with the other PSTs using a template, namely answering a few open-ended questions provided by their university instructors.
- Self-evaluation questionnaires:
 - Objectives: to foster learners’ self-assessment; to foster PSTs’ reflective teaching practice.
 - o Learners complete an online self-evaluation questionnaire focusing on the various aspects and objectives of the lesson.
 - o Completing an online self-evaluation questionnaire, PSTs reflect on the development of their competences as telecollaborative task designers, task evaluators, and teachers.

- Assessment:
 - Objective: to assess students' performances.
 - o PSTs evaluate students using interactive customised digital rubrics.

Stage 3: Collaboration and product creation

- For the last telecollaborative lesson: collaborative production of a multimodal artefact focusing on intercultural aspects.
 - *If the telecollaborative project implemented aims to foster intercultural citizenship, both groups, namely students and PSTs, carry out civic actions in their local communities.*
 - Objective: to foster students' creativity, higher-order thinking skills, language skills, collaborative skills, and intercultural awareness/citizenship.

Pre-task activities

- Learners and PSTs select the topics and digital technologies they want to use to create their multimodal intercultural-driven artefacts.
 - Dyads, made up of one PST and one student (or only students), or triads, made up of one PST and two students (or only students), create their multimodal intercultural-driven artefacts.
 - All the learners and PSTs involved in the online intercultural exchanges watch the multimodal intercultural-driven artefacts created by the other dyads and/or triads made available on the project website.
 - *If the telecollaborative project implemented aims to foster intercultural citizenship, both groups, namely students and PSTs, plan the civic actions to be carried out in their local communities.*

Tasks

- Discussion of the content of the multimodal artefacts, devised by dyads or triads, in DVC environments. Two dyads (or one dyad and one triad – depending on the number of PSTs and students involved in the project) can discuss their artefacts in DVC environments. Learners are expected to lead the conversation, ask questions on the other dyad's presentation, answer questions about their own presentations, and manage turn taking. At the end of the discussion, students have to come up with three or more key intercultural points to share later with the other learners and PSTs on a digital noticeboard.
 - *If the telecollaborative project implemented aims to foster intercultural citizenship, both groups, namely students and PSTs, carry out the civic actions planned in their local communities.*

Post-task activities

- On a digital noticeboard, students share the three key intercultural points they have negotiated during the DVC. Everyone involved can thus browse the main ideas emerged in the various DVC discussions.
 - Students evaluate all dyads' multimodal artefacts to select a winning product. Through digital polling, learners and PSTs select the best multimodal presentation. The winning team can be awarded a prize.

- *If the telecollaborative project implemented aims to foster intercultural citizenship, both groups, namely students and PSTs, share and discuss the results of the actions carried out in their local communities through videos and/or during DVC and/or in shared digital spaces.*

- To foster metacognition, students can be asked to watch the video-recordings of their first and last DVC lessons to self-evaluate, through customized digital rubrics, their improvements in terms of language proficiency, talking time, and turn taking management using a customised interactive assessment rubric:

One of the benefits of using digital technologies is that a permanent record of the interactions can be used for both language learning and research. Students [...] [can be] asked to listen to and analyse the recordings of their conversations at different stages of the exchange to identify strengths and weaknesses as well as points for improvement. (Guth, Helm 2012, 46)

Likewise, PSTs can be required to watch the same video recordings to self-evaluate – using a customised interactive rubric – their ability to foster students’ engagement in terms of talking time and turn taking management. Furthermore, PSTs can be required to evaluate students’ language development and task management as well as self-evaluating their own ability to provide students with suitable feedback. PSTs and students can share and compare (parts of) their self-evaluations and discuss the results.

- Final online questionnaires:
 - questionnaire for students: learners evaluate the various aspects of the telecollaborative project.
 - questionnaire for PSTs: PSTs evaluate the various pedagogical and technological aspects of the telecollaborative project; PSTs reflect on the development of their competences as telecollaborative task designers, task evaluators, project designers, and teachers.

PSTs will modify the guidelines here provided to cater to the needs and characteristics of the various telecollaborative projects and institutional contexts.

5. Developing and structuring the blended course

After having posed the theoretical presuppositions and outlined a framework for blending the course from the perspective of PST trainers willing to expose their graduate students to desktop videoconferencing, this final portion of the study shifts towards a more “deliberately” pragmatic approach, intended to answer all the more-or-less empirical, “how to”-type questions raised by the task of blending an (existing) Italian Studies Unit. This is done in order to assist any (Australian) curriculum developers who may be interested in developing a similar format in collaboration with a PST training program overseas. Given their somewhat empirical nature, these guidelines should indeed not be understood

prescriptively but rather descriptively²⁶. As to the framework for this section, in answering these somewhat experiential questions, it is appropriate to draw upon the Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013, 243) framing checklist – based on four components (context, learners and teachers, course design and development/improvement of the blend) – which was followed in Carloni and Zuccala (2017, 119), and according to which the project-format itself had been developed.

Context

Amongst the preliminary and most practical aspects to be taken into account when developing the blend, from the perspective of a(n Australian) curriculum developer in collaboration with one (or more) Mediterranean European tertiary partner(s), there is the obvious matter of time zones, which cause changes across the semester²⁷. Taking that into consideration, and due to the way Italian Masters' programs in foreign language and culture tuition are structured (September to June), semester 1 of the Australian academic year may be the preferred one for implementing the blended course, as it will overlap with the time of the year in which most Italian training programs have scheduled placement for their students.

Learners and teachers

Instructor-student one-on-one meetings are conducted autonomously by the students in agreement with their teachers. Indicative suggestions, however, may be provided, to simplify the “negotiating process”, such as the recommendation that meetings be held between the culture workshop and the language workshop. If possible, the class calendar for the semester

²⁶ This is the reason why this section appears to be less heavily reliant on existing Online Intercultural Exchange (OIE) scholarship.

²⁷ To make this illustration more usable and to possibly save valuable curriculum development time, it seems appropriate to adhere to the 2020 Australian academic calendar in relation to its Italian counterpart. Monash academic calendar has been used, hence the table refers to Melbourne Time.

2020 Semester 1	Australia (Melbourne Time)	Italy (Rome Time)
Week1 2-6 March	Daylight Saving Time (DST)	-8 hours
Week 2 to week 4 9-27 March	DST	-8 hours
29 th March	DST	DST starts
Week 5 30 March-3 April	DST	DST -9 hours
5 April	DST ends	DST
Week 6 to week 12 6 April – 29 May	+ 10 hours	DST

may be organised so as to have the culture-centred workshop precede the language-centred one. This will enable learners to engage with the cultural content in the weekly workshop, and only then participate in the relevant Skype-mediated encounter and relative activities, while utilising, if needed, a portion of the following language workshop to seek clarification with the in-class language instructor and/or to explore further any particular aspects of the encounter which might need further attention.

Course design and developing/improving the blend

A comparative account of the feedback from the pilot trials conducted at Monash in 2017 and 2018 shows that Australian students react positively to the aforementioned possibility of a preliminary and mutual exchange of 4-5 minutes audio-video recordings (any suitable device) between overseas teachers and (Australian) learners²⁸. The video allows the (inter)actors to become mutually acquainted, in a digital guise, before partaking in the first live Skype-mediated one-on-one session. A video introduction of this sort aims to function as an ice-breaker and to diffuse the potential awkwardness of the first contact, while rendering the first simultaneous linguistic interaction less abrupt and, therefore, arguably more effective. In order to help students with this initial video-presentation and the first meeting, learners may be provided with a checklist, prompting them to cover a basic range of topics such as their name, their studies, their hobbies, their passion/reasons for studying Italian. As to the timing of each session, the 2017 and 2018 Monash pilot trials indicates 30 minutes long-Skype sessions (excluding preparation as in pre- and while-viewing activities) as being the ideal time perceived by students (see Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 134) for the sessions to be both effective and enjoyable. Anything exceeding that timeframe has been (mostly) negatively reported in the feedback.

In accordance with the collaborative nature of the project, selecting the topics and creating a meeting roster matching the Unit overall schedule may be done, as mentioned, in collaboration with the PSTs and co-developers. Before selecting the thematic areas upon which to construct the telecollaborative sessions, it appears necessary to sort out a suitable number of Skype sessions/meetings to be conducted throughout the semester. On the basis of the 12 teaching weeks of which an Australian semester consists, factors to be taken into account may include: allowing the students the first week/first two Skype-free weeks for them to familiarise with the course and other gaps/pauses in correspondence of major

²⁸ Data collected during the 2018 pilot trial, in which the requirement of a mutual video-introduction was in place, show that over 90% of learners considered themselves “calm” and/or “comfortable” during the first meeting, and that shows an improvement upon the 2017 feedback in relation to the perceived awkwardness on Skype session 1.

assessment tasks throughout the course, i.e. major culture essays (1000 words or more) or main grammar test(s). After a number has been agreed upon, the following step is that of extrapolating as many topics/thematic areas from the culture components of the Unit as the telecollaborative sessions are going to be, minus 1 (session N-1). The missing one is identified as the session left out, at the end of teaching period, for assessing learners' final presentation/artefact and its discussion both digital with their instruction and face to face in class.

Evidence from 2017 and 2018 trials show that the Weebly+Mindmaster+Padlet+Googleforms+UtellStory toolpackage (Carloni and Zuccala 2017, 125-129) is one that allows for the realisation of an effective pre-, while- and post-viewing digital content in line with the Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Mishra, Koehler 2006; Koehler, Mishra 2008). While the specificity of this digital content has been addressed in detail elsewhere and is thus in no immediate need of further exploration, it seems relevant to highlight a comparatively unexplored link between the theoretical relationship between digital component and regular in-class instruction, and the way such relationship may be transferred into the course blend.

The rationale of the overall project being that of transporting the student in a “decenter[ed]” space in which “learners examine phenomena and experience their own cultural situatedness while seeking to enter into the cultural worlds of others” (Scarino 2014, 391), it is important to facilitate such a ‘decentering’ operation through a technical/digital separation of the ordinary digital environment for the course and the Skype-mediated component. Such separation can be easily achieved through embedding only a link to the project webpage(s) in the chosen learning platform for the Unit (i.e. Moodle or Blackboard). Through this separation, students are digitally enabled and encouraged to leave their ordinary learning environment and to enter, on a weekly basis, a new and far more personalised space for one-on-one, cross-cultural and inter-linguistic exchange. In order to facilitate such immersion, the Weebly-powered space may be themed according to the (Italian) geographical location and cultural landscape from which the PSTs are operating (i.e. Urbino- and Renaissance-themed in the case of a University of Urbino PST cohort). Also, exchanges of video-introductions and Skype sessions may be preceded by similarly-themed introductory online activities, also aimed at familiarising students with the features of the new digital learning environment.

When it comes to devising a tool for assessing the effectiveness of the project (by using, in this case, a tasks list from Monash's eight non-elective Italian Studies Units²⁹), the Skype-mediated component of the course ap-

²⁹ All of those Units usually comprise, along with a written examination to be undertaken during exam period, one or more culture essays, one or more writing folios and one or more

pears to fall best into the category of, and/or replace, an oral task, when an oral task is available. In doing so, the proportional weight of the task may be taken into account. In order to further students' engagement (see above), all aspects of the project may be taken into consideration in the point system for determining the final score for the component, including completing of all activities and accompanying questionnaires for each meeting and producing all the materials required, such as video-introduction and final cross-cultural presentations. While it seems redundant to focus on the design of the final “learner-generated” artefact (Carloni, Zuccala 2017, 129), it is appropriate to stress the simultaneous needs for the PTS overseas to be involved in the marking process and yet for the students' final artefact to be double-marked by the (Australian) language instructor, so as to guarantee that marking standards of the delivering institution be followed.

As to potential motivational strategies to be put in place for improving students' involvement, a comparative account of 2017 and 2018 trials points toward the effectiveness of devising a reward system. Specifically, within the boundaries of academic appropriateness, curriculum developers may find that rewarding the best cross-cultural presentation (as voted by the students themselves) with a limited amount of extra (free) one-on-one Skype tuition, works as an effective motivating device.

6. Some concluding remarks on benefits, affordability and further potential applications within and beyond the Australian context

This essay has unfolded along a double trajectory. On the one hand, it has illustrated the PSTs- centred theoretical outlines along which the Monash-Urbino collaboration's format has been developed, and it has highlighted its main points from a PSTs' training perspective, thus providing PSTs trainers with a possible framework through which to engage PSTs in similarly-designed projects. On the other hand, this study has provided Unit designers with some trial-based guidelines and suggestions as to how an additional/alternative blended Skype-mediated component may be devised, for complementing and enriching any existing Italian Studies Unit for which a need and/or a possibility for enhancement might be envisioned.

As a way of concluding this theoretical as well as pragmatic scholarly excursion into the domain of Skype-mediated blended learning, it seems appropriate to bring together the two research threads characterising the study, by pointing out some of those overall advantages of the project which have not

grammar tests, and one oral task (at Monash no oral task is worth over 10% of the overall mark), it thus makes sense for the component to fully or partially replace the oral assignment(s).

previously been addressed³⁰. In doing so, it is relevant to focus on those most closely related to the aspects of the project discussed here: namely, its inherent pedagogical flexibility, which makes it inherently prone to constant updating, and its equally intrinsic “sustainability” over time. As to the first point, with pedagogical practices in the digital age evolving as quickly as never before and with curriculum developers and program coordinators increasingly aware on the financial front, one aspect that seems particularly important as far as designing and implementing a Unit goes, is that of the “life-span” of the unit itself: that is to say, the timeframe within which the Unit may be delivered and the time (and costs) related to updating the Unit, so as to ensure that standards are maintained semester after semester.

In this respect, it is important to stress how a blended course, revolving around the training of Pre-Service foreign language specialists, is designed to be inherently capable of keeping up with said pedagogical innovations. The Italian Masters’ program (in collaboration with which the blended component is designed and implemented) is systematically prompted, year by year, to update and upgrade both its own teaching practices and those to which its graduate students are required to become accustomed, in order to remain meaningful and competitive within its own academic market. This appears to have the potential for triggering a somewhat virtuous circle, by means of which the design and digital layout of the project as it is delivered to learners, as well as its pedagogical groundings, benefit from the constant/annual updating of the “parent-program” overseas. Furthermore, such updating does not seem to involve any extra-costs on either part.

Highlighting the intrinsic sustainability of updating the Unit’s format and content on a yearly basis leads to focus on the overall financial sustainability/affordability of the project itself. Unlike most of the telecollaboration projects either recently or currently implemented in Australia (see Tudini 2016), this format does not, in fact, rely on institutional funding of any kind nor on any voluntary/*pro bono* service by those involved. The reason is that there does not seem to be any in-built specific cost related to the implementation of a blended Unit constructed in this format: not only the updating but also the initial co-designing of the blend can take place in the form of PSTs-oriented workshops supervised by faculty members within the graduate program.³¹

³⁰ Attention has been drawn to such positive outputs, related to incorporating a blended Skype- and PST- centred components as: perceived linguistic improvement, increased digital literacy, increased metacognitive knowledge, increased proactivity and participation in the learning process, both through existing scholarship in the field (*inter alia* Gruba, Hinkelman 2012; Garrison, Vaughan 2008; Means *et al.* 2010; Ushida 2005; Blake *et al.* 2008; Gleason 2013; Liddicoat, Scarino 2013; Hampel, Stickler 2012; Codreanu, Celik 2013; Malinowski, Kramsch 2014) and by students’ perception surveys (Carloni, Zuccala 2017).

³¹ The cost-free nature of the format may play an even more relevant role in cases in which the blended component is to be introduced in lieu of an existing in-class instruction session.

The affordability of the format directly links to the potential contexts, not only within the Australian tertiary education landscape, to which a project of this sort may hold appeal and to which it may be extended. In this regard, the possibilities of incrementing the impact of this project seem to expand in three directions: (i) “intra-institutional”: according to which the project might be extended to Units at a lower-than-advanced linguistic proficiency level, and specifically those, such as immediate post-VCE Units (see above), which seem to be structurally most in need of it; (ii) “cross-institutional”: according to which the format might be extended to other kinds of institutions in the country, such as (Victorian) Certificate of Education preparation courses and/or technical colleges; (iii) “trans-national”: according to which the project might be expanded so as to involve (by continuing to pivot on the Urbino-based Master’s for Teaching Italian to Foreigners) different educational realities outside Australia. These can best be described as being part of the Global South,³² and the deployment, in those institutions, of digital tools, such as Skype, immediately acquires further meaning and also bears further ideological implications, particularly in relation to the current debate on decolonising tertiary education.

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In such instances, a more or less systematic implementation of the format might be used for re-budgeting one or more Units or even an entire program.

³²In this respect, South Africa appears to be a particularly relevant example – notwithstanding the specificities of any given educational environment – and in relation to it, it might be useful to refer to Anita Virga’s essay “Transformation through telecollaboration”, in this section.

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