



Social Dimensions of Telecollaborative Foreign Language Study

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[Belz, Julie A. \(Julie Anne\)](#)



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Abstract:

Previous research on network-based foreign language study primarily has focused on: a) the pedagogy of technology in the language curriculum, or b) the linguistic characterization of networked discourse. In this paper, I explore socio-institutional dimensions of German-American telecollaboration and the ways in which they may shape foreign language learning and use. Telecollaborative partnerships represent particularly productive sites for the examination of social aspects of foreign language study since, by definition, they entail tight sociocultural and institutional interface. Within the theoretical framework of social realism (e.g., Carter & Sealey, 2000; Layder, 1993), any human activity is thought to be shaped by both macro- and micro-level sociological features. These include social context and institutional setting, situated activity and individual agency, respectively. In this analysis, I intertwine the socially and institutionally contingent features of language valuation, computer know-how, Internet access, and learning accreditation and the micro-level features of situated classroom interaction and individual psycho-biography in order to provide a rich and multi-faceted characterization of foreign language learning and use on both ends of a German-American telecollaborative partnership.

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