

Teachers' perspectives on telecollaboration in secondary school foreign language education

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Abstract

In recent years, telecollaboration has proved to be a useful tool in the acquisition of foreign languages and intercultural communicative skills (Belz 2003b; Clavel-Arroitia, Pennock-Speck 2015a, 2015b; Hewitt, Brett 2007; O'Dowd 2007; Su *et al.*, 2005). This paper focuses on how prepared secondary-school teachers believe they are in order to successfully implement telecollaboration in the classroom. To gather information on their views we carried out an online survey of 179 secondary school foreign language teachers and a series of focus group interviews in the context of a European project, TeCoLa. The advantage of the double-pronged approach to data collection, quantitative and qualitative, is that it provides us with a more complete picture of teachers' needs.

Keywords: Focus Group Interviews (FGIs), language teaching, questionnaires, telecollaboration

1. Introduction

In recent years, interest in telecollaboration has grown significantly and several local, state and European projects have been financed to explore this exciting field. Many of these projects involve university students but ours, the TeCoLa project, the full name of which is: "Pedagogical differentiation through telecollaboration and gaming for intercultural and content integrated language", involves secondary school students. TeCoLa started in 2016 and will finish in 2019 and is the successor of the TILA, "Telecollaboration for Intercultural Language Acquisition" project (2013-2015). TeCoLa aims to harness gamified telecollaboration technologies to improve foreign language teaching and learning while paying special attention to aspects such as authentic communication practice, intercultural competence development and

awareness, collaborative knowledge discovery in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) contexts and learning diversity and differentiation.

Here we will focus on the first and fourth of the eight intellectual outputs in TeCoLa, which are designed to elicit data from teachers to gauge their preparedness for telecollaboration. The first, Output 1, consisted of an online survey among secondary teachers in a number of European countries (see Annex 1 for the questions in English and their translation into Spanish). This was complemented by the information gathered from focus group interviews with smaller cohorts of teachers in each partner country in Output 4. The authors of this article coordinated the teachers working in the Spanish education system (see Annex 2 for the interview questions in English and Spanish). Our objective was to identify the amount of training that teachers would need to successfully employ the tools to be used in the project (video conferencing tools, virtual worlds, chats, wikis, etc.). The information from Outputs 1 and 4 gave all the researchers in the project insights on how to design teacher development modules to be implemented later in the project in teacher-training sessions and workshops. The overall aim was to provide teachers with training on how to help students of all abilities to use the targeted online tools and improve their communicative and intercultural competences¹.

2. Theoretical and practical underpinnings of the TeCoLa approach to telecollaboration

In this section, we review some of the main concepts involved in our vision for telecollaboration as a foreign language learning and teaching tool as these are the basis on which our questionnaires and focus group interviews were designed. These include, telecollaboration itself, gamification, authentic communication, diversity and learning challenges in foreign language teaching, intercultural competence development and collaborative learning in CLIL contexts.

2.1 Telecollaboration

Telecollaboration is one of the most revolutionary technological advances in language teaching and learning and it:

[...] involves the application of global computer networks to foreign (and second) language learning and teaching in institutionalized settings under the guidance of a language cultural expert (i.e., a teacher) for the purposes of foreign language learning and the development of intercultural competence. (Belz 2003a, 2)

¹ Specifications outlined in “Output 1 Identification” in the official proposal document.

Telecollaboration offers students the opportunity to talk to native speakers of a target language of a similar age (Clavel-Arroitia, Pennock-Speck 2015b, 75). Telecollaboration in TILA and TeCoLa normally takes the form of synchronous and asynchronous videoconferencing. It can also involve synchronous activities in a virtual world, which can be defined as:

[a] computer-generated display that allows or compels the user (or users) to have a sense of being present in an environment other than the one they are actually in, and to interact with that environment. (Schroeder 1996, 25)

2.2 Gamification

According to Dicheva *et al.* (2015, 75), gamification is “a fairly new and rapidly growing field”. It should not be understood as turning any activity into a game but rather enhancing classroom activities when “with characteristics borrowed from games” (Landers 2014, 756). Gamification can be used in conjunction with serious games, which refer to “full-fledged games for non-entertainment purposes” (Dicheva *et al.* 2015, 75). It is important for teachers to be made aware of the distinction between gamification and serious games, especially when designing tasks for students to be used in telecollaboration as laypersons often treat these terms as synonyms.

2.3 Authentic communication

Authenticity has been defined in different ways by different scholars and has been employed to describe the types of materials employed in the classroom, the types of tasks carried out by students and the type of classroom interaction, among others (Clavel-Arroitia, Fuster-Márquez 2014, 124). Several authors (Mishan 2004; Tamo 2009; Clavel-Arroitia, Fuster-Márquez 2014) have put forward the view that authentic materials are more likely to kindle the interest of learners and motivate them to a greater extent than the more traditional materials found in textbooks. Nevertheless, Clavel-Arroitia & Fuster-Márquez found that students in general are exposed to authentic vs. non-authentic materials in unequal proportions (2014, 125) proving that textbooks “are not as authentic as some researchers argue they should be” (*ibidem*, 133). Therefore, we need to look for ways to compensate for this attested lack of authenticity in classroom materials and we believe that telecollaboration is the perfect tool to achieve this aim as students find themselves in situations where they need to communicate with speakers of the target language or other non-native speakers in *lingua franca* exchanges in order to carry out tasks.

2.4 Diversity and learning challenges in foreign language teaching

Differentiation has become a key feature in the field of pedagogy and is an aspect that should be taken into account in lesson planning, methodology and assessment. According to the UK Training and Development Agency for Schools, differentiation is “[t]he process by which differences between learners are accommodated so that all students in a group have the best possible chance of learning” (<<http://geoffpetty.com/training-materials/differentiation>>). Following Tomlinson (2001, 1), we can state that “[...] differentiating instruction means ‘shaking up’ what goes on in the classroom so that students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they learn”. Furthermore, as each learner is unique, “[r]igorous, relevant, complex and flexible, differentiated instruction is a response to that uniqueness” (<<https://www.sedl.org/loteced/communique/n06.html>>).

The TeCoLa approach to diversity allows for the acquisition of social, civic and intercultural communicative competences. Our intention is to provide teachers with the right tools to address the different types of diversity by offering them tasks, templates, contents and other resources that can be used and easily adapted according to the specific needs of their students and their school context. This can be complimented through effective scaffolding and personalization².

2.5 Intercultural competence development

Byram (1997, 32) was one of the first researchers to define intercultural competence. He argued that when people from other languages and/or cultures interact in a social context, they contribute with what they know about their own country, but also with what they know of people from other cultures. In this sense, both knowledge and attitude are important and they are affected by the processes of intercultural communication, which, in his words, refer to “the skills of interpretation and establishing relationships between aspects of the two cultures” and “the skills of discovery and interaction” (*ibidem*, 33). Coperías links intercultural and communicative competence when she stresses that:

the knowledge of the participants of another culture is linked to their language competence through their ability to use language appropriately and their awareness of the specific meaning, values and connotations of the language. (2007, 65)

²Presentation on “Differentiated Pedagogical Practices. New Perspectives from Gamified Intercultural Telecollaboration” available at <<https://sites.google.com/site/tecolaprojectoer/guides/background-topics?authuser=0>> (11/2018).

Nevertheless, Celce-Murcia (2007, 46) warns that difficulties may arise if foreign language teachers focus too much on linguistic content while sidelining sociocultural behaviours and expectations. Thus, a challenge in the TeCoLa project is to find ways to integrate language instruction with cultural and cross-cultural teaching.

In the case of telecollaboration, it is important to highlight that there is a series of studies devoted to intercultural aspects of communication and the development of intercultural competence such as Belz (2003b), O'Dowd (2003, 2007) and Ware & Kramsch (2005)³. In the TeCoLa project⁴, we see the development of intercultural skills as a process materialized in the following (sub)competences:

- developing awareness of intercultural communication;
- fostering confidence in communicating with others;
- suspending quick value judgments and providing teaching time to analyse interactions;
- making hypotheses about other people's behaviours;
- being able to accept misunderstanding;
- developing observation skills about others.

In order to organise the intercultural dimension, which consists of sustaining interaction and building communication for the development of intercultural skills, we need to offer students the opportunity to build relationships and develop communicative skills through the exchange of information and help them to reflect on different ways of doing things and to be capable of accepting different views and opinions, etc.

2.6 Collaborative learning in CLIL contexts

According to Pérez-Cañado (2018, 52), European countries have had to look for ways to meet the so-called “mother tongue + 2 objective” established by the European Commission (1995) which states that European citizens should be proficient in at least two other languages apart from their native language. One of the means proposed to achieve this aim is the introduction of CLIL, which has been extensively implemented in most European educational systems. As Marsh (2018, 198) indicates, “it has become an innovative educational praxis that acts as one of the flagships of ‘learning across the curriculum’ in schools, regions and countries”.

³ See the TILA ICC evaluation <<http://www.tilaproject.eu/moodle/course/view.php?id=83>> (11/2018).

⁴ Presentation on “Intercultural Communication Development. European Citizenship Building” available at <<http://www.tilaproject.eu/moodle/course/view.php?id=83>> (11/2018).

In the case of Spain, studies such as Pérez-Cañado (2018), Lancaster (2018) and Ráez-Padilla (2018), provide evidence of the positive results that the implementation of CLIL has had in our educational system. Furthermore, these studies show that there is indeed a linguistic competence differential between CLIL and EFL groups in favour of the former (Pérez-Cañado 2018, 67).

Taking all this into account, TeCoLa serves as way of enriching CLIL by complementing content knowledge development with intercultural communicative competence development. In the TeCoLa project we distinguish between two main CLIL constellations in secondary and vocational schools:

- High-level CLIL: A school subject is taught in a foreign language, e.g. history, geography, or biology in English;
- Low-level CLIL: Thematic units about, e.g., a cultural, political or vocational topic, are taught in a regular foreign language class⁵.

3. Data collection methods

In this section we will detail our approach to data collection in Outputs 1 and 4, which, as we have mentioned, consist of an online survey and focus group interviews.

3.1 Rationale for the use of the online survey

We decided on an online questionnaire to gather information as they are a very common way of collecting data in second language research. Dörnyei points to one of the most important reasons for using questionnaires, namely that:

they are easy to construct, extremely versatile, and uniquely capable of gathering a large amount of information quickly in a form that is readily processable. (2003, 1)

The usefulness of questionnaires has been attested in the literature (Dörnyei 2003/2007; Brown 2001; Wilson, Dewaele 2010; Wilson, McLean 1994). They have proved to be an efficient way of gathering information in terms of the time and effort needed by researchers to create and administer them, the financial resources required and the relative ease in the processing of the data collected. In the particular case of online questionnaires, their strength lies in the fact that they can reach a large and diverse pool of participants and this, in turn, can increase the validity of their results (Wilson, Dewaele 2010, 103).

⁵Presentation on “Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). New Perspectives from Gamified Intercultural Telecollaboration” available at <<https://sites.google.com/site/tecolaprojectoer/guides/background-topics?authuser=0>> (11/2018).

3.2 Design and administration of the questionnaire

The design and creation of our own survey involved several stages. The initial prototype was arrived at during the project kick-off meeting and was fine-tuned in a series of virtual meetings until a design was arrived at that satisfied all the project members. Subsequently, the beta version of the survey was tested with a small group of secondary education teachers in each one of the target countries and they were asked to provide their feedback regarding the intelligibility of the questions, the relevance of the topics and the adequacy of the types of questions employed. Based on their feedback, an improved version of the questionnaire was elaborated. The questionnaire was written in English first and then translated to the other languages in the project (Spanish, French, German, Dutch and Flemish). In designing our questionnaire we took into account the guidelines offered by Dörnyei (2003, 16-17):

- Deciding on the general features of the questionnaire, such as the length, the format, and the main parts.
- Writing effective items/questions and drawing up an item pool.
- Selecting and sequencing the items.
- Writing appropriate instructions and examples.
- Piloting the questionnaire and conducting item analysis.

In our case, the aim was to design a questionnaire that was long enough to cover all the important topics that were necessary at that stage of the project and for the preparation of the corresponding report, but at the same time to make it short enough to avoid respondents becoming bored, which might have led them to abandon the completion of the survey. Our survey provided the informants with the opportunity to express their thoughts through optional comment questions after each set of Likert-scale questions thus supplying us with quantitative and qualitative data.

3.3 Profile of participants recruited for the questionnaire

As Wilson and Dewaele (2010, 119) point out, the issue of recruitment is key when working with questionnaires. Our participants were chosen based on their interest in the project and 98% were teachers from the countries targeted by the project. The others were European teachers who happened to be teaching in other countries – some of these have subsequently returned to teach in Europe. A number of the respondents were teachers who had been involved in earlier projects, others were teachers who had some kind of contact with members of TeCoLa and the rest answered the questionnaire after being contacted through professional organisations. In all, we received 179 responses coming from the following countries:

Germany	31.8%	57
Spain	18.4%	33
Belgium	17.9%	32
UK	14.0%	25
France	8.9%	16
Netherlands	7.3%	13
Canada	0.6%	1
Mexico	0.6%	1
Saudi Arabia	0.6%	1

Table 1 – Location of teachers

The number of years the teachers had worked is laid out in Table 2. Although the largest number of teachers belongs to the “Over 20” years of work category, the results show a broad spread regarding teaching experience:

# of years	%	Count
From 1 to 5	21.8%	39
From 6 to 10	21.8%	39
From 11 to 15	18.4%	33
From 16 to 20	15%	27
Over 20	22.9%	41

Table 2 – Teaching experience

3.4 Rationale for the use of focus group interviews

Focus group interviews have been defined as “carefully planned series of discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment” (Krueger, Casey 2009, 2) or in Barrows’ (2000, 193) words, as “a type of a group interview where a small group of individuals are gathered together for the purpose of discussing one (or sometimes more) topic of interest”. For our own purposes, Marczak & Sewell’s (2007) definition is particularly applicable since they highlight the role of the moderator: “who uses the group and its interaction as a way to gain information about a specific or focused issue”. This is precisely what we did in our interviews where teachers in secondary education, having a common background and common interests, discussed a series of pre-designed issues concerning the implementation of telecollaboration guided by the one or two researchers involved in each of the groups.

Interviews with focus groups provide qualitative data regarding participants' beliefs and attitudes (Masadeh 2012, 63; Gaižauskaitė 2012, 21). They can be used in isolation or to expand on the responses obtained in questionnaires and with a view to helping towards a better understanding of the opinions, beliefs and experiences of informants (Al Ghazali 2014; King 2004; Gonzalez 2011). We envisaged the results of the focus group interviews as a complement to the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in the questionnaires as such interviews are effective in unveiling new or unexpected information regarding the research questions (Ansay, Perkins, Nelson 2004; Engel, Schutt 2010; Rubin, Babbie 2010 cited in Gaižauskaitė 2012, 21).

3.5 Administration of focus group interviews

A series of interviews were conducted in the different countries involved in the project. The replication of these types of procedures in different groupings was found to facilitate the identification of trends and patterns in the responses (Krysik, Finn, 2010). The data obtained was analysed and the results compared across groups. Our first concern was the suitable configuration of participants and facilitators in order to guarantee the validity of the resulting data (Masadeh 2012, 67). In a focus group interview, it is important that the participants share certain common characteristics and a similar profile (Litoselliti, 2003). This is an aspect that we took into account in our study since all the participants in the case of the Spanish group were or had been foreign language teachers in secondary (or primary) education in either public, charter or private schools and had an interest in telecollaboration. The size of the groups is an important aspect of an interview with a focus group. The groups in the different project member countries ranged from four to six members, which is considered optimal (Krueger, Casey 2009). The Spanish interviewees consisted of a group of six teachers working in three charter schools, one private organization and two public institutions. Five of them worked in secondary education and one was a primary education teacher. We deliberately chose that distribution since even though the project is currently concerned with secondary education pupils, at that point we had already planned to carry out a piloting experience in primary education. There were four women and two men. Five of them worked in the area of Valencia and were English teachers and one worked in the United Kingdom as a teacher of Spanish.

The second major concern, following King (2004) and Vaughn and Linan-Thompson (2004), was to offer our respondents a safe environment where they could voice their opinions and beliefs as individuals. This facilitated the exchange of information among the members. The Spanish focus group was moderated by the authors of this chapter. Our responsibility was to guarantee the smooth running of the interview process and the quality of the data collected (Gaižauskaitė 2012, 23). The main aim was to focus the attention of the partici-

pants on the topics of interest and to direct the discussion and to guide the flow of discourse in the right direction through the use of clarification questions and other strategies. The participants were informed about the topic of discussion from the very beginning and were also informed that the interview would be recorded to obtain a complete script of their interventions for data analysis.

The interview questions were designed to elicit information going from more general to more specific. The questions were open-ended and gave participants the opportunity to contribute their own ideas and beliefs (Krueger, Casey, 2009). There were ten questions in the first draft but these were rewritten and narrowed down to three after being revised by all the project members. At the very beginning of the session we offered a brief explanation of what was expected from the participants. We informed them that we would not give them information about the project at first so as not to condition their answers. We introduced the different people present in the meeting and provided information on who they were and where they worked and we also told them who had had previous experience in telecollaboration. Finally, we explained the mechanics of a focus group interview. Before presenting each of the three questions, the participants were given a few minutes to think about their answers and were asked to write down short comments, which they then shared with the rest of the group. A debate then took place about the issues.

4. Research questions and results

In this study, the questionnaire and the focus group interviews were conducted to answer the following research questions:

- What are the teachers' needs regarding technological training in order to implement telecollaboration and gamification projects?
- What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to diversity and learning challenges?
- What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to intercultural awareness and competence?
- What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to communicative competence in the context of authentic communication opportunities?
- What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to CLIL?

4.1 Results of the questionnaire

The participants' answers to the 36 Likert-scale questions and their comments gave us a good idea about the teacher's experience with the tools we planned to use, their attitudes towards a series of aspects regarding foreign language teaching through the use of new technologies and their perceived training needs with respect to telecollaboration. Regarding our informants' actual teaching practice situation, the results indicate that the issue of com-

municative competence was very important for them followed by those of learning challenges and intercultural awareness and competence. However, CLIL did not seem to be as relevant for the teachers as the other aspects:

To what extent are the following issues RELEVANT in your teaching practice? (1 = Not At All Relevant, 5 = Extremely Relevant)								
	1	2	3	4	5	Mode	Mean	St. Dev
Diversity and learning challenges	1	12	34	77	55	4	3.9	0.9
Intercultural awareness and competence	2	5	28	79	65	4	4.1	0.8
Communicative competence	0	1	18	48	112	5	4.5	0.7
To support CLIL	38	26	43	33	39	3	3	1.4

Table 3 – Results regarding relevant issues in participants' actual teaching situation

The majority of the respondents were language teachers who are not engaged in CLIL itself. However, 50.6% of the teachers work in schools where some content subjects are taught in a foreign language, while 49.4% of the teachers work in institutions where CLIL is not employed at all. Perhaps, this would explain why the results show that CLIL was considered to be unproblematic for most of the teachers.

With respect to informants' experience with video-communication (VC), online games (OG) and virtual worlds (VW), most of the teachers reported having little or no experience, particularly in the case of virtual worlds, as can be seen in the following figure:

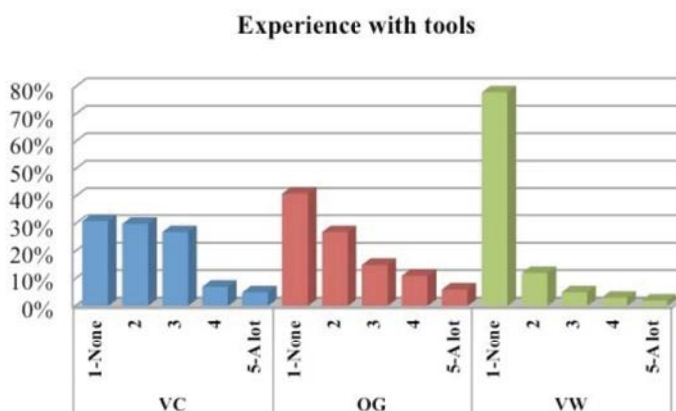


Figure 1 – Results regarding teachers' experience on technological tools

This was also seen in their perceived needs about training in these tools. Extensive training in virtual worlds was felt to be needed by most teachers. These results might be because quite a lot of teachers are familiar with the use of video-communication and online games outside the teaching context, which is not the case for virtual worlds either within or outside the teaching context. Therefore, our main conclusion was that teachers have little experience in the use of these tools and would need quite a lot of training.

With regard to the question of whether teachers thought that video communication, online games and virtual worlds in international school collaboration would help to better deal with the factors seen in Table 4, their perception of the usefulness of the first seems to be greater, in general, than in the case of the other two:

Do you think using video communication, online games, virtual worlds in international school collaboration would help ...			
	Mode/Mean		
	VC	OGs	VWs
to better deal with LEARNING CHALLENGES due to cultural, cognitive or social DIVERSITY among your students?	4/3.8	3/3.1	4/3
to promote your students' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS and COMPETENCE?	5/4.2	3/3	4/3.1
to promote your students' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE?	5/4.3	3/3.3	4/3.2
to support CLIL	5/3.6	3/3	3/2.7

Table 4 – Results regarding the particular usefulness of the tools for certain aspects

Most of the teachers surveyed has a positive opinion regarding the usefulness of all three tools. This is especially true in the case of communicative competence and, to a lesser extent, in the case of intercultural awareness and competence. Our preliminary conclusions are that teachers need more training in the case of online games and virtual worlds compared to video-communication. We can also conclude that more effort needs to be spent on the areas of learning challenges and CLIL regarding the perception of the usefulness of these tools. On the other hand, it is quite obvious that our respondents seem to be clear about the potential benefits of the tools in the case of communicative competence.

We were also interested in finding out more about our teachers' teaching context with respect to technical issues and found that there was quite a lot of diversity depending mainly on the country the teachers are based in. Concerning the number and availability of computers, Internet speed and the

availability of a technician (see Figures 2, 3 and 4 below), our results point to the fact that the situation is quite positive in all the partner countries. We found that 78% of the teachers would have computers for between 40% and 80% or more of their students and from the results shown in Figure 3 it seems that the highest number of computers is to be found in Germany, the UK and Belgium followed by the Netherlands and Spain. However, as we can see below, the results are very varied in France:

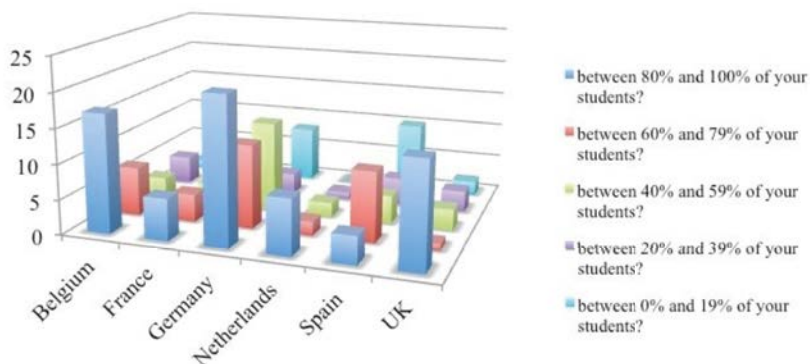


Figure 2 – Availability of computers

Regarding Internet connection speed, in general most of the teachers rated their connection as neither fast nor slow (38%) and fast (34%). However, it is interesting to note that a good proportion of teachers in Germany and Spain considered their Internet speed was slow to very slow:

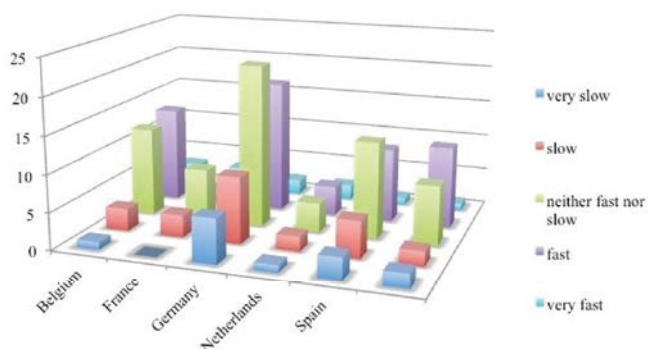


Figure 3 – Internet speed

Looking at the results regarding the availability of technicians, we can see that there are two clear groups. On the one side, Belgium (56%), the UK (66%), and the Netherlands (69%) answered the question about the availability of a technician affirmatively. On the other hand, most of the teachers answered negatively in the other group: 62% in Spain, 66% in France, and 89% in Germany:

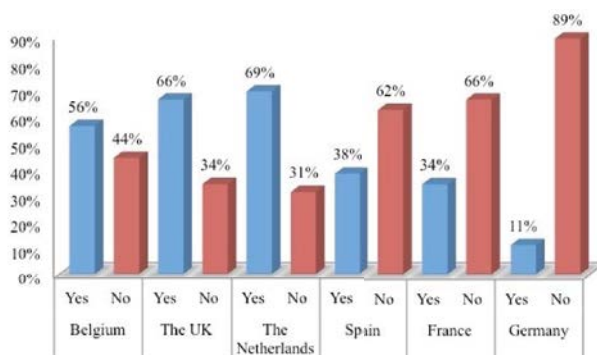


Figure 4 – Availability of a technician

4.2 Results of the focus group interviews

As stated above, several focus group interviews took place in each one of the countries represented in the project, but for the purposes of this publication, we will present the results of the one monitored by the authors of this paper in Spain on 6 April, 2017.

The first question was related to the main difficulties teachers face in their teaching practice. All the members of the group mentioned the low competence level of many of the students and the different proficiency levels found in the same group, the lack of motivation and the difficulty in adapting the official curriculum to the real needs in their classroom context. They also brought up the issue of the number of students per class, the impact of red-tape on their workload and the limitations regarding ICT resources. Finally, they also highlighted the lack of hours devoted to English in the Spanish curriculum. In the debate, some other issues came up, such as the behaviour of a minority of disruptive students and the need for inclusion.

With respect to the second question about telecollaboration as a tool to help them address some of the difficulties mentioned previously, we asked teachers who had no experience with telecollaboration to give us their answers first. In general, they stated that telecollaboration would be motivating for students, since young people enjoy using computers and carrying out tasks that are not usually offered to them in class, and that they would be par-

ticularly interested in virtual worlds. They added that some of them already play online videogames with people from other countries and that in this context, they might see English not just as a subject to learn, but as a tool they could implement outside the classroom. Another very important issue raised by one of the teachers was that not all of the students could afford to travel to the country where the target language is spoken, but that telecollaboration is something they could all do. Giving them the opportunity to interact with other native speakers of the target language without the expense of travelling to the country would be a very good idea, according to that teacher, and students would welcome it. Another teacher believed that it would be an interesting and useful activity not only for students, but also for teachers. Furthermore, she put forward that it is a teacher's duty to offer students challenges and enjoyable activities. She added that teachers are partly responsible for their lack of motivation. In spite of her positive opinion about telecollaboration as a motivating tool, one of the teachers stated that it would be very difficult to implement it in the school where she worked because the system is exam-oriented and anything that departs from the syllabus is not welcome and also because of the technical problems that her institution would be faced with.

The primary school teacher in the group said that the students in his school would be particularly attracted to the use of videogames and that he saw telecollaboration as a more elaborate and sophisticated version of the penpal activity he used to carry out when he was a child. At that point, the teacher who had previous experience in telecollaboration told the rest about his participation in the TILA project⁶. He commented that although students had a task they had to work on, digressions from the task and the authentic type of communication that arose during telecollaboration were pedagogically of great interest. He described the experience as very satisfactory and stated that institutional support is essential, that is, the possibility of flexible groups with another teacher taking care of some of the students in the group and also the support of a technician. Moreover, coordination and the commitment on the part of the school were essential aspects in his view. At this juncture, one of the teachers suggested that telecollaboration might be a way to involve some of the disruptive students or low-achievers in the activity. Involvement in telecollaboration might be seen as a prize for them and this would in turn enhance their motivation.

Finally, concerning the third question, which dealt with the challenges that teachers would have to face when implementing telecollaboration, the

⁶ *Telecollaboration for Intercultural Language Acquisition (TILA)* 531052-LLP-1-2012-NL-KA2-KA2-KA2MP (<<http://www.tilaproject.eu/>>, 11/2018) was a European-funded project embedded in the *Life Long Learning Project* of the European Commission.

teacher who had had previous experience with telecollaboration replied that the exchanges are also beneficial for students at a personal level. He compared the exchanges with a pre-Erasmus year since many of the advantages students experience in their year abroad could be brought to the secondary school classroom using telecollaboration. Another teacher added that the introduction of science content in a CLIL context would work very well with telecollaboration; for instance, comparing the hours of darkness in Northern European countries, if classes are cancelled in other countries during periods of heavy snowfall, etc. One of the teachers remarked that telecollaboration would be a challenge regarding the inclusion of certain types of activities in the syllabus. However, she also informed the rest of the group that in post-compulsory education in the UK, they had recently changed the specifications and had included citizenship, diversity, immigration, racism, integration, and so on in their foreign language classes and thus these issues could be brought up during interaction with other students from the target language country instead of being taught to them explicitly by the teacher. Another teacher (one based in Spain) added that the challenge would also be to include telecollaboration activities in the students' assessment. The teacher with previous experience in telecollaboration highlighted that timing is also an important aspect and that the second term or beginning of the third one would be ideal (in systems where there are three terms). Another informant stated that intercultural competence is also a relevant factor and that teachers should introduce such aspects indirectly in the pre-task.

The participants agreed on the importance of taking into account learning diversity and inclusion and they all believed that telecollaboration could be a very powerful tool to achieve this aim. They then went on to discuss the different options that telecollaboration could offer them such as video-conferences, online games and virtual worlds. As one of teachers pointed out, the methodology employed in the class would also influence this choice because in cases where traditional approaches are employed, it would be more difficult to implement activities of this kind. The pre-task was seen to be very important as it would guide students in the interaction and give them the right preparation to succeed in the main phase.

Finally, all the participants highlighted the importance of coordination among teachers in the same institution and particularly coordination with the partner teacher in terms of organization of student pairing, planning the exchanges, choosing the tasks, deciding on the right tools, etc.

5. Conclusions and pedagogical implications

In what follows, we will summarize the main results obtained in both the questionnaire and the focus groups answers to our research questions

and we also offer some recommendations vis-à-vis the implementation of telecollaboration.

Regarding research question 1 (“What are the teachers’ needs regarding technological training in order to implement telecollaboration and gamification projects?”), we have seen that most of the teachers reported having little or no experience, particularly in the case of virtual worlds, and therefore quite a lot of training would be necessary in all the areas.

In relation to question number 2 (“What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to diversity and learning challenges?”), in general teachers are aware of the need to cope with diversity in the classroom since they explicitly mention disruptive behaviour on the part of a number of students and the existence of different proficiency levels in the same group. They conclude that telecollaboration would be a very useful tool to guarantee inclusion in their classroom context.

When it comes to research question 3 (“What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to intercultural awareness and competence?”), our results indicate that even though our teachers seem to be more concerned with communicative competence, intercultural awareness is also an important issue for them and they find that telecollaboration offers opportunities for them to raise this type of awareness in their classes. They mentioned the particular usefulness of telecollaboration for raising intercultural awareness in the case of CLIL modules.

Turning to question number 4 (“What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to communicative competence in the context of authentic communication opportunities?”), as stated above, it is clear that teachers in all the countries and in all the focus group interviews consider communicative competence to be the most relevant issue. They believe that telecollaboration guarantees opportunities to practice this competence in meaningful authentic communicative situations that would be the nearest a student would get to travelling to the target language country and interacting with members of that community.

Finally, with respect to the last research question (“What are the beliefs and conceptions of the teachers with regard to CLIL?”), it was felt to be a less important issue according to the responses to the questionnaires. However, participants in our focus group did mention the importance of CLIL modules and how telecollaboration could be a very interesting and motivating tool to help them acquire content in a telecollaborative way.

All in all, both the responses to the questionnaire and the analysis of the focus group interview results confirm that language teachers nowadays see telecollaboration as a potentially motivating tool that would give their students access to native speakers and to the target culture. Furthermore, they consider that it provided more authentic experience than that offered by traditional

classroom activities and that it would also allow them to tackle diversity in their classes and to help them in the implementation of CLIL methodology. Nevertheless, the informants also voiced certain concerns regarding the implementation of telecollaboration such as having to cope with unruly students, the fact that these activities would mean an increase in their workload and the difficulty of including telecollaborative activities in the curriculum.

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Annex 1

Questionnaire:

Communication Challenges and Learning Diversity in Secondary School Foreign Language Education

The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect information about how foreign language teachers experience and evaluate the pedagogical potential of video communication, online games and virtual worlds for strengthening foreign language learning and teaching in secondary schools. Special emphasis is on implications for intercultural communication, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), and learning diversity. We are very interested in the opinion of professionals like yourselves in order to design tasks and training materials that will be of use to you or other teachers.

You can fill in the comment boxes in Dutch, English, French, German or Spanish.

We would like to thank you for agreeing to do this anonymous questionnaire.

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. In what country are you teaching now?
3. To what extent are the following issues RELEVANT in your teaching practice?
(from 1-Not at all relevant to 5-Extremely relevant)

- diversity and learning challenges
- intercultural awareness and competence
- communicative competence (providing your students with opportunities for more authentic communication)
- to support Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) e.g. Geography taught in English, History taught in French, etc.

4. If you have any comments on the questions above, we would be very happy to read them.

5. To what extent are the following issues PROBLEMATIC in your teaching practice? (from 1-Not at all problematic to 5-Extremely problematic)

- diversity and learning challenges
- intercultural awareness and competence
- communicative competence (providing your students with opportunities for more authentic communication)
- to support Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) e.g. Geography taught in English, History taught in French, etc.

6. If you have any comments on the questions above, we would be very happy to read them.

7. Rate the amount of EXPERIENCE you have with VIDEO COMMUNICATION tools in a teaching context.

1-None 2 3 4 5-a lot

8. If you have any comments on your experience with VIDEO COMMUNICATION tools in a teaching context, we would be very happy to read them.

9. Do you think USING VIDEO COMMUNICATION tools in international school collaboration would help ... (from 1-not at all to 5-a lot)

- to better deal with LEARNING CHALLENGES due to cultural, cognitive or social DIVERSITY among your students?

• to promote your students' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS and COMPETENCE?

- to promote your students' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE?
- to support Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) e.g. Geography taught in English, History taught in French, etc.

10. If you have any comments on the questions about VIDEO COMMUNICATION tools above, we would be very happy to read them.

11. How much TRAINING do you think you would need to be able to use VIDEO COMMUNICATION tools as a teaching resource?

1-None 2 3 4 5-a lot

12. If you have any comments on training for VIDEO COMMUNICATION tools as a teaching resource, we would be delighted to read them.

13. Rate the amount of EXPERIENCE you have with ONLINE GAMES in a teaching context.

1-None 2 3 4 5-a lot

14. If you have any comments on your experience with ONLINE GAMES in a teaching context, we would be very happy to read them.

15. Do you think USING ONLINE GAMES in international school collaboration would help ... (from 1-not at all to 5-a lot)

- to better deal with LEARNING CHALLENGES due to cultural, cognitive or social DIVERSITY among your students?

- to promote your students' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS and COMPETENCE?

- to promote your students' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE?

- to support Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) e.g. Geography taught in English, History taught in French, etc.

16. If you have any comments on the questions about ONLINE GAMES above, we would be very happy to read them.

17. How much TRAINING do you think you would need to be able to use ONLINE GAMES as a teaching resource?

1-None 2 3 4 5-a lot

18. If you have any comments on training for ONLINE GAMES as a training resource we would be delighted to read them.

19. Rate the amount of EXPERIENCE you have had with VIRTUAL WORLDS (such as Second Life) in a teaching context.

1-None 2 3 4 5-a lot

20. If you have any comments on your experience with VIRTUAL WORLDS in a teaching context, we would be very happy to read them.

21. Do you think USING VIRTUAL WORLDS in international school collaboration would help ... (from 1-not at all to 5-a lot

- to better deal with LEARNING CHALLENGES due to cultural, cognitive or social DIVERSITY among your students?

- to promote your students' INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS and COMPETENCE?

- to promote your students' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE?

- to support Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) e.g. Geography taught in English, History taught in French, etc.

22. If you have any comments on the questions about VIRTUAL WORLDS above, we would be very happy to read them.

23. How much TRAINING do you think you would need to be able to use VIRTUAL WORLDS as a teaching resource?

1-None 2 3 4 5-a lot

24. If you have any comments on training for VIRTUAL WORLDS in a teaching context, we would be very happy to read them.

25. I have enough computers to carry out online activities for students

26. How often or when can the computers be used?

Every time it is necessary / on most of the occasions/ only occasionally

27. How would you rate the Internet connection in your school?

Very slow/ Slow / Neither slow nor fast / Fast / Very fast

28. Would a technician be available while your students are online?

29. How old are your students? (you can tick more than one box)

5 years old	11 years old	17 years old
6 years old	12 years old	18 years old
7 years old	13 years old	19 years old

8 years old	14 years old	20 years old
9 years old	15 years old	21 years old or older
	10 years old	16 years old

30. If you teach English, what levels do you teach? If you don't teach English, tick "none". (You can tick more than one box)

None	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
------	----	----	----	----	----	----

31. If you teach French, what levels do you teach? If you don't teach French, tick "none". (You can tick more than one box)

None	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
------	----	----	----	----	----	----

32. If you teach German, what levels do you teach? If you don't teach German, tick "none". (You can tick more than one box)

None	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
------	----	----	----	----	----	----

33. If you teach Spanish, what levels do you teach? If you don't teach Spanish, tick "none". (You can tick more than one box)

None	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
------	----	----	----	----	----	----

34. If you teach a different language from the ones above, what levels do you teach? If you don't teach a different language, tick "none". Please write the name of the language in the box. (You can tick more than one box)

None	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
------	----	----	----	----	----	----

Other (please specify):

35. Are any subject disciplines (e.g. Geography) in your school taught in a foreign language?

36. If your answer to the last question was "yes" please specify which subjects, languages and level. For example: History, English, B1. Geography, French, C1.

37. If you would like feedback on this survey or further information about TeCoLa or would like to participate in TeCoLa school exchanges with your students, please leave your email.

Spanish version of the questionnaire:

"Desafíos de la comunicación y diversidad en el aprendizaje en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en enseñanza secundaria"

El propósito de este cuestionario es recoger información sobre cómo los profesores de lenguas extranjeras experimentan y evalúan el potencial pedagógico de la comunicación por vídeo, los juegos en línea y los mundos virtuales para fortalecer el aprendizaje y la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras en las escuelas de secundaria. Se hace especial hincapié en las implicaciones para la comunicación intercultural, (AICLE) aprendizaje integrado de contenido y lenguas extranjeras (o aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lengua), y la diversidad en el aprendizaje. Estamos muy interesados en la opinión de profesionales como vosotros para diseñar tareas y materiales de formación que serán útiles para vosotros o para otros profesores.

Puedes escribir los comentarios en alemán, español, francés, holandés o inglés. Quisiéramos agradecerte que hayas aceptado realizar este cuestionario anónimo.

1. ¿Cuántos años llevas enseñando?

2. ¿En qué país estás enseñando en este momento?

3. ¿En qué medida son RELEVANTES los siguientes aspectos en tu práctica docente? (1 = no, en absoluto, 5 = mucho)

None	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
------	----	----	----	----	----	----

- diversidad⁷ y retos de aprendizaje

- competencia y conciencia intercultural

- competencia comunicativa (proporcionar a tus estudiantes oportunidades para una comunicación más auténtica)

- el apoyo al (CLIL o AICLE) Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras, p.ej. geografía enseñada en inglés, historia enseñada en francés, etc.

4. Si tienes algún comentario sobre las preguntas anteriores, estaremos encantados de leerlas.

5. ¿En qué medida son PROBLEMÁTICOS los temas que aparecen a continuación en su práctica docente? (1 = no, en absoluto, 5 = mucho)

- diversidad y retos de aprendizaje

- competencia y conciencia intercultural

- competencia comunicativa (proporcionar a tus estudiantes oportunidades para una comunicación más auténtica)

- el apoyo al (CLIL o AICLE) Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras, p.ej. geografía enseñada en inglés, historia enseñada en francés, etc.

6. Si tienes algún comentario sobre las preguntas anteriores, estaremos encantados de leerlas.

7. Estima la cantidad de EXPERIENCIA que tiene con herramientas de COMUNICACIÓN POR VÍDEO en el contexto de la enseñanza (1 = ninguna; 5 = mucho)

8. Si tienes algún comentario sobre tu experiencia con herramientas de COMUNICACIÓN POR VÍDEO en el contexto de la enseñanza, estaríamos encantados de leerlos.

9. ¿Crees que USAR herramientas de COMUNICACIÓN POR VÍDEO en colaboración internacional con otras escuelas ayudaría ... (1 = no, en absoluto, 5 = mucho)

- a tratar de mejor manera los DESAFÍOS del APRENDIZAJE debido a la DIVERSIDAD cultural, cognitiva o social entre tus estudiantes?

- a promover la CONCIENCIA y la COMPETENCIA INTERCULTURAL de tus estudiantes?

- a promover la COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA de tus alumnos?

- a apoyar el (CLIL/AICLE) Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (el aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lengua) p.ej. geografía enseñada en inglés, historia enseñada en francés, etc.

10. Si tienes algún comentario sobre las anteriores preguntas relacionadas con herramientas de COMUNICACIÓN POR VÍDEO en el contexto de la enseñanza, estaríamos encantados de leerlos.

11. ¿Cuánto FORMACIÓN crees que necesitarías para poder utilizar las herramientas de COMUNICACIÓN POR VÍDEO como recurso de enseñanza? (1 = ninguna, 5 = mucha)

⁷ Se refiere a la diversidad, social, cultural, psicológica y étnica.

12. Si tienes algún comentario sobre la formación respecto a las herramientas de COMUNICACIÓN POR VÍDEO como recurso de enseñanza, estaremos encantados de leerlos.

13. Estima la cantidad de EXPERIENCIA que tienes con JUEGOS EN LÍNEA en el contexto de la enseñanza (1 = ninguna; 5 = mucho)

14. Si tienes algún comentario sobre tu experiencia con JUEGOS EN LÍNEA en el contexto de la enseñanza, estaríamos encantados de leerlos.

15. ¿Crees que USAR JUEGOS EN LÍNEA en la colaboración internacional con otros colegios ayudaría ... (1 = nada, 5 = mucho)

• ¿a tratar de mejor manera los DESAFÍOS del APRENDIZAJE debido a la DIVERSIDAD cultural, cognitiva o social entre tus estudiantes?

• ¿a promover la CONCIENCIA y la COMPETENCIA INTERCULTURAL de tus estudiantes?

• ¿a promover la COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA de tus alumnos?

• ¿a apoyar el (CLIL/AICLE) Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (el aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lengua) p.ej. geografía enseñada en inglés, historia enseñada en francés, etc.

16. Si tienes algún comentario sobre las preguntas anteriores relacionadas con los JUEGOS EN LÍNEA, estaremos encantados de leerlos.

17. ¿Cuánto FORMACIÓN crees que necesitarías para poder utilizar los JUEGOS EN LÍNEA como recurso de enseñanza? (1 = ninguna, 5 = mucha)

18. Si tienes algún comentario sobre la formación respecto a los JUEGOS EN LÍNEA como recurso de enseñanza, estaremos encantados de leerlos.

19. Estima la cantidad de EXPERIENCIA que has tenido con los MUNDOS VIRTUALES (como Second Life) en el contexto de la enseñanza (1 = ninguna, 5 = mucha)

20. Si tienes algún comentario sobre tu experiencia con MUNDOS VIRTUALES, estaríamos encantados de leerlos.

21. ¿Crees que USAR MUNDOS VIRTUALES en la colaboración internacional con otros colegios ayudaría ... (1 = nada, 5 = mucho)

• ¿a tratar de mejor manera los DESAFÍOS del APRENDIZAJE debido a la DIVERSIDAD cultural, cognitiva o social entre tus estudiantes?

• ¿a promover la CONCIENCIA y la COMPETENCIA INTERCULTURAL de tus estudiantes?

• ¿a promover la COMPETENCIA COMUNICATIVA de tus alumnos?

• ¿a apoyar el (CLIL/AICLE) Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (el aprendizaje integrado de contenidos y lengua) p.ej. geografía enseñada en inglés, historia enseñada en francés, etc.

22. Si tienes algún comentario sobre las preguntas anteriores relacionadas con los MUNDOS VIRTUALES, estaremos encantados de leerlos.

23. ¿Cuánta FORMACIÓN crees que necesitarías para poder usar los MUNDOS VIRTUALES como un recurso de enseñanza? (1 = ninguna; 5 = mucha)

24. Si tienes algún comentario sobre la formación de MUNDOS VIRTUALES en el contexto de la enseñanza, estaríamos encantados de leerlos.

25. Tengo suficientes ordenadores para desarrollar actividades online con X estudiantes

26. ¿Con qué frecuencia o cuándo se pueden utilizar los ordenadores?
siempre que sea necesario / en la mayoría de los casos/ sólo ocasionalmente
27. ¿Cómo calificarías tu conexión a Internet?
Muy lenta / Lenta / Ni rápida ni lenta / Rápida / Muy rápida
28. ¿Habría un técnico disponible mientras tus estudiantes estén en línea?
Sí / no
29. ¿Qué edad tienen tus estudiantes? (Puede marcar más de una casilla)
30. Si enseñas inglés, ¿qué niveles impartes? Si no enseñas inglés, marca “ninguno”. (Puedes marcar más de una casilla)
31. Si enseñas francés, ¿qué niveles impartes? Si no enseñas francés, marca “ninguno”. (Puedes marcar más de una casilla)
32. Si enseñas alemán, ¿qué niveles impartes? Si no enseñas alemán, marca “ninguno”. (Puedes marcar más de una casilla)
33. Si enseñas español, ¿qué niveles impartes? Si no enseñas español, marca “ninguno”. (Puedes marcar más de una casilla)
34. Si enseñas una lengua diferente a las que aparecen arriba, ¿qué niveles impartes? Si no impartes una lengua diferente, marca “ninguna”. Por favor, escribe el nombre de la lengua en la casilla. (Puedes marcar más de una casilla)
35. ¿Hay alguna disciplina (por ejemplo, geografía) en tu escuela que se enseñe en un idioma extranjero?
36. Si su respuesta a la última pregunta fue “sí”, especifica qué asignaturas, idiomas y nivel.
Por ejemplo:
Historia, Inglés, B1.
Geografía, francés, C1.
37. Si deseas información sobre esta encuesta o más información sobre TeCoLa o le gustaría participar en intercambios escolares de TeCoLa con tus estudiantes, por favor déjanos tu correo electrónico.

Gracias

Annex 2

Questions for the FGI (English version):

- Q1: What do you identify as the main difficulties that you face when teaching?
- Q2: Think about the possibility of getting your students to interact online with pupils from other countries, would this help you to address some of these difficulties or would it cause further problems?
- Q3: What challenges (if any) do you think you would face if you used these online tools?

Questions for the FGI (Spanish version):

- ¿Cuáles son las principales dificultades a las que te enfrentas en tu práctica docente? ¿Puedes, por favor, escribir tres ideas?
- Imagina la posibilidad de que tus estudiantes puedan interactuar online con alumnos de otros países. ¿Te ayudaría esto en alguna de las dificultades que has nombrado antes o te causaría más problemas? ¿De qué manera? (Ejemplos de esto serían videoconferencia, mundos virtuales, chats, etc.)
- ¿A qué retos (si consideras que los hay) prevés que puedas enfrentarte como profesor si implementarás este método?

